TEACHERS' LEARNING ABOUT THE NATIONAL EDUCATION MONITORING PROJECT (NEMP) REPORTS IN A QUALITY LEARNING CIRCLE

A Probe Study for the National Education Monitoring Project

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Abstract

My probe study uses the example of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) reports to explore teacher learning processes in action. It is argued that the impact of the NEMP reports and their assessment information is being compromised because classroom teachers are already fully committed to curriculum document developments mandated by the Ministry of Education. While this continues to happen the potential benefits of the NEMP reports as assessment exemplars for effective assessment practice will remain limited because teachers' time is drawn to address other competing priorities.

This project acknowledges the many pressures which impact on teachers' abilities to keep pace with new developments. In particular the quantity and pace of current learning agendas for staff development mean that teachers have limited time to share ideas and concerns about their classroom practices. An intervention programme for eight teachers using a quality learning circle approach provides this time for teachers' learning by giving them opportunities for structured, focused and regular talk with one another during the school day.

Data is collected from the eight teachers as they experience learning journeys using the NEMP reports. Individual interviews, observations of meetings and document analysis reveal the ways in which each of the teachers experience the QLC approach and find ways to enhance their knowledge and expertise in classroom assessment. The model demonstrates that teachers benefit from processes which allow them to shape, create and share their learning with colleagues rather than continuing to accept that others can make these decisions for them. The QLC approach allows teachers to decide what it is they will learn, how this can be achieved and justify why this is necessary.

Acknowledgements

The data gathering for this project has been dependent on the willingness of principals and teachers sharing their experiences of professional learning and development in their schools. To this end, I express my gratitude to the principals and teachers in Canterbury schools who responded to my requests for data gathering through interviews and observations of meetings.

In particular, I owe my sincere thanks to eight teachers who formed a quality learning circle. These teachers undertook to increase their knowledge of the NEMP reports within a group setting. This required an extra commitment and a willingness to share what they had learnt with each other. Their infectious enthusiasm, energy and honesty have become the 'lifeblood' for this thesis. More than anything, they have shown that teacher learning can be enhanced when teachers are given the time to talk, share and observe one another's practice within the school day.

Closely following my project 'journey' have been my two supervisors, Dr. Alison Gilmore (Education Department, University of Canterbury) and Associate Professor Terry Crooks (Co-Director NEMP, University of Otago). Throughout I have appreciated Alison's ability to ask probing questions, which have left me with puzzles to solve and Terry's feedback at key points to ensure the structure was viable. As well, it was a considerable help to receive funding for the teacher release component of the quality learning circle experiment from the National Education Monitoring Project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The significance of NEMP

For my study the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) has been chosen as the means through which to explore the provision and quality of teacher learning and development in New Zealand schools. It is highly significant that this particular project (introduced to schools in 1995) has included a professional development component in its design. Two purposes have underpinned the project. One has focussed on accountability and the need to gather detailed information about the overall performance of year 4 and year 8 children thereby allowing comparisons and trends in performance to be tracked over time. The other has related to a need to act on the information and raise student achievements. Crooks and Flockton, the designers of NEMP, were adamant that a New Zealand model for national monitoring needed to produce high quality information about student performance and at the same time make a difference to the teaching, learning and assessment practices in classrooms. In order to meet these dual purposes, strategies for helping teachers interpret and use the information were planned in the design of the NEMP model. Monitoring information has therefore been disseminated to teacher audiences as well as policy makers and curriculum planners and multiple copies of the full written reports plus 4 page summaries (Forum Comments) sent to every school in the country.

Dissemination of the monitoring information to teachers has been a key feature of the NEMP model. Colourful written reports of the NEMP assessment tasks and the results of the monitoring programme have been one way that this information has been made available to teachers. Other methods have been used to build a critical mass of teachers who have gained a more in-depth knowledge of assessment tools for better learning through a direct involvement in the project. Further details of the professional development programmes for teachers as administrators and markers of the project can be found in the work of Gilmore (1999). However, the focus for my study has been teachers at large. I have tracked the dissemination of NEMP's written documentation to teachers and recorded the extent to which teachers have accessed and used this information in their classrooms.

Teachers at large

For teachers not involved as teacher administrators or markers, the benefits of the project have been harder to realise. Their learning has been dependent on other teachers, or perhaps their principal, raising their awareness of its possible uses and benefits. Finding time to read and discuss the NEMP material in already full professional development schedules has been a further difficulty. For most schools, participation in the various curriculum contracts has been all consuming and precluded asking teachers to absorb even more learning.

For those who have realised the benefits and possible uses of the NEMP information, and wanted others to share in their knowledge and enthusiasm, this has been a point of frustration. Clearly, the NEMP information needs to be used by teachers for the improvement of their classroom assessment strategies. Just how this can be squeezed in and assessment take a more integral part alongside curriculum development is over to individual schools to resolve. For its part NEMP can disseminate multiple copies of the written reports, provide shorter summaries in the Forum Comments and continue to provide professional development for teacher administrators and markers who keep returning to the nation's classrooms. If schools are to be seen as true learning organisations, they cannot ignore what information NEMP has to offer. Just how schools might find the time and energy to engage in this learning and development is central to this project.

Research interest

My personal interest in the professional development of teachers has stemmed from my work as a provider of educational leadership and management courses for teachers and those aspiring to leadership positions, during a decade of significant change in school administration, curriculum and assessment. Programme themes in these qualification courses for school leaders have related to the theories of change management, school effectiveness and improvement and organisational learning. The programme has provided course members with theoretical frameworks from which to analyse both the implementation and outcomes of their school's professional development work. Such analysis has shown that the introduction of new teaching

content or approach has relied on a wider range of skills, knowledge and understandings than was ever imagined. Since school leaders have typically gained their positions of responsibility on the basis of teaching abilities, it has been assumed that they have also had the necessary leadership and management skills which promote teachers' professional development. Despite their best efforts, school leaders have often faced considerable difficulty engaging teachers in professional development activities which had the goal of improvements in classroom practices.

Choosing a focus

When the National Education Monitoring Project was introduced to schools in 1995, I was interested in its design features. Its dual purposes of accountability and teacher learning and development were of particular interest. I wondered how these might work given the stories my course members were telling me about the pressures they were facing with new curriculum documents. My worry was that no matter how potentially useful the NEMP project and its reports might be, there was a real danger that teachers would dismiss them simply because they represented an additional pile of documents for reading and understanding. I wanted to find ways in which the NEMP reports could impact on classroom assessment and learning against these odds of time and workload pressures.

While dissemination of the NEMP assessment information is driven from a national level its entry and use at the school level can be somewhat problematic. Schools are constantly receiving resources from the national level and are challenged to keep pace with the quantity of material they receive. School leaders need to take particular care when deciding what teachers might find useful and how these resources might be introduced to them. The next section introduces theories of educational change in order to highlight the range of issues and questions which are important considerations in the management of teachers' learning. These are then applied to teachers' learning about the NEMP reports.

Application of change theory to learning about the NEMP reports

All teachers are challenged to keep up with the hectic pace of educational change. While there is no shortage of research on how to manage educational change, problems are still evident in the range of delivery modes for change and the effects these have on individuals and organisations. For educational settings, Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) ask why it is that reform efforts have repeatedly failed to engage teachers' commitments and expertise, or faded from the limelight after their early promise. This question is a reminder that commitment to change stems from teachers' active involvement in the planning of changes and the importance of relevance to classroom teaching. Therefore if the intentions of the NEMP project and its reports are to be realised by teachers, practical ways must be found to introduce teachers to how this knowledge might enhance their classroom assessment practices. This is not a simple matter when teachers' awareness is dependent on their finding time to read the written reports sent to schools and no accompanying professional development programme is offered to support it.

For change to take effect, teachers need more than an awareness of the new knowledge and skills on offer. At a personal level an understanding of change theory will help teachers to work with changes they encounter, especially if their own feelings about the anticipated change are acknowledged in its implementation (Bell & Gilbert, 1996). Accepting challenge and uncertainty is the message given by Fullan (1998) who argues that chaos theory is a useful tool for understanding the complexity of the change process, especially its non-linearity. This is well illustrated through his eight lessons which draw attention to the competing needs of individuals and the wider society and education system as each endeavours to make a difference to the lives of students. These are explored through the mindset of treating challenges as learning opportunities (problems as friends), accepting the strength of both individualism and collectivism, and the combination of centralisation and decentralisation. Together these lessons show that a variety of support is required for change to have meaning and take effect.

Fullan has developed these ideas further in his 'What's Worth Fighting For' trilogy which accepts the givens of a non-linear, fragmented and incoherent system suggesting that capacity building represents 'the only viable defence' (p.222) to the present change overload schools and teachers are facing. This is explained in terms of the need to develop inner and outer learning capacities, despite the system, to create individual and group patterns of coherence. Inner learning is described as the personal awareness of finding ways to cope and grow from within individuals, while outer learning is about making connections with other learners in order to learn. Fullan argues that individuals need to view themselves as active learners and be wary of their dependence on others telling them what it is they should know and do. This type of response represents a capacity building stance which has the potential to strengthen the professionalism of teachers and draw them together as learners with opportunities to share similarities and differences as they learn. This view is endorsed by Hallinger (1997) who sees the way forward as being one of creating the conditions for effective learning among people and their organisations. In other words, change is less successful when controlled by the system alone. This is an important message for the NEMP project, because, despite genuine efforts to disseminate written information, teachers need more than reading material to convince them of the need to review their current assessment practices. Teachers also need the psychological security of learning alongside one another and being supported when they face difficulties.

Schwahn and Spady (1998) provide five reasons and rules for explaining why change doesn't happen and how to make sure it does. Each of these has significance for the dissemination and implementation of the NEMP assessment information. The first reason relates to the purpose of change which Schwahn and Spady argue must be compelling. For teachers this means improvement to classroom practice must be made obvious. Thus for the results of national education monitoring to have more significance, teachers need to be sufficiently confronted with the national results to then question their applicability for individual classrooms and to ultimately plan changes to their teaching programmes addressing particular problems and barriers to learning. A second reason relates to the active involvement of teachers in the planning of the change and its implementation for ownership to develop. This is about shaping information for teachers' own purposes and not being subject to others deciding what it is they should learn. Schwahn and Spady's third reason is that the change must be

an integral part of the strategic plan and associated decision making for it to have meaning for teachers. Therefore, in terms of the information available from the NEMP resources, teachers should realise its potential for enhancing both learning processes and outcomes across the full range of knowledge and essential skill areas. This means teachers must see their leader's commitment to the change made evident through a willingness to take risks to support it. A fourth reason depends on the alignment of people if the change is to be real and lasting. Here people need to have some idea of what the change will look like for them at a personal level. Then a fifth reason extends this alignment to the organisation as a whole in terms of the structures, policies and procedures required to support the change. This calls for support and a culture conducive to teacher learning where time is provided for teachers to talk and share their ideas and even to observe and plan together. Again, for NEMP to have an impact on the work of classroom teachers, teachers require more than the presence of written reports to make a difference to the quality of their assessment practices.

Change theory contains messages for teacher learning about the NEMP reports. While it is unfortunate that many schools have been slow to realise the potential of the NEMP reports, this is perhaps indicative of teachers' total dependence on the Ministry of Education to signal what they should know and learn. The Ministry of Education has reinforced this expectation by providing a continual programme of professional development to support the implementation of the curriculum documents. Any dissemination of the NEMP material has suffered because it has not been possible to include it amongst the Ministry's already full schedule. This has left the dissemination of the NEMP reports somewhat dependent on the enthusiasm of a small, yet growing number of teachers who have made time for reading the reports, adapting them for classroom use and sharing their experiences with other colleagues.

Teachers have found it much harder to accept programmes not included under the Ministry of Education contract delivery because they do not provide the same certainty of structure, support and content to which they have become accustomed. It is therefore not surprising that five years after the release of the first NEMP reports only 37.2% of Canterbury teachers have spent time discussing these reports in their schools and 19.1% say they have incorporated NEMP assessment tasks into their school-wide assessment programmes.

Leaving the dissemination of NEMP to those at the school level has been problematic. This means that unlike the MOE Curriculum development contracts, teachers have been left to make decisions about what, how, when and if they might address the information offered through the NEMP reports. As dependent learners, teachers have found it difficult to adjust to this independence in their learning (being left to discover NEMP by themselves), since their learning experiences have largely been determined by others who present a structured programme for them to follow. Fullan (1999) argues that mandates for change on their own seldom allow high quality outcomes. An important lesson to realise about working with change is that it provokes anxiety which must be overcome for new meanings to be found. This process requires teachers to develop a greater awareness of the processes underpinning learning and what it means for them as learners. This is a vital step if teachers are to move beyond their current dependency on others to make decisions about their learning.

The purpose of this study is to work with a group of teachers to discover how they might learn more about the NEMP reports through the use of a quality learning circle approach.

Research Questions

1 How effective is the Quality Learning Circle Model for teacher learning and development?

1.1 Which features of the QLC model increase the likelihood of teacher learning impacting on classroom practices?
1.2 How well do teachers rate it as a tool for professional development?
1.3 How easy is it for teachers to use?
1.4 Is it suitable for use in schools?

Project overview

The central focus of the project is the application of the quality learning circle model. Chapter 1 has provided background information on New Zealand's Education

Monitoring Project (NEMP) and introduced NEMP as a framework for exploring possibilities for teacher learning and development. A discussion of change management theory has provided a framework for exploring issues of importance in teacher learning and development.

In Chapter 2 the principles of adult learning theory are related to teachers' professional development experiences within the New Zealand setting. This framework is used to explore the factors which help and hinder effective teacher learning and development.

Chapter 3 provides justification for the quality learning circle approach and outlines the sample and procedures used in the intervention study. The chapter concludes with a general discussion of qualitative research methodology and how I used this methodology for my data collection and analysis.

Teachers' experiences of the quality learning circle are reported in Chapter 4 to reveal the challenges and successes of their learning journeys.

Chapter 5 reviews the effectiveness of the quality learning circle approach as a tool for teachers' professional learning and development. It concludes with a reconceptualisation of teacher learning and development.

Chapter 2

Teacher learning and development

The purpose of this chapter is to draw upon the principles underpinning adult learning theory in order to explore the factors which both contribute to and hinder effective teacher learning and development. It is noted that teachers' learning in New Zealand is dominated by Ministry of Education mandates for professional development. These determine what it is that teachers should know and do. While schools receive invitations to participate in professional development programmes accompanying many of these documents, the problem is that these programmes are constrained by tight timeframes and can often do little more than impart knowledge to teachers. This practice is ignoring the importance of programmes addressing how learning processes can enhance teachers' learning. An account of teachers' experiences in these Ministry of Education professional development programmes provides some contextual background which informs the current reality of teacher learning in New Zealand schools. It also highlights issues for further consideration, particularly those regarding the way learning is offered to and experienced by teachers. These issues are also important in analysing the usefulness of the quality learning circle approach which are addressed in the remaining chapters of this project's report. In the meantime it is important to consider the factors which help adults to make the most of their learning opportunities.

Adult learning theory

Adult learning as a field of study is complex (Brookfield, 1986). Adults bring a variety of pertinent backgrounds to their learning. These include personal factors such as knowledge, academic experience and qualifications, level of intrinsic motivation and attitude towards learning, and the impact of previous learning experiences. In addition, the contexts for learning also matter. Systemic factors as well as these personal factors impact on adults' ability and willingness to learn. Decisions about what it is adults might learn, how this learning might occur and why the learning might be considered helpful or desirable are key issues to address in adult learning. Questions of how to motivate, enthuse and support learners are important if learning is to be a life-long endeavour.

The field of adult learning, sometimes given the name of andragogy (see Knowles, 1980), is characterised by interest in a number of sub-fields. These include notions of the reflective practitioner (Smyth, 1989, Schon, 1991, Moon, 2000); experiential learning (Kolb,1984, Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1995); transformative learning (Cranton, 1996); self-directed learning

(Brookfield,1986); and problem-based learning (Boud & Feletti, 1997). Several key principles for adult learning can be derived from these emphases: links to experience, involvement in decisions about learning, reflection, dialogue, application, support offered by significant others, and the role of theory.

Links to practice (experience)

Adult learners have a strong preference for learning centred in practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999). This is often termed *experiential learning* to emphasise the need for active engagement in situations that mirror the work contexts of adult learners. In particular, Kolb's (1984) work is useful because it draws attention to learning being a continuous process grounded in experience rather than merely a product or outcome. He argues that ideas are neither fixed nor immutable elements of thought but are rather formed and reformed through experience. This also suggests that learning should be seen as a journey, which although at times unpredictable and uncertain, is centred around the needs of its participants.

Kolb's learning cycle represents four phases that contribute to a deeper learning. While Kolb accepts learners will have strengths in particular parts of the four dimensions, he maintains that effective learning depends on attending to all four phases. These phases evolve around concrete experience, reflection on that experience, abstract conceptualization of the experience and active experimentation. Each of these four phases translates into approaches to, or modes of, adult learning which are described as being active, reflective, theoretical and pragmatic.

Boud, Cohen and Walker (1997) argue that the role and relevance of learning from experience deserves more recognition in adult learning. This is worth remembering especially given the constant pressure to respond to learning agendas within known limitations of time and energy. Learning opportunities therefore need to be focussed and useful for the learner if there is to be any long-term impact. Five propositions are offered to highlight the value of experiential learning. The first is that experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning. In saying this Boud, Cohen and Walker contend that experience cannot be bypassed and all learning builds on and flows from experience no matter what external prompts to learning there might be. A second proposition is that learners actively construct their experience whether they realise it or not. Following this, a third proposition gives recognition to learning as being an holistic process. Two remaining propositions show learning as being socially and culturally constructed and influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

Involvement in decisions about learning

Involvement in decisions about learning agenda is another important principle. Boud and Walker (1997) refer to this as appropriation, where the learning is made one's own. When learners are involved in making decisions about their own learning, particularly the nature, scope, and purpose, learning becomes more productive, meaningful and relevant to those closest to the action. Active involvement increases adults' commitment to and enjoyment of learning. A degree of self-autonomy is important for adult learners. This is about being able to make choices about what to learn, and how and when this might take place. Unfortunately, adult learning is not simply a matter of individuals determining their own agendas. Legislative controls, compliance demands and financial constraints also impact on these decisions and so a compromise is often required. Particularly in times of change and economic uncertainty, the education system often becomes the target of blame for society's problems and results in change agendas being set by others. When this happens, teachers can become resentful and lose their enthusiasm for learning because they are removed from the decision making process.

Reflection

A further guiding principle is the role of *reflection*. Schon (1991) distinguishes between reflection in practice and reflection on practice. This distinction serves to highlight the kinds of knowing and thinking in which adult learners engage. Reflective practice helps learners to articulate their theories in use and to recognise espoused theories that may be largely intuitive. Thus, reflection can be viewed as a process of consciousness raising that can either affirm or confront existing practice and may act as a catalyst for further improvements to practice.

In the context of teacher education or teachers as learners, Smyth (1989) develops the notion of reflectivity into four forms of action which can improve teaching practice. These are listed as sequential stages and link to a series of questions:

1 What do I do? (describing)
2 What does this mean? (informing)
3 How did I come to be like this? (confronting)
4 How might I do things differently? (reconstructing)

While individuals may reach the stage that they can internalise these questions, others will benefit from having these stages and questions modelled by other teachers. These questions also relate to Cranton's (1996) questions about the professional development of adult learners which indicate a growing awareness of process rather than outcome. The first of these questions is about finding out how adult educators learn about their practice. The second concerns how they can continue to grow and change over time and thirdly how they can go beyond the acquisition of simple techniques to reach a deeper reflection on and understanding of their work. These questions are also key questions for my larger doctoral study which explores the current reality of teacher learning and development in New Zealand, and in doing so aims to raise teacher awareness of the ways they learn and its effectiveness.

Boud and Walker's (1997) model of reflection on experience adds a number of features. These include attending to feelings that might help or hinder the reflection, making links to previous experience and learning, integrating the new experience with previous learning, and testing the validity of the learning. Similarly the notion of praxis is mentioned by Brookfield (1986), who argues "explorations of new ideas, skills or bodies of knowledge do not take place in a vacuum but are set within the context of learners' past, current and future experiences" (p.15).

Dialogue

Theorists such as Brookfield (1986) and Shor and Freire (1987) support the *importance of dialogue* in learning. They argue that dialogue can challenge learners to identify and clarify their personal beliefs, values and actions when they work alongside colleagues in real or simulated situations. Focussed dialogue about work practices can be a particularly powerful learning tool when teachers join together as a learning community. The more diverse these communities are, the greater opportunity there is for learning as practices are both challenged and affirmed. Shor and Freire describe such dialogue as "a way to recreate knowledge as well as the way we learn. It is viewed as a mutual learning process where the teacher poses critical problems for inquiry" (p.11). Shor and Freire also view dialogue as a liberating process because it allows the participants to shape and own the learning process. However, if this dialogue is to motivate learners to question their practice, trust and respect must be developed first.

Application

Critical reflection, is however, not a panacea for improved practice. Action is also required, and this is where learners need time and a reassurance of psychological safety to plan for and

experiment with new ideas. If learners are to do this then risk taking and the making of mistakes must be an accepted part of the learning process. Smyth (1989) suggests that it is not enough to just talk about new ideas, these need to be applied to real situations for meanings to develop and changes to practice considered. He describes this as a process of:

> *[opening up] dialogue between teachers about actual teaching experiences but in a way that enables questions to be asked about taken-for-granted, even cherished assumptions and practices, the reformulation of alternative hypotheses for action, and the actual testing of those hypotheses in classroom situations (p.5).*

Support from significant others

Learning support can be offered from a number of sources. These include colleagues, senior teachers and principals and advisers. Research by Joyce and Showers (1995) has been particularly useful for showing what quality teacher learning and development looks like, why it works, and with what results for both teachers as learners and those who provide professional development programmes for them. While acknowledging the complexities and difficulties of teachers' learning and development, Joyce and Showers claim that what is needed is a "giant but simple self-learning system of inquirers in which every educator is implicated" (p.xii). Their five-step model is an answer to this challenge. The five steps, beginning with theory, include the remaining steps of demonstration, practice, feedback and support.

As the final step in this model, support from others represents more than a linking of theory to classroom practice. Continued forms of classroom assistance are essential if new practices are to be added to existing teaching repertoires. Elements of all five steps are evident across the range of Ministry of Education professional development approaches that feature later in this chapter. However, for the moment, discussion remains with Joyce and Showers' preference for peer coaching as being one way to create norms of collegiality and experimentation that allow the transfer of learning to the classroom. This practice is one of teachers teaching one another. The quality learning circle is a variation of this model.

Showers (1985) describes peer coaching as serving several purposes. The first is that it encourages learners to connect with one another and engage in focussed study of their craft. The second purpose emphasises the importance of collegial study of new knowledge and skills developed through shared language and common understandings. A third purpose depicts coaching in terms of the structured support or follow up to training that helps teachers acquire new teaching skills and strategies. This involves teachers coaching each other and visiting one another's classrooms for the

purposes of observation, feedback, and conferences. However, teachers must be open to experimentation and be willing to persist and refine their teaching skills if this approach is to be successful. Showers, Joyce & Bennett (1987) argue that teachers must be able to transfer their learning directly to a classroom setting for it to be truly effective.

The role of theory

There are differences of opinion regarding the place and relative importance of theory in explaining and guiding practice (Rentoul, 1996). While some note the 'potential' for theory to inform practice (Bush, 1995), this view is not the commonly held view of teachers who value practical rather than theoretical activities. Dearden (1984) claims that teachers have a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards theory saying:

> *Teachers themselves commonly regard theory with a varying mixture of respect and suspicion: respect because it is thought of as difficult, and suspicion because its bearings are unclear on the detailed decision as to what to do next Monday morning (p.4).*

It is then interesting to note that Joyce and Showers' (1995) model of teacher learning and development has placed the role of theory as its first step. From my experience as a teacher educator I have found that while classroom practitioners may not necessarily value theory to the same extent as those providing professional development support to teachers, there is no doubt about the importance of theory. I argue that teachers can benefit from theory but that this has more meaning when it comes after demonstration and practical application because teachers relate to problems of practice which are their predominant learning agendas. Theory has the potential to raise awareness of work practices and to confront learners. It need not be seen as something remote from the day-to-day experience of the practitioner (Bush, 1995). The challenge professional development providers face is helping teacher learners to appreciate the connection between theory and work practice so that gaps between current and ideal realities, beliefs and practices can be identified and then addressed. If Rentoul (1996) is correct in assuming that many practising school leaders are unaware of the theory guiding their action, then this may be a reflection that theory is not valued as highly as practice by practitioners. However, even though practitioners may not admit to theory guiding their practice, Morgan (1986) writes "practice is never theory free, for it is always guided by an image of what one is trying to do. The real issue is whether or not we are aware of the theory guiding our action" (p.336). This is where the teacher educator plays an important role in raising teachers' awareness of their practice and helping them to be reflective practitioners. It is for this reason that the role of theory needs to be included as a principle underpinning adult learning and development.

Application of adult learning principles to the QLC model

The quality learning circle model is based on the principles of adult learning. It begins with a shared learning experience that has relevance and meaning for a group of teachers. The teachers make decisions about what that learning might be and how it will develop. Throughout the learning experience opportunities for dialogue are encouraged. These opportunities are the focus for reflection where teachers not only observe one another but also teach each other by sharing their ideas and providing feedback and support.

The following sections continue this theme of teacher learning and development by extending the focus to the roles played by professional development providers. In doing so it is necessary to highlight the subtle differences in terminology between teacher learning and development and professional development before beginning to discuss the range and effectiveness of professional development programmes on offer in New Zealand schools.

Definitions

Teacher learning and development, and professional development are two related but different concepts. Professional development tends to have a fixed content and delivery mode and is based on the assumption that teachers will automatically benefit from the learning offered to them. On the other hand, teacher learning and development suggests a more dynamic and evolving approach in which teachers engage in more open-ended learning experiences more akin to a journey into unknown territories than to set destinations. This may even necessitate mistakes being made for learning to occur.

Evaluations of professional development programmes

Sources for evaluating the effectiveness of professional development programmes include the on-going milestone reports prepared by the regional providers in each programme, external evaluation reports and those produced by the Ministry of Education itself in their annual publication called "The Research Bulletin". This bulletin reports participants' opinions and perceptions across a range of programmes and explores their effectiveness as learning opportunities for teachers. For example, Donn's (1995) report canvassed a total of 15 programmes, Dewar and Bennie's (1996) report 369 programme participants and Scott and Murrow's (1998) study a further 600 participants throughout 64 programmes. While acknowledging the range of existing evaluation data, discussion in this chapter uses the broad themes identified in the Research Bulletin across programmes.

While teachers' views have been canvassed about the effectiveness of the content and delivery of the various curriculum contracts, teachers have not been asked for specific comment about the viability of the professional development models used. This is further evidence of the Ministry of Education making decisions for teachers and teachers passively accepting what is offered rather than considering the possibility of there being alternative models which could better address their needs. However, despite this omission, teacher ratings from annual samplings of Ministry of Education professional development contracts reflect high levels of satisfaction, for example, 81-95% (Donn, 1995), 91% (Dewar & Bennie, 1996) and 80% (Scott & Murrow, 1998). It is then interesting to note how Bell's (1993a) research on teacher development draws attention to the development of teachers' social, personal and professional needs as being significant factors contributing to the quality of professional development programmes for teachers. Not only has this emphasis on metacognition about the teacher development process, change processes and how teachers themselves learn been a major part of Bell's work in the LISP project, but it is also a central focus for this thesis where teachers are learning about classroom assessment practices and their own preferences for learning.

The discussion in this chapter combines the evaluation data from teachers participating in these professional development opportunities as well as programme providers to highlight what New Zealand teachers value in their professional learning. Teachers' experiences of their learning within the Ministry of Education curriculum contracts are compared with those teachers seconded into the NEMP programme as teacher administrators and markers. Both of these sets of experiences help demonstrate what teachers want from professional development.

Issues

While the topic of teacher learning and development has always been fraught with difficulties of timing, relevance, and delivery, it is also acknowledged that career-long learning for teachers is important (Lovett, 1995). Teachers need to view themselves as learners and take deliberate steps to ensure they are learning on the job. Bell (1993a) suggests:

> *The prime purposes of teacher development are to help teachers feel better about themselves as teachers and to improve teaching and learning outcomes in the classroom…it is not something to be left to chance (p.5).*

Bell also argues that rather than empowering teachers as learners, teacher development providers need to be careful they do not encourage dependency in their learners. Programmes need to be set

up in ways that teachers can contribute ideas about what works in the classroom and admit to their concerns in a safe environment. Bell justifies this need for teacher talk and involvement by saying:

> *Teacher development is enhanced when teachers are able to talk with each other about what they are doing in the classroom as an integral and key part of the programme. ... Their contributions may include talking about what they are doing in the classroom, providing their ideas and opinions for discussion, giving support and feedback and negotiating the content and ways of doing the activities. Once the teachers contribute, they can be given support and feedback (p.5).*

Comments from teachers in Donn's (1995) evaluation of the Ministry of Education professional developments endorse this need for teachers to be talking and sharing one with another. One teacher's preference is clear with the words:

> *[I] would have liked to have worked a lot more in each area of the curriculum subject we were studying – to exchange ideas and experiment using our peer groups for evaluation and springboards and sounding boards, to get a more thorough overview and understanding of the depth of change and understanding necessary and intended in the document. I felt we barely scratched the surface, although each session was well planned and covered a range of theoretical and practical ideas (p.44).*

Another said:

> *I felt it useful to be able to 'bounce' ideas off other people in the programme, and it was good to know that I was not the only person unsure about implementing the new curriculum and who didn't understand the jargon (p.46).*

The theme of teacher talk is also discussed by Day (1999) who refers to the deeper levels of reflective practice which are possible through high quality teacher talk. Teacher development programmes have the potential to offer and model ways of reflecting on practice so that teachers begin to develop some self-help skills and strategies. Day (1993) suggests that reflective practice occurs within a social context and cites Argyris and Schon's (1976) definition of teacher talk as being, "the means by which teachers deconstruct, test out and reconstruct their beliefs and 'espoused theories' of education" (Day, 1999, p.46). This definition is important because it gives emphasis to critique as a way of moving teachers beyond the practical arena to the consideration of alternative practices. Day expands these ideas by saying:

> *Most 'co-construction', whether it takes place through anecdote, ideas, information and material swopping, or the sharing of problems, issues and opinions will need to challenge teachers to move beyond exchange to critique, and the success of this depends upon the level of individual trust and institutional support. Critique,...involves both disclosure and feedback. The way communities use talk as a means of probing meanings and uncovering*

> *diversity is crucial to their growth. Making time for sustained reflection and dialogue is a primary challenge in building professional learning cultures (p.46).*

Thus the role of the professional development facilitator is crucial. A facilitator who adopts a training-focused perspective rather than a learner-focused perspective can negatively affect the professional development of teachers. In this regard, Lieberman cited by Day (1999), suggests there is more to teacher development than the introduction of new content and maintains:

> *[It is important to move] teachers beyond simply hearing about new ideas or frameworks for understanding teaching practice, to being involved in decisions about the substance, process and organisational supports for learning in school to finding broader support mechanisms (such as networks or partnerships) that provide opportunities and innovative norms from groups outside the school (p.3).*

A comment from a teacher in Dewar and Bennie's (1996) evaluation supports this view by expressing an appreciation of the way the facilitators had worked to connect teachers as learners one with another:

> *The facilitators created a great atmosphere, full of opportunities to learn in many ways. They were also very flexible and listened to us about what we felt we needed to focus on as well. They fed in ideas when we were lacking too. (p.76)*

Like the previous comments, this comment reiterates the value of teacher talk and interaction in the learning process. However, the provision of professional development is by no means a straight-forward exercise because it remains caught between the need for the education system to guide support programmes, (often within short timeframes to maximise coverage) and the need for individuals to take responsibility for their own learning to ensure immediate relevance. Professional development models have difficulty meeting both of these needs.

Whatever the approach taken, a further challenge for an education system lies in how it can provide learning opportunities for all its teachers and at the same time meet the needs of teachers who have very different skill and knowledge levels, and attitudes to learning. As a provider of professional development courses for teachers, I have encountered this same difficulty. While accepting that teachers vary in their career experience and stages, it is another matter being able to recognise these differences in the mode of delivery given the real constraints of time, resources, staffing and finance. When these differences are realised and taken into account in teacher learning and development with curriculum documents, some learners, particularly those in the early stages of their teaching careers, may require more structured learning opportunities and have a preference for content to be determined by others. Providers should be careful that they do not get trapped into making these learners dependent on them. Other learners will be

sufficiently motivated to determine their own needs and find ways of achieving their goals. This independent behaviour should be cultivated so that more time is available to help those who lack this capacity for learning themselves. This is where teacher development programmes can serve as opportunities for teachers to build their capacity for data gathering and subsequent analysis if these processes are modelled.

Bell (1993a) argues that teacher development can be maximised for all teachers "if teachers are convinced and accept that an aspect (but not all) of their teaching is problematic and [they want] to improve it" (p.5). This statement reinforces the message that teachers need to be convinced about the need for change and involved in planning its direction before they will make significant progress in their learning. Collaborative planning presents a way of modelling the learning process so that when ready, teachers actually know how to be independent learners. A comment from a teacher included in Donn's (1995) report, shows this concern regarding a lack of consultation with the participants over the direction of the learning. The teacher said, "there seemed to be a lack of overall plan and direction – ideas presented were not always relevant or focused on our school's needs" (p.44). Clearly this situation had hindered learning for the teachers involved.

However, in accepting that teachers have their own particular learning styles and preferences, professional development programme providers still need to accommodate these differences as best they can. In 1988, Kingston reminded those responsible for guidance and support programmes for beginning teachers that it was dangerous to adopt a single approach to suit all participants. She argued that where teachers were treated as having identical needs this was likened to being placed in a straitjacket within a "restrictive zone" and learning output and performance were limited (p.20). It is argued that this also applies to professional development programmes for more experienced teachers. Teachers welcome input into aspects of programme content because relevance to their classroom programmes is particularly important. The following comment from Donn's (1995) evaluation offers advice for other facilitators when it states:

> *In response to the question on the needs of programme participants, respondents again mentioned their belief that teachers' existing knowledge and understanding of a particular area was not taken sufficiently into account during the programme. Respondents who made this point suggested that, in the future, participants should be asked what they needed or wanted or expected of the programme, either before and/or during the course" (pp.42-43).*

Similar comments have been made in subsequent evaluation reports. For example, Dewar and Bennie (1996) stated that 11% of respondents suggested courses needed to focus more on the individual needs of participants and their schools. These concerns were repeated again by Scott and Murrow (1998) who claimed a small proportion of respondents were critical of the nature and content of the workshops or cluster meetings and made complaints that the focus of the programme or the levels covered did not meet their needs.

Definition of professional development

It has been argued that the task of helping teachers to learn and develop is extremely challenging. While various professional development programmes can attempt to enhance teacher learning and development, they are a vehicle for rather than a guarantee of learning. Broadly speaking professional development has been defined by the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) as being "any activity that develops an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher. This may include personal study and reflection as well as formal courses" (p.18). This definition serves as an acknowledgement that opportunities for learning exist with provisions driven by others (sometimes as mandates) and those sought by teachers themselves. It will be shown that the current practice of most professional development being determined by the Ministry of Education rather than the teachers themselves is a significant problem and continuing source of dissatisfaction for teachers. Whether professional development opportunities come from within or beyond a school makes a considerable difference to their overall impact, including the short- and long-term gains to classroom learning and teaching practices. An important point to note is that dependence on others to provide the necessary learning will not necessarily increase levels of professionalism amongst teachers. Sachs (2000) offers five principles as a platform on which teachers' professionalism can be renewed and developed. These principles include learning, participation, collaboration, co-operation and activism and reflect the need for professional development models to empower and energise teachers rather than control what it is they should be learning.

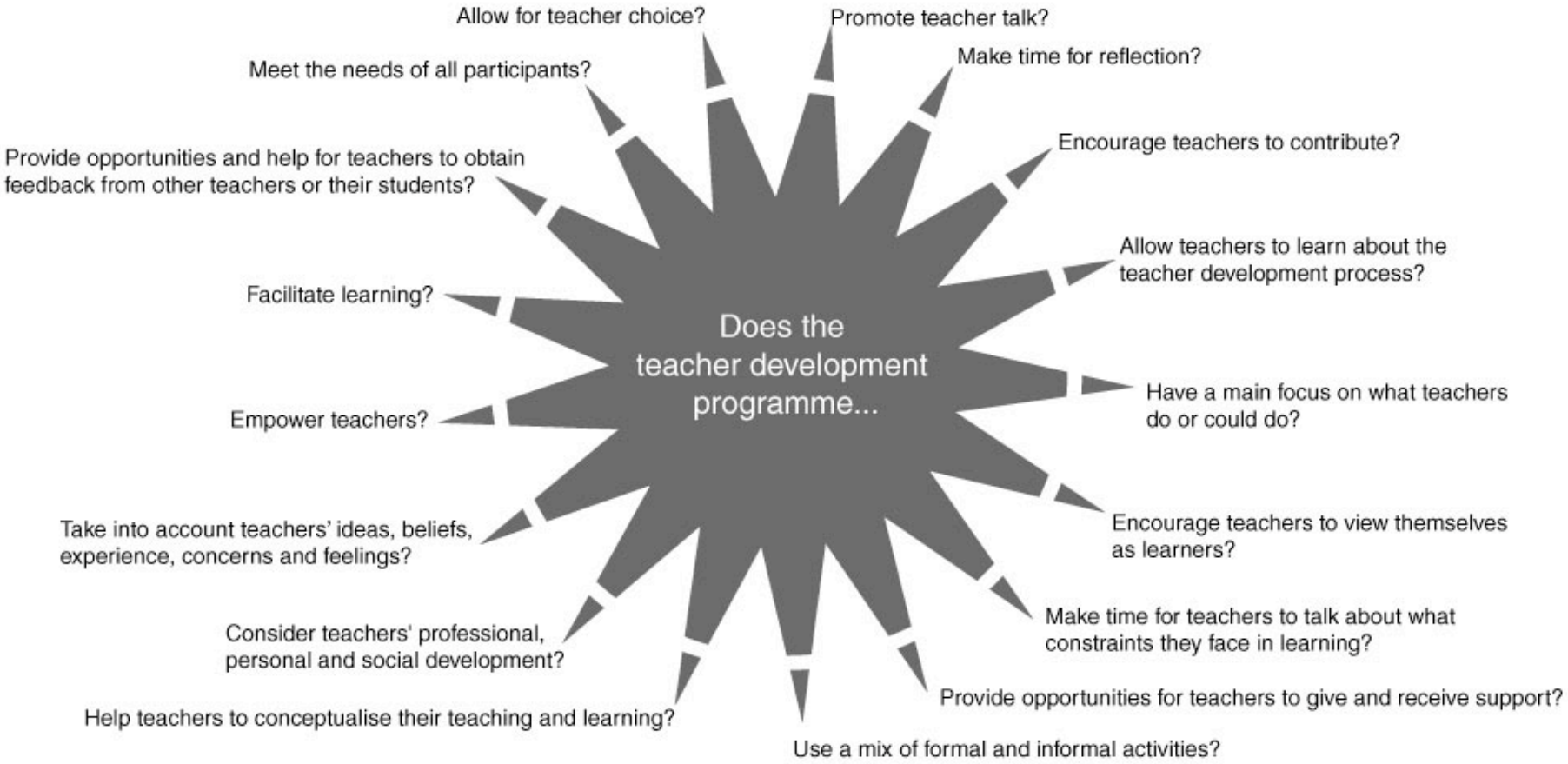
What is an effective professional development model?

Just what is considered to be an effective model for professional development is also problematic. Gilmore (1999) argues that the number of intangible aspects contributing to professional development make it hard for teachers to specify what has helped them to change their teaching practices. This is because it becomes much easier to describe any changes made than to analyse why

these have been possible. Professional development providers face this same dilemma of uncovering why it is that some models are more successful than others in promoting teacher learning and professional development. It is for this reason that regular evaluations serve a useful purpose in highlighting what teachers find effective for their professional learning. The Ministry of Education has endeavoured to meet the range of teacher need by offering programmes targeting individual teachers, whole schools and lead/key teachers as well as funding in-service courses.

Regardless of the professional development model used, Figure 1 represents a series of useful evaluation questions which have been adapted from Bell (1993b). These questions serve several purposes. Bell suggests that they may be useful for planning and monitoring a current programme or evaluating a completed programme. While the questions are primarily intended to guide future programme delivery by facilitators, Bell (1993b) suggests that another value is raising teacher awareness about ways teachers might take more responsibility for their learning. Figure 1 is a summary of Bell's evaluation framework but does not include the recommendations which accompany each question.

Figure 2: Questions to Evaluate Teacher Development Programmes.



adapted from Bell, B. (1993b) pp. 84-91

Professional development in New Zealand

Professional development in New Zealand schools is driven from two sources. One is from the school site and the other from central agencies (e.g., Ministry of Education). Both share responsibility for ensuring that professional development is available to all teachers on an on-going basis and provide regular reports on the programmes on offer and their effectiveness. Such programmes are offered on the assumption that professional development improves the quality of the teaching profession. However, because so much curriculum change has been mandated by central agencies, schools are now finding that considerable time is being spent meeting these requirements. Little time, space or energy is then available for schools to decide on issues that they consider merit attention.

Sources of professional development

Nationally, an annual $60 million budget has provided for professional development funds. This has been allocated in three ways. The first has been through the work of the School Support Services, to support government priorities and meet needs that have been identified in local areas. A second approach has been an allocation through the schools' operational grants of an approximate amount of $500 per teacher on professional development. The third approach has been through contestable professional development contracts. This funding has ensured that professional development occurs at several levels; nationally, at each school, and by teachers themselves in a variety of ways. The focus for most of this development has been development to support the implementation of revised curriculum documents which is why it is useful to explore their delivery modes and impact.

Timeframes for professional development

It has been unfortunate that not all professional development programmes have allowed sufficient time for learning. Teachers involved in the LISP programme (Learning in Science Project) as reported by Bell (1993b) found that the gradual process of change had helped their professional development. The spread out nature of their programme over two years with weekly sessions had given them time to try out new activities, rethink their ideas, talk with others about their work and manage their feelings about the change process. This extended timeframe meant that their development matched the change process. Bell (1993b) explained this as teachers accepting that they did not change everything all at once but could adapt the new teaching ideas in their own ways. Clearly the LISP teachers wanted more control of the pace of their learning as

well as the details of that learning. Both of these features are important when considering teachers' feelings about the change process.

Models used for implementing curriculum documents

Since the early 1990s, New Zealand schools have been inundated with curriculum changes. For primary school teachers, teaching every curriculum area, the pressure to keep up with the changes has been unrelenting. In recent years teachers have been introduced to the new curriculum documents in a variety of ways. Four broad categories of professional development have been adopted by the Ministry of Education. These relate to individual teachers, whole school, lead/key teachers and in-service programmes. Each of these categories will be discussed in terms of their advantages, disadvantages and lessons learnt.

The individual teacher approach

Developments associated with the initial curriculum documents, e.g., mathematics and science (1992), adopted an individual teacher focus, where teachers were taken out of their schools for intensive workshops. This approach allowed for direct targeting of individual teachers and meant that over a period of six weeks individual teachers received an induction into the ways of a new curriculum document before another cohort went through the same process. However, there were more disadvantages than advantages with this delivery mode. One particular disadvantage was that teachers could be denied collegial support from other teachers at their own schools because they were the only ones attending the programme at a particular time. This isolation also meant that it was harder for teachers to relate the new knowledge to their classroom practice and trial new approaches and content when others were not engaged in similar projects. Gilmore (1994) noted some of these limitations in her evaluation report which said:

> *Teachers and facilitators felt that the teacher development should be available to every teacher. Where whole schools, departments or syndicates were involved in the same cluster, there was noticeably greater progress towards implementation (p.115).*

Such a comment draws attention to the benefit of having larger numbers through the programmes from a particular school or cluster in terms of support and knowledge on the ground. Here tensions were evident between the Ministry of Education wanting many teachers involved in the professional development programmes before funding of specialist support services was depleted and a growing

realisation that teachers' learning needs were not simply in the realm of new content. Teachers also had personal and social needs which were equally important (Bell, 1993b, Bell & Gilbert, 1996).

From my personal involvement as a seminar workshop facilitator for the PDCL (Principal Development Curriculum Leadership) contract in 1992, I was well aware of the isolation teachers experienced in their learning. At the seminars teachers appreciated being able to talk about their personal feelings as they worked with various changes. This was particularly important because new learning could easily overwhelm teachers, and they were reassured to know they were not alone and that there were others who were also feeling unsure of directions and their ability to cope with similar changes. It was here that action research methodology had considerable appeal for the contract providers because it offered a way of catering for individual needs enabling one or more teachers the opportunity to follow their own learning pathways. However, progress for some teachers was hindered when they needed longer to work through the first steps of identifying their needs and choosing a focus for improvement which at the same time matched the scope of the new curriculum documents. It soon became apparent that these timeframes were inadequate for significant progress to be made, especially when the support stopped with the ending of the contract time. A teacher in Donn's report (1995) had also mentioned time as being a problem for teacher learning. This teacher described the professional development as being very intense and wanted more time to work through ideas and aspects with other teachers to clarify ideas. The whole school approach attempted to address some of these problems.

The whole school approach

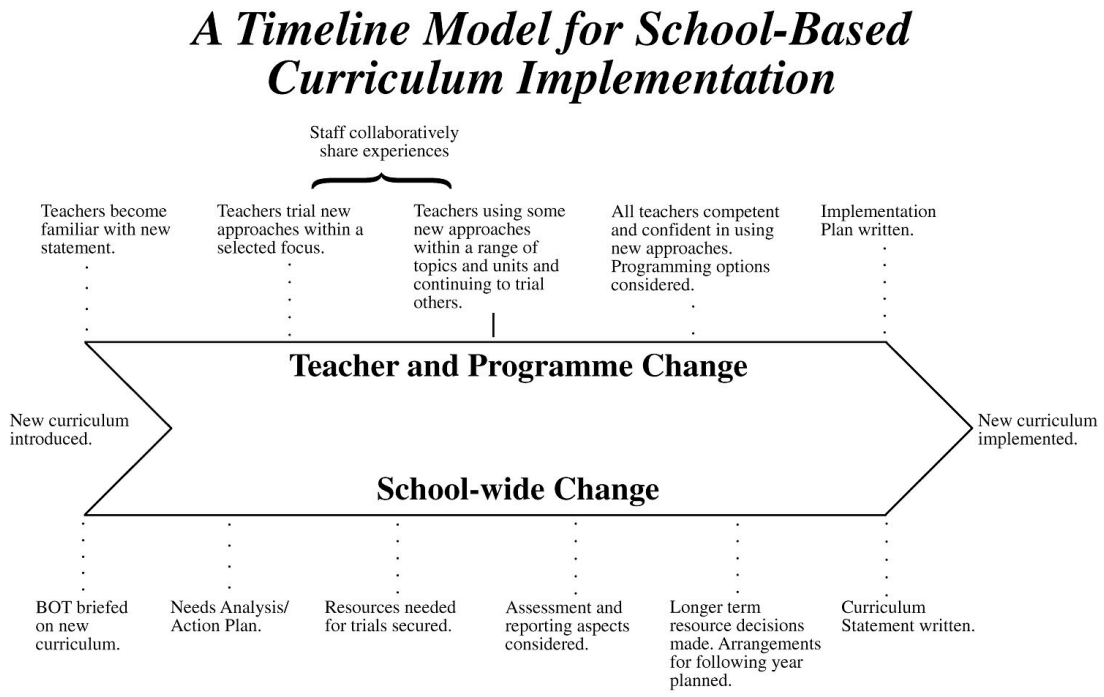
The whole school approach enabled all teachers in the one school to work on the same project at the same time. Not only were teachers required to work with one another on content but this approach promoted stronger support for teachers. Considerable progress was made in the development of curriculum policies, and the sharing of teaching philosophies in the nominated curriculum area. This communication of ideas increased the consistency of approach between teachers and allowed a clearer progression of learning content to emerge throughout the age groups taught in schools. This proved to be particularly useful and had a greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Providers continued to require schools to adopt action research methodology for implementing the new curriculum documents so that work could be directly linked to the programme needs of the participating schools. This made it possible for teachers to develop new teaching topics and units of

work with accompanying resources and assessment tools. These developments were spread over a full year which was an improvement on the earlier, somewhat intense timeframe given for the individual teacher delivery. Nevertheless, even with these timeframes, there were still some schools where teachers were unable to complete their implementation within the calendar year of the Ministry of Education funding. However, despite these difficulties, teachers' confidence with the action research model increased as they used the planning and reflection cycle format to their advantage.

The following diagram highlights the elements which underpin curriculum implementation at the school level showing that it is not merely a matter of teachers being presented with new knowledge. School-based implementation requires further levels of planning, resource development and budgeting to ensure school-wide consistency of approach and philosophy.

Figure 2: *School-based curriculum implementation*



Collins, G. (1994). p.2.

Trialing of professional development models has led to the development and clarification of a set of guiding principles for future delivery. For example, O'Rourke (1992) has claimed that the success of professional developments for teachers in the long-term depends on programmes being:

- appropriate to the needs of the teacher
- 'owned' by the teachers involved
- a mixture of practice and theory
- over an extended period of time
- support and guidance as well as professional 'input' sessions
- within the context of the school culture
- with the support of the school principal (pp.1-2)

These features show how the programme providers have attempted to address issues of individual needs, school characteristics, timing and support structures over time. As each new curriculum document has arrived, lessons have been learnt and passed on to the next developers. Further refinements have been made to the professional development models in use as a result of the annual evaluations. In addition, better questions have been asked regarding programme usefulness, relevance, timeliness and the extent to which the needs of participants have been met. Subsequent evaluation questions have included asking teachers about:

- the extent to which they had benefited from their involvement in the programme, whether through increased knowledge, skill development, or merely from meeting and sharing with other teaching professionals
- feedback about aspects of the programmes while they were in progress, rather than, in some cases, some months after the end of the programme, in order that participants' recall was not 'contaminated' by events occurring after completion of the programme. (Scott & Morrow, 1998, p.113)

Such questions have allowed for a more thorough evaluation of the strategies used.

Lead/key teacher approach

Since 1999 Ministry of Education professional development contracts have adopted a lead or key teacher approach. While this model has some features in common with the earlier school-wide, year-long model described above, it is a cheaper version. This model requires schools to nominate two lead teachers for in-depth training in the selected curriculum implementation for support to be more readily available at the school site. This is a reduction of the support level previously provided by the contract facilitators. While cluster workshops are still included, there are fewer school visits to assist the lead teachers share their learning with the rest of their school staffs. These actions have

the potential to increase a school's ownership of the learning process because teachers within a school are responsible for organising their own staff development sessions. By the same token, the success of the implementation requires teachers at the school site to have sufficient skills and knowledge to lead their colleagues and the confidence to be flexible in their delivery approach. Unfortunately, not all the lead/key teachers have had the necessary facilitative skills and content knowledge to perform these professional development roles. It has been clear that many of these teachers have lacked an awareness of the change process and what it means for teacher development. They have not realised the importance of Fullan's lessons for understanding the change process, e.g., that change cannot be forced, problems are our friends, risk taking is part of learning, and both top-down and bottom-up strategies are needed.

A major difficulty of this approach has been the inadequacy of its delivery time for teachers at the school level. While the lead teachers have attended full day workshops introducing them to a range of activities, some lead teachers have then attempted to repeat what was delivered to them in a whole day's course to teachers at the school level in the one to two hour staff meeting time. Thus content has been crammed into an unrealistic timeframe denying teachers the time they need to absorb, discuss or relate the new knowledge to their existing classroom programmes. This practice has overwhelmed teachers rather than enthused them with new knowledge and ways of enhancing the quality of their classroom programmes. Likewise the provision of in-service training also falls into this trap of assuming that a one-off programme can provide the help teachers need to keep up with curriculum developments. Teacher learning deserves a better chance of success.

In-service training

Alongside the three approaches to Ministry of Education funded professional development are the traditional in-service programmes for teachers. These have occurred in areas not covered by the Ministry of Education curriculum contracts and have been the focus of a review by the Education Review Office (2000).

Two purposes have been given by the Education Review Office for this national education evaluation study of in-service for New Zealand teachers. The first is to examine how well in-service training in schools has been managed; the second to provide information about good practice that can assist schools to use in-service training more effectively.

The Education Review Office suggests that this is an important study because it "considers not just the content and delivery of training programmes but also the wider issues of how well schools identify training needs and evaluate results" (p.1). This statement in itself is an acknowledgement that schools have a part to play in making decisions about the nature of professional development for their teachers. This ownership dimension can vary from schools deciding whether to participate in a particular professional development programme, to helping with its design and delivery. Such interest in the quality of teacher learning and development through one day in-service offerings is timely given the amount of change and learning which is expected of teachers. It seems that it is no longer possible for teachers to keep pace with every programme on offer and the question needs to be asked whether teachers are any better off with a wider menu of courses. It could also be asked whether these one day offerings do in fact improve classroom teaching practice.

It is clear that teachers are struggling to find time to read the written materials which are sent to schools on a weekly basis. While schools receive the National Education Monitoring Project reports annually, teachers have still found it difficult to cope with this reading material on top of their existing demands for professional reading. The absence of professional development on the NEMP results and Ministry of Education teacher development contracts to support teacher learning, apart from those for teachers involved in the assessment and marking programmes, have made it harder for teachers to learn about NEMP. Unfortunately without the focus of a Ministry of Education contract, the NEMP reports currently stand little chance of widespread use because teachers are already committed to other projects and have accepted the pattern of the Ministry making decisions about what and when they should learn.

Teacher professional development and the National Education Monitoring Project

Some teachers have received NEMP training through their roles as teacher administrators and markers. The timing of these professional development programmes outside of the teachers' own classrooms and schools has been a clear demonstration that teachers benefit from more in-depth training. Here they have enjoyed focussed time, free of interruptions and this has enabled them to develop their understanding of good assessment practices. Teacher administrator secondments to concentrate solely on the NEMP programme for six weeks, during the school day and not in 'tired' times, have resulted in better quality learning (Gilmore, 1999).

Not only have these teachers been fully supported in their NEMP work at all times, but also, opportunities have been provided for teachers to work alongside other teachers as learners. This has

proved to be a particular bonus as these in-depth discussions have added to the teachers' knowledge and enjoyment of assessment roles and activities. Gilmore notes the following comments from teacher interviews in her 1999 evaluation study.

> *Teachers are independent people who get used to working alone and being self-sufficient. It's good for us to work alongside one another from time to time (p.9).*
>
> *Great professional discussions. Having a buddy really makes this project. You have time to share, reflect and analyse what you do. Having the time means that we are more reflective and more likely to utilise our experiences elsewhere (p.9).*

In evaluating the experiences of the teacher administrators and teacher markers, Gilmore (1999) has demonstrated the resounding success of this professional development for teachers. A wealth of data gained from weekly diaries, a series of questionnaires and interviews with case study teachers has shown that the benefits of this six week experience have been "numerous, broad and multi-faceted." Benefits have ranged from being "personal and professional, specific and general, immediate and longer-term, and relating to assessment and beyond" (p.2).

The need for relevance to classroom learning and teaching is important for teachers. In many cases the NEMP experience has acted as a catalyst for more self directed learning and experimentation by these teachers. For example, learning gains have been made from accessing the instruction manuals, reading the questioning techniques and instructions and reading about the management of assessment activities. Teachers have also asked their own questions as a result of working with different groups of children. Gilmore (1999) reports teachers as saying:

> *I have found it very interesting to observe different groups of children and the strategies they're using to solve the same problems. I have been interested in finding out more about learning styles and would like to pursue this when I return to my class.*
>
> *I've also found it interesting to observe how important the teacher's role is to keep some groups focused on the task and how well other groups can do when given the time to follow their ideas.*
>
> *One to one gives a nice picture of a child. It doesn't take long to find weaknesses, strengths, etc. This is so important to establish rapport. I discovered that I can do this with any child... This was a nice discovery and confidence enhancing.*
>
> *Allowing children even more time for thinking seems the most significant idea this week, highlighted by one child. Too often in normal classroom practice we are unable to give extended time for this purpose because of time constraints and the pressure of getting everything done. Perhaps this should be reconsidered (p.10).*

Current understandings of the factors hindering quality professional development

Teachers and schools are all conscious of pressures for change coming from within their midst and also from central agencies. This inevitably creates tension in terms of the professional development provisions for teachers, as choices need to be made. Decisions regarding content and delivery styles have particular effects depending on their source of origin. It is also unfortunate that teachers receive on-going blame for poor performance when in fact there are many factors which contribute to the quality of teacher work.

Barth (1990) suggests that many attempts to improve learning in schools have dwelt on adult working conditions, the control of students and student achievement. He claims that the emphasis should not be one of "what should students, teachers, and principals know and do and how do we get them to know and do it?" (p.45). It is this same mindset which is driving much of the current professional development for New Zealand teachers. Barth argues this can only encourage dependence and learners whose actions will be driven by compliance rather than personal reflection and any desire to improve practices. Lieberman (1995) shares this concern regarding learners who expect to be told what it is they should learn. Her concern relates to the growing number of teachers who have come to believe that other people's understandings of teaching and learning are more important than their own and that knowledge gained from the daily work with students is of far less value. This passive acceptance can mean that teachers dismiss their own problem-solving capabilities and their dependence on others is reinforced. Furthermore, Barth argues that we should be finding ways to promote independent, self-motivated learners. Our efforts should, therefore, centre around identifying the "conditions under which principal, student and teacher will become serious, committed, sustained, lifelong, co-operative learners" (p.45) who reflect on their daily work and plan for change and improvements to their practices. This is about building the capacity of teachers for learning.

Joyce in Hoyle and Megarry (1980) supports this interest in identifying the conditions which promote the professional learning of teachers. He suggests that current barriers to professional learning centre around issues of resourcing, structures, the nature of schools as social systems and the work situation of teachers. In this sense schools are not conducive to teacher learning. It is argued that this situation ought to be taken more seriously if teachers are to be seen as professionals who continue learning throughout their working lives.

Resourcing professional development

Providing for professional development involves making decisions about cost and getting value for money. Other resourcing issues relate to personnel and the perceived quality of the professional development provider. Facilitation skills, expertise and credibility are important. Having one style or message is unlikely to meet the multiple needs of adult learners. Such an approach is to ignore teachers' problems of practice and the potential for building on experiential learning. Lieberman (1995) argues that providers need to move beyond delivery in "bite-sized pieces of transferable knowledge" to approaches which can be shaped around the needs of teacher learners throughout the programme's delivery. (p.592). This will involve being sensitive to the needs of adult learners and in particular issues of pacing, direction, and relevance to context and outcomes.

Structures

The *design of schools* is considered a further hindrance to the professional learning and development of teachers. Fullan (1995) refers to the school as a learning organisation as being a 'distant dream'. He argues that "schools and teachers have become stalled in their efforts to become more learning oriented and are not currently learning organisations" (p.230). He also contends that the recent developments, e.g., site-based management, restructuring and systemic reform, have failed and diverted attention from the very issues they have claimed to address. In order to move forward, Fullan suggests a "radical reculturing of schools as institutions and the basic redesign of the teaching profession" (p.230). Starratt (1994) suggests that the "bureaucracy of school systems is now seen as an enduring problem and not simply a contemporary phenomenon." (p.46). Further questioning about the purposes of schooling is needed. Questions to determine whose needs are being served, who exercises power and whose agendas are being met by present structures are necessary. Criticism of present structures is increasing. MacNeill and Silcox (1996) also question whether schools can be called learning organisations. They argue that just because teaching occurs in schools, this does not mean that there is learning.

Time is another structural obstacle for teacher learning. Often the time devoted to professional learning occurs at the end of a school day when teachers are exhausted and largely unable to absorb or reflect on new knowledge or issues of practice. Other opportunities such as teacher only days can be more productive. However, these occur on an infrequent basis and require the school to close or relieving teachers to be employed. Mostly schools depend on staff meetings for professional development and these are juggled with administrative matters and other topics that need to be kept

'on the boil'. This often means that insufficient time is devoted to the main topic. Momentum can also be lost with the passage of time between meetings, staff being absent, and the receptivity of the staff at any given time in the term and energy levels.

Time is needed for effective learning. This means that timeframes need to be flexible to adjust to the readiness and ability of teachers as learners. The 1994 report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning captured the frustrations of teachers well when it was named "Prisoners of Time." Fullan (1995) reinforces the importance of time when citing the Commission as having said:

> *Teachers, principals and administrators need time for reform...Adding school reform to the list of things schools must accomplish, without recognising that time in the current calendar is a limited resource, trivialises the effort. It sends a powerful message to teachers: don't take this reform business too seriously. Squeeze it in on your own time (p.232).*

The Commission suggests new structures and uses of time which involve changes to the culture and organisation of schooling. These include:

> *Reinventing schools around learning, not time; using time in new and better ways; giving teachers the time they need; establishing an academic day; keeping schools open longer; investing in technology; developing local action plans to transform schools; sharing responsibility for learning and ending the finger pointing and evasion (p.233).*

The New Zealand Review on the length of the school day and school year is another acknowledgement that time is considered to be an obstacle for learning (Ministry of Education, 2000). However, it would be easier said than done to change the existing structures and use of learning time in schools.

Nature of schools as social systems

Despite working in a school setting where there are other adults, teachers and principals can feel isolated in their work. Rosenholtz (1985) considers *isolation* to be one of the greatest obstacles to the professional development of the teaching profession. She claims:

> *Teachers spend a large proportion of their time deprived of the benefit of seeing or hearing others in the act of teaching. Indeed, many report no adult contact at all in the course of a normal working day. In such an isolated setting teachers come to believe that they alone are responsible for running their classrooms and that seeking advice or assistance from their colleagues is an open admission of incompetence (p.350).*

Thus, the challenge is to find ways that promote teacher communication and interaction to benefit teacher learning and development. Special care should, therefore, be taken with the planning of staff meetings and staff development sessions to maximise opportunities for teacher interaction and dialogue. It is not sufficient that these be information giving sessions. Meetings can be opportunities for modelling collegial ways of working to show staff that these can promote learning.

Metaphors are now being used to highlight the degree to which collegial practices are evident in organisations. Barth's (1990) metaphor of a child's sandbox captures this lack of collegiality amongst teachers because it matches the essence of many adult relationships in schools and can be likened to parallel play. He writes:

> *The benefit of parallel play is isolation from others who might take away our time, challenge our practice, steal our ideas, or have us do things differently. The price of parallel play is that we ward off those who might help us do things better and with whom we might do grander things than either could do alone. The price is isolation from other adults (p.16).*

This metaphor of parallel play is of increasing concern given the competitive state of staff relationships, in the present climate of accountability and performance management that rewards individuals rather than the performance of teams of teachers.

The preferred metaphor of honeybees is more collegial. This conveys a sense of belonging, working together and being in a community. When translated to the school setting, the honeybee metaphor is an acknowledgement that teacher growth and development is a social activity and teachers relate their own behaviours to what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. If this learning is denied then a valuable opportunity is missed.

Work situation of teachers

Finding time for talking with other adults is important for teachers. Time needs to be made for interactions about learning and teaching matters, for teachers to engage in learning. When the time for interactions is restricted to staff meetings and where the agendas are set by the principal or senior staff, additional opportunities need to be made for teachers to discuss their burning issues of practice. This is a further challenge because such time is not easy to find in and amongst other meetings and duties. Graham and Fahey (1999) suggest that teachers need to practise a way of talking with one another which will promote reflection and learning. They argue it is important that

teacher talk allows for judgements to be suspended and time is given for listening, questioning and wondering. Facilitators also need to practise these behaviours and model them to teachers.

Garmston and Wellman (1998) offer seven norms to enhance teacher talk. The seven norms include pausing, paraphrasing, probing for specificity, putting ideas on the table, paying attention to self and others, presuming positive intentions and balancing advocacy with inquiry. In working with schools on communication, Garmston and Wellman report positive outcomes from groups that balance advocacy with inquiry. Time devoted to these process skills may reap more benefits for the teachers as a unit, than time devoted to absorbing new content knowledge on their own. Such benefits are explained as:

> *When advocating, group members make their thinking and reasoning visible by stating their assumptions, distinguishing data from inference, and giving examples. Members also test their assumptions and conclusions by revealing what they are least certain about, staying open to other interpretations, and encouraging others to explore their thinking. When inquiring into others' views, members check for understanding, ask others to make their reasoning visible, invite introspection, and explain their reasons for inquiring (p.33).*

And so the dilemma facing professional development providers and leaders in schools is whether to continue fighting against the odds. Pressure of time, differences in career stages and needs will not go away. These are givens which cannot be removed. We now need to decide whether professional development is worth the effort if the learning is so suspect. Maybe the time has come to accept that current professional development is not working, and often amounts to merely going through the motions in order to satisfy system compliance, rather than any real learning by teachers.

New Zealand's National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) has addressed some of these concerns in its design. Ways have been found to allow teachers time for in-depth learning away from their classrooms by seconding them for blocks of time. Teachers have been trained in a residential setting which has fostered professional networking and provided the necessary support for learning about the testing role. Then the actual testing in schools has involved pairs of teachers working together and again further opportunities have been available for teachers to talk about their work as issues have arisen. The usual patterns of teacher isolation and not seeing beyond one's own classroom door have similarly been addressed with teachers testing in schools other than their own workplace, or in the case of markers, viewing video excerpts from a range of school types and locations. Furthermore, examples of children's work are discussed allowing teachers the chance to see the full range of ability at a particular age level and how this is reflected in the marking criteria and descriptors. All of this has enabled teachers to extend their assessment repertoire, identify

weaknesses in the children's performances, be more precise in their feedback, and better able to plan future teaching towards the meeting of real needs and not just teach to the curriculum content of the documents.

Since critics have started using the word 'joke' to describe a good deal of what schools do in the name of professional development (Miles, 1995), it is now time to take notice and look for alternative practices. Miles writes in the foreword to Guskey and Huberman's book that professional development is:

> *... everything that a learning environment shouldn't be; radically under resourced, brief, not sustained, designed for 'one size fits all', imposed rather than owned, lacking any intellectual coherence, treated as a special add-on event rather than as part of a natural process and trapped in the constraints of the bureaucratic system we have come to call 'school'. In short, it is pedagogically naive, a demeaning exercise that often leaves its participants more cynical and no more knowledgeable, skilled, or committed than before. And all this is accompanied by overblown rhetoric about "the challenge of change", "self-renewal", "professional growth", "expanding knowledge base", and "life-long learning (p.vii).*

Stoll (1999) suggests that if we are serious about addressing the problem of professional development not necessarily resulting in learning gains for teachers, then we need to focus on ways that teachers can help themselves and drive their own learning. This view recognises that teachers cannot learn if they are "victims of change" (Fullan, 1993) or resistant to what others think it is they should know or do better. If ways can be found to help teachers accept the need for change, engage in learning and even become "agents of change" (Fullan, 1993), then studying and sharing knowledge about the internal conditions which develop teachers' capacities for learning and improvement may prove to be beneficial.

Support for this emphasis on internal capacity is gathering favour in the school effectiveness and school improvement literatures through the writings of Garmston and Wellman, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hopkins and Harris, 1997; Lambert, 1998; and Stoll, 1999. As a result a new field of study is emerging with its focus around schools as learning organisations. This is a recognition that schools all have their own set of internal conditions or variables which help and hinder learning for students and staff. If these can provide a framework for schools to analyse their own settings and choices, then the future of teacher professional learning and development will be promising. The theory of organisational learning is discussed in Chapter 10 of my doctoral thesis (see Lovett, 2002).

Chapter 3

The quality learning experience overview

The next two chapters include details of an intervention study, which follows a quality learning circle approach, to facilitate teacher learning for a group of eight teachers over a year. Of particular interest are the processes which these teachers use to develop and sustain their learning.

In this chapter, the origins and rationale of the quality learning circle approach are discussed. These are followed by a justification of the modifications made to use this approach with a group of teachers who worked in different schools. A profile of each of the teachers sets the scene for the remaining data gathering in this project and my role as a researcher is also explained. The chapter concludes with a general discussion of qualitative research methodology and how I used this methodology for my data collection and analysis.

In Chapter 4 data from the teachers' QLC journeys are discussed. This serves to highlight a range of factors which have value for these teachers as individual members of the QLC, the QLC as a collective entity and draws upon existing opportunities for learning within their schools. The QLC approach is presented as being a useful tool because it is based on teacher ownership, enthusiasm, commitment and time for learning, all of which are in short supply with existing modes of teacher learning in schools.

Origins of the QLC approach

The QLC that is used in education today had its origins in American industries of the 1960s which allowed people to select a common focus or issue within their organisation or profession, and then to use one another to explore ways of effecting improvements in work practices. The QLC required colleagues to share experiences and to talk with and work alongside one another in order to learn from each other. Each participant was seen as an equal, and that was essential for members of the circle to work together.

In 1993, Stewart and Prebble adapted the industry-based QLC model for school settings in New Zealand. They described their model as having the following features:

- Selection of a common theme for exploration

- Discussion and story telling within the group about experiences related to the theme
- Observation in classrooms to enhance the meaning of the stories (the visitor to the classroom is the learner)
- Discussion of these observations in pairs and then with the whole group
- Sharing examples of practice with the group

These features are evident in the QLC model chosen for my research project, with some minor modifications which I will mention later in this chapter. However, first it is necessary to explain why I selected the quality learning circle approach as the means by which a group of teachers could be introduced to the NEMP reports.

Rationale for the QLC approach

The idea of having such an intervention arose when the baseline data from Stage One of my doctoral thesis which showed that the majority of teachers surveyed were unable to find the time to read the NEMP reports. I considered that teachers were missing out on vital information which would address many of their concerns about the design of meaningful assessment tasks, the practicalities of assessment and criteria for marking. This was why I was attracted to the quality learning circle approach. It seemed to me to offer a possible way forward which would allow teachers to absorb new information around the daily concerns of classroom practice and at the same time allow teachers to enjoy the support of colleagues who were also wanting to learn. I considered that if a structure could join teachers together for the purpose of learning, there would be more gains as learners supported each other in a combined learning journey rather than leaving teachers to learn by themselves.

The QLC approach was also an attempt to demonstrate how teacher learning could be enhanced when it was based on the principles underpinning adult learning and change management theories. The main difference was a conviction that teachers needed to be active participants in the shaping of their learning pathways rather than being on the receiving end of information. This matched Fullan's (1999) view that successful learning depended on an element of uncertainty and being on the edge of chaos. Here the process of change was also viewed in a different way. It was no longer seen in terms of a neatly structured linear pattern with a pre-determined end point. Rather it depended on its participants being 'change agents' and not 'victims' of change who waited for others to determine what it was they should learn. For Fullan (1999) this learning involves journeys for both individuals and groups of learners and is an

acknowledgement that learning is more involved than the simple introduction of new learning content. Effective working relationships with other learners are an important consideration for quality learning. Fullan (1999) writes, "working through the discomfort of each other's presence, learning from dissonance, and forging new complex agreements and capabilities is a new requirement for living on the edge of chaos" (p.23).

Learning on the edge of chaos

The idea of a learning journey into 'unknown waters' and perhaps even to the edge of chaos understandably does not have immediate appeal. It is also accepted that teachers are already busy, overworked and stressed and because of this, may have a preference for readymade solutions rather than finding their own. Yet while experiencing this stressed and busy state, teachers know that effective learning requires the commitment and active involvement from all participants. This time and effort cannot be substituted by the work of others who present learning as a completed package. Hence a very real tension exists between teacher beliefs and what can be managed in practice given the constraints of time and energy in the current context of continuous change. When facing many demands for compliance and adhering to implementation dates for new programmes, it is not surprising to find that teachers have become dependent learners with little voice for determining the nature or timing of their learning. In this sense teachers are 'victims of change' which, while attractive for short-term survival, is ultimately counterproductive for their long term development and professionalism.

A quality learning circle addresses many of the problems associated with current teacher learning in schools. It represents a learning community that is able to draw its members together through a shared commitment and focus for learning, meeting on a regular basis to enhance their work practices. It promotes a collegial culture where members support and sustain one another as a collective entity. In terms of my research, the QLC approach is able to provide a structure that matches what Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) write about when promoting the desirability of collegial and collaborative work cultures. They argue that schools should be rewarding collective rather than individual learning for the enhancement of schools as learning organisations.

Modifications to the QLC model

While the above features guided my thinking about the QLC approach, the teachers in the QLC were encouraged to shape the model as they began working with it. This was necessary because

it was clear from the initial questionnaire that the teachers who were willing to have further involvement in the study came from different schools rather than from within the same school (as was the usual pattern for a QLC). If a quality learning circle model were to be used, its membership and processes had to cater for the different work environments across these schools. This required considerable discussion to satisfy all members of the circle that their learning would actually benefit their particular needs and circumstances. Such broadening of the QLC's membership was one of the main modifications we made and was both a strength and an issue to be overcome (refer to Chapter 4 for details).

The main differences were that members were classroom teachers in the Christchurch City area in different schools, and they differed in the class levels they were teaching. These covered the whole range from years 1-8. School types were also different, with some teachers teaching in the higher socio-economic areas (decile 9 and 10 schools) while others worked in lower socio-economic areas (deciles 2 and 6). The teachers themselves ranged in teaching experience from 5 years to 20 plus years. While all of these factors added to the diversity of the quality learning circle, it is worth noting that Fullan (1999) has argued for the importance of diversity in his most recent set of lessons for understanding the complexity of the change process. This comment provides a justification for the diverse membership of the QLC because conflict and diversity are seen as opportunities for learning.

The sample

Six months after the initial questionnaire on the impact of the NEMP reports was sent to teachers in Canterbury, work began on developing a QLC with a small group of teachers. Contact was made with twenty-six teachers who had completed the initial questionnaire and indicated a willingness to have further involvement in the project. The original intention was that these teachers would form cluster groups in their areas as quality learning circles. However, for pragmatic reasons (travelling distances and associated costs), a single group was formed. The geographical spread of teachers willing to be involved covered North, South and Mid-Canterbury as well as Christchurch City. Unfortunately teachers in the outlying areas were either not clustered in close proximity to each other or were insufficient in number to form a quality learning circle in a particular region. This created an immediate dilemma because the involvement of teachers working outside the Christchurch City boundary meant additional release time and money would be required to make their attendance possible. The reality was that the project's budget could not extend beyond a $100 payment to the schools for teacher

release and an additional amount to the teachers for their car travel for the fortnightly meetings. I considered that payments for teachers requiring a full day's release would compromise the frequency of the meetings and it was therefore more viable to work with teachers who did not require further release time and the more substantial travelling expenses. Thus the sample was restricted to those teachers who could travel across the city in 15-20 minutes and would only require an afternoon's release to attend the meetings. Letters were sent to the teachers who were not accepted as part of the project explaining why it was not possible to include them in the project because of the additional expense involved.

The Christchurch teachers numbered eight and were contacted at the end of the 1998 school year and asked if they were still interested in being involved in the research. Each teacher replied in the affirmative but not without some concerns about the impact on their already full workloads. These issues were discussed and one subsequently had to withdraw because she had been appointed acting principal over the Xmas holidays. It was important to fill this place in the circle to enable pairings of teachers for the school visits. I asked the teacher who was unable to join the circle to suggest a possible replacement because I had no other possibilities to explore from teachers responding to the questionnaire from Christchurch City. I was given the name of a teacher, who, despite being somewhat over-committed with extra study, had an established interest in the NEMP project through her involvement as a teacher administrator in 1998 and when approached welcomed the opportunity to have further involvement with NEMP.

In February 1999, the eight teachers met together as a group for the first time. All were strangers to each other except for two teachers who had met before on in-service courses. This opportunity to work with a new group of teachers appealed to all of the teachers who saw it as another network which would take them beyond their own school's gates. The purpose of the first meeting was to explain and clarify the purpose of the quality learning circle, the teachers' involvement and my expectations of them. More detailed descriptions of this first meeting are provided in Chapter 4. It was necessary however, to provide further clarification through two written communications to the QLC teachers after this initial meeting. The first memorandum (written immediately after the first meeting) reminded each of the teachers to think about how they might match their experimenting with NEMP with their existing school staff development projects. It also included a framework for reporting any NEMP tasks for the next meeting. Following the individual interviews (held before the second QLC meeting), I sent the teachers a second memorandum. This was in response to key issues raised by the teachers in the interviews which I felt needed airing before the group met again. In this memorandum (dated 3 March

1999), I acknowledged the teachers' difficulty with a "journey into the unknown" with no apparent structure by saying:

> *I sense that your recent experiences in the Ministry contracts follow a different pattern from the one I am introducing to you. It is my hope that by addressing these concerns we may all feel more comfortable about our involvement and clarify a direction to follow.*

Furthermore I reinforced the notion that the quality learning circle was a support structure for gaining confidence with the NEMP reports through the trialing of assessment tasks in classrooms and sharing these details at the QLC meetings. My role in the QLC was also documented and I said:

> *I have a dual role in the group both as a group member and as a researcher documenting the QLC as a tool for professional development. One of my difficulties is that I do not want to be in charge or be seen as a lecturer. By the same token I need to ensure that the project is based around teachers finding ways of using the NEMP reports and not getting side tracked! This is particularly difficult when the group is forming and looking for direction. I need to be careful that group members are comfortable with the group, its purpose and don't feel anxious about what is expected of them. I am not wanting to cause more stress.*

At the first meeting I explained my distance from classroom teaching and that I should not be seen as the person to lead the group through the NEMP reports. I considered that this honesty about my background was necessary and would save me getting into curriculum areas beyond my expertise and currency. Further details of how I established a working relationship with the QLC teachers are recorded in Chapter 4. In the meantime, it is important to introduce each of the teachers who joined the quality learning circle.

Profiles of the circle's membership

Each of the circle's members has been given a nom de plume for this research and is introduced through a brief profile. I argue that it is helpful to appreciate the variety of school contexts in order to understand the impact of the NEMP reports and other initiatives that the schools have faced.

Sarah had taught for 8 years when she joined the research project. She already held senior teacher status and was responsible for a senior syndicate. Sliding doors from her classroom opened into the adjacent classroom indicating a close working relationship. The two classes operated as a unit sharing many of their activities with the children, with the teachers doing joint planning. Sarah worked long hours and was also adding to her qualifications with study for the National Diploma in Educational Management. She conveyed a genuine commitment to on-

going learning and relished opportunities to share her knowledge with others as well as learn from them. The notion of visits to classrooms of the circle's members appealed greatly to her. Sarah subsequently moved to a new school and position of responsibility at the end of Term 1. In her new role of deputy principal, she took on particular responsibility for assessment and ran several staff meetings on school-wide assessment and incorporated the NEMP material into this.

Mary had trained as a teacher after having a family and doing other jobs. At the time the QLC began, she had taught for three years and was an associate teacher for student teachers on their professional practice. In addition to her classroom teaching, Mary had a very busy study programme, which included three upgrade papers for her bachelor's degree. She was the member of the circle who joined as the replacement for the teacher who had become acting principal over the Xmas holidays. She was anxious about another commitment knowing that the school was to have an ERO visit and what she could offer the circle. Because she had been a teacher administrator for the NEMP project she added an extra dimension to the circle and her experiences were particularly useful in discussions.

Since Mary taught in a six-teacher school, opportunities for staff development were largely as a whole staff. Smaller groupings of syndicates met on an infrequent basis. Mary looked for networks from beyond her school because she found them to be more useful. She felt that staff resented her energy for taking courses for qualification updates and found that she was better to keep quiet about what she might offer the school. Staff meetings were a source of real frustration for her. Her attendance at courses and additional study were therefore deliberate strategies to better her chances for a promotion out of the school.

Mavis had been teaching a number of years and had had breaks for having her own children. She was another dedicated teacher who was ready for promotion and was the current staff representative on the Board of Trustees. As a syndicate leader she had responsibilities both within her syndicate and also across the whole school for Social Studies. She prided herself in having taken either a university or advanced studies for teachers paper each year as her own professional development outside the school.

Lois was another syndicate leader, associate teacher and a tutor teacher for several beginning teachers at her school. As a senior teacher, she had responsibilities for leading curriculum development in health and physical well-being. She was also a very dedicated teacher who welcomed opportunities for networking with other teachers and regularly attended in-service

courses and meetings for teachers. A particular feature of her syndicate meetings was the sharing time, which she had instigated. Teachers were given five minutes each to share a successful teaching strategy or a new resource and this practice had developed an atmosphere of learning from each other as equals. Of all the teachers in the QLC, Lois was the one who brought the most samples of work from her work with the NEMP reports.

Katrina was another experienced teacher who took an active part in staff development at her school. She had a particular passion for resource development and was able to report back to her staff after each QLC meeting. Subsequently she developed resource boxes for themes and one-off activities from the NEMP reports. Throughout the QLC meetings, Katrina provided lots of ideas for resources which could be purchased at low cost to make teaching more interesting. She saw the potential for the NEMP ideas as adding an extra dimension of variety and fun to her classroom programme.

Harriet was relatively new to her school, having been recently appointed a senior teacher and syndicate leader. She, like the others, welcomed opportunities to talk about classroom concerns with assessment. Ambitious for further positions of responsibility, Harriet saw her NEMP involvement as developing strengths in assessment. She later had a turn at being a teacher administrator for NEMP.

Diane was both the Deputy Principal and a Reading Recovery teacher. She had recently moved to the junior school having taught the older classes for many years. Working in a small school, she had adopted a team approach and had her whole school trialing aspects of the NEMP reports. When she heard that a class was doing a new special topic, she went and offered NEMP ideas, even to the extent of arriving with a bag of 'goodies' for the teacher. Later in the year Diane became an acting principal at another school which was in considerable strife, and subsequently stayed on as the principal appointing an entirely new staff.

Lara was a part time Scale A teacher who joined the QLC circle because she felt disadvantaged as a part timer not having access to professional development opportunities. The opportunity to learn more about NEMP through the QLC experience appealed to her because she did not teach in the afternoons. Lara found it more difficult than the others to trial the NEMP tasks because her time was limited to particular curriculum areas in the mornings when she worked with her class. Her attendance at the QLC also fluctuated with the onset of her first pregnancy. She opted out of the school visits because of her part time status, which meant that three teachers worked together

and had an extra visit to schools. This if anything was an advantage for these teachers who were able to divide their classes into three smaller groups.

All of the circle's members shared a commitment to on-going learning. They actively sought opportunities for learning and were prepared to move outside their schools and use their own time. While all maintained busy schedules, they still welcomed new ideas especially if they could see ways of applying them to their classroom programmes of work. They liked nothing better than talking about ideas for classroom teaching.

Researcher's role in the QLC

My role in the QLC was planned as a participant observer. This was problematic for several reasons. I could not be considered a full participant in the quality learning circle because I did not participate in the school visits, did not trial the NEMP tasks in a classroom and therefore could not contribute to the sharing of NEMP dissemination in the classroom. I was also an observer in the circle who at times participated in discussions to keep the teachers on task or responded to questions the teachers asked me. Thus my interactions with the teachers contributed to the functioning of the QLC and I was not an observer in the strictest sense. As a researcher I could also claim an affinity with the teachers being researched because of my work in schools as both a classroom teacher and a teacher educator working in the field of curriculum development and educational management. The teachers had been informed about this background. Undoubtedly these roles have influenced my thinking about what it means to be a teacher, what constitutes effective teaching and assessment practice and how teachers might respond to curriculum development initiatives in times of considerable change. It is because of this sensitivity to the busy world of teachers that I wanted the quality learning circle to proceed at its own pace rather than impose my direction on the circle's learning pathway. As the ninth member of the circle, I faced tensions because no matter how much I tried to be accepted as one of the teachers, I could not escape being seen as a researcher who was trialing a quality learning circle with a group of teachers. For the teachers this meant adjusting to an outsider who firmly resisted taking the lead and determining the direction of the circle's learning agenda. This was a difficult role to enact as the teachers wanted the security of knowing what was expected and how this would be achieved. Their response was "we are busy people, tell us what to do and we'll do it". I wanted the teachers to be equal learning partners shaping the direction of their learning with no one person acting as its leader. I endeavoured to model this stance by showing the teachers that I was a NEMP learner so that they would not continue to see me as someone who could shortcut

their learning by providing ready-made solutions. This was important because the quality learning circle approach was somewhat experimental and required both the teachers and me as the researcher to acknowledge that we would be learning as we went. Thus it was important for me to reinforce the two notions of a learning culture and learning as a journey into 'unknown waters' from the circle's inception. I believed that if the QLC model were to help the teachers to use the NEMP material, then it was particularly important to establish a pattern of the teachers' sharing their NEMP learning experiences one with another so that the circle did not rely on me to deliver information and create a situation of dependent rather than independent learners.

Qualitative research methodology

I have used qualitative research methodology for the next two phases of data gathering and analysis in my project. This is because qualitative research methodology provides abundant data for understanding the richness and subtlety of human experience, which for my study allows me to capture teachers' experiences of learning and development. In a general sense, qualitative research methodology is used to interpret the lived experiences of people in a particular context. This methodological approach enables the researcher to listen to the people involved talk freely about their experiences and highlights the features that they consider to be of importance. Burns (2000) suggests that qualitative forms of investigation recognise the importance of the subjective, experiential 'life world' of human beings and help to make sense of one's world.

Challenges facing the qualitative researcher are twofold. The first relates to the extent to which research participants can articulate their experience and the second relates to how the researcher can select appropriate methods to achieve this articulation (Walsh, 1996). The first challenge means grappling with the problem of unconsciousness to bring knowledge to the surface. Walsh contends that to address this challenge, the researcher "will query a participant in order to foster the process of looking within. The participant's elaborations, clarifications and associations then become the data for analysis" (p.378). Thus, the second challenge is partially addressed when qualitative researchers use interviews to draw this information from their research participants. This second challenge is further addressed by scrutinising the data. When researchers use a qualitative approach, they can record interviews to identify common themes that give meaning to the shared experience of participants. They can also use transcripts of these recordings for the participants to reflect on their experiences.

The interpretive paradigm

Questions of paradigm are of primary importance when interpreting research findings. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide action. Paradigms give consideration to epistemology, ontology and methodology. Denzin and Lincoln have framed these as: "how we know the world, what the nature of reality is and how we gain knowledge about the world" (p.99).

An interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to capture what people say and do in order to interpret the world from a participant's viewpoint. This is a particularly useful tool because it can serve to confront participants with the reality of their worlds in ways that otherwise may not be possible.

Several principles are important to consider when using the interpretive paradigm. These include reciprocity, reflexivity and reflection. *Reciprocity* is an acknowledgement that knowledge is co-constructed and is a mutual exercise of exploration and discovery. This has implications for the way the research should be designed and interpreted because both the researcher and the researched will influence each other's thought patterns by what is said and not said. *Reflexivity* allows the participants to carefully examine their own actions including their implicit aspects. Walsh (1996) writes that for the participant this "entails recollection of a lived experience, with attention to details that might typically be ignored" (p.378). For the researcher, experiences will be understood through personal frames of reference and an awareness of the social and historical meanings of the participant's experience. Finally *reflection* is acknowledged as being a process of thinking about one's experiences either during or after a learning episode. Involvement in the research project will have helped the participants to consider the meaning of their experiences and these can be explored through their responses to interview questions. Holstein and Gubrium (1998) maintain "both parties to the interview are necessarily and ineluctably active" (p.114). Furthermore they argue:

> *Respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge- treasuries of information awaiting excavation, so to speak– as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers. Participation in an interview involves meaning-making work.*

Thus, in using qualitative methodology for my study I am able to interpret the teachers' experience through a variety of lenses. Rich descriptive data can tell me what the teachers know about teacher learning and development, the factors or conditions they consider help teacher

learning and development, and how this knowledge might inform existing practices. I have addressed the challenge of interpreting this data by acknowledging the principles underpinning an interpretive paradigm. When documenting my contributions to the QLC meetings and responding to the teachers' concerns raised in the individual interviews, I have acknowledged the principle of reciprocity. This has allowed me to explain my role in the quality learning circle as more active than a passive observer able to assist the teachers in the formation of a quality learning circle. One example of this was when I responded to the teachers' concerns about the lack of initial structure to their learning by bringing this to the attention of the group as an issue which needed to be addressed. When Mary suggested that one way forward might be for the group to settle on studying one report in-depth per meeting, I shared this with the other members of the QLC. When the QLC met and decided that this structure was appealing, I then offered to prepare a summary sheet of the main points as a framework for discussion. I did this because the teachers had told me that they liked to work from a structure. My attempt at providing a written summary drew attention to the grouping of the NEMP tasks according to the strands in their associated curriculum documents and this reassured the teachers of their usefulness. My summary served as a link between a national assessment task and an idea for classroom assessment.

In addressing reflexivity, I asked the teachers to keep a journal of their NEMP trialing in an exercise book. I provided the teachers with a possible format for recording their NEMP trialing. These headings included subject area, task name, reason chosen and a comment on its usefulness. Only one teacher (Diane) listed details of her trialing in the exercise book for the duration of the QLC. This included samples of tasks she had used, brief comments on the types of response the children had given and how useful the task was for a curriculum area or age group of children. She was particularly interested in the usefulness of the NEMP tasks across the school and the full range of curriculum area. This approach did not work with the other teachers who merely used the exercise book as a place to list the various tasks they had used without making additional comments about their usefulness. As a source of data, the journal was of limited use. I soon realised that the interviews provided me with a better source of data through which to gain an impression of how the teachers were making use of the NEMP tasks and their levels of satisfaction with the quality learning circle as an approach to professional learning. In my analysis of the interview transcripts, I also made notes to myself about my reaction to what the teachers had told me and these served as reminders for subsequent interview questions.

Reflection was included in my research method when I invited the teachers to read the transcripts of their individual interviews. The teachers were informed about the return of their transcripts when I set up the interviews and knew they could make any changes to the script. Interestingly enough, the teachers were only worried about the language (ums, ahs, and okays) they had used rather than any content messages they had conveyed. I considered that the interview situation was a useful time for the teachers to think about their learning experiences and I acknowledge that this was an exercise of joint meaning making.

Methods for investigating the quality learning circle experience

Cohen and Manion (1998) define the term 'method' as being the range of approaches used to gather data which are then used as a basis for inference, interpretation, explanation and prediction. My study uses multiple sources for its data. These include: interviews and observational notes of meetings which were always written up immediately after each meeting. Other sources include the documentation of the interview transcripts and textual data supplied by the teachers themselves. For example, Mavis and Sarah gave me their planning notes for staff meetings on assessment and dissemination of the NEMP information to other teachers at their schools.

Interviews and interviewing

Burns (2000) describes interviews as being verbal interchanges in which the interviewer tries to elicit information, beliefs, and opinions from another person. These may be unstructured (open-ended), semi-structured or structured.

Interviewing is a skilled activity. Altrichter, Posch and Somekh suggest that an interviewer's listening skills are as important as their questioning skills. They contend that the interviewer can show respect for teachers being interviewed by remembering not to interrupt trains of thought, accept pauses as a natural part of reflection, and accept whatever is said, however unexpected and regardless of their own views as the interviewer. When asking questions, the interviewer also needs to make it clear what they want to know, while at the same time helping the teachers being interviewed explore their own thoughts. While it will be necessary to seek expansion and clarification of ideas from time to time, the interviewer should be careful that such a request is not giving a contradictory message. For example, a request for more details can be interpreted as

a strong acknowledgement of the importance of what has been said, or as an indication that the truth is being questioned.

In my project, I chose a guiding approach and asked teachers semi-structured questions. This was because I wanted to capture each teacher's perceptions of her QLC experience. By using semi-structured interviews as my research tool, I was able to explore the critical issues for the teachers as learners and yet allow the teachers sufficient scope to reflect on their recent experiences. This meant treating the interview as a conversation and being flexible so that I could ask additional questions where I felt teachers could usefully expand their responses. This enabled me as the researcher/interviewer to develop a reciprocity with the teachers which would determine the direction of subsequent questions in our combined search for knowledge about what constituted effective teacher learning and development. In asking the teachers to recall details of their previous experiences of teacher learning and development, my interview questions prompted the teachers to be reflexive and identify particular features that had been seen to contribute or hinder their learning. Thus my questions helped the teachers to reflect on their experiences when they were asked to describe their learning, explain its meaning, discuss its degree of success and suggest alternative practices in the same way as Smyth (1989) had developed reflectivity for improving teaching practice (see Chapter 2).

Taking account of Altrichter et al's concerns, I gave careful consideration to both the content and sequence of the questions for the interviews tracking the teachers' experiences of the QLC. Copies of the interview questions are included as Appendix A. My intention throughout all the interviews was one of affirming the teachers' experiences regardless of the extent of their familiarity with NEMP and to accept their accounts as they were told. There were however some limitations with these semi-structured interviews. Where I kept to the exact wording of my interview schedule I was able to compare the teachers' responses one with another but any other questions were specific to individuals and their unique contexts and thus could not be compared.

Recording and transcribing the interviews

Interview data was collected at three points in the QLC intervention to track the learning journeys of the teachers as individuals and as a group of learners. I decided that it was important to gather baseline data at the beginning of the journey, to interview at a mid point in the QLC journey and then again at the end of the QLC intervention to determine its ultimate progress. Verbal permission was obtained from each teacher to tape record the interviews as the raw data

for later analysis. This saved the need for notetaking during the interviews and enabled me as the interviewer to take part in the interview conversation in a way that did not disrupt the flow of the conversation. Full written transcripts were developed from careful listening to each of the tapes and returned to the teachers with an invitation to amend if necessary and gain their approval as a true and correct record of the interview conversations. This allowed the teachers to see that the transcripts were indeed authentic records of their spoken words and served to verify the accuracy and trustworthiness of the transcripts. I believed that this viewing of the transcripts also helped to make my research interests even more explicit to the teachers and thus strengthened our rapport.

Identification of themes

As I read and interpreted each transcript, I identified key words, sentences and phrases. The generation of themes was guided by the questions I asked and my knowledge of the literature. While themes generally related to a particular question, there were also recurring themes appearing across the various questions. Two examples of these recurring themes concerned the pressures of time for quality learning and the teachers' feelings of isolation from adequate stimulation in their own schools.

To aid my analysis I developed a summary sheet in which I brought the interview transcripts of individual teachers from each interview round into one document question by question. I found Bell and Gilbert's (1996) model of teachers' personal, social and professional needs a useful starting point for developing my key words of this summary document. This model allowed me to focus on issues relating to the teachers' personal attitudes and feelings about their learning, the development of satisfying working relationships with colleagues and the benefits of that learning to classroom teaching and learning. I was also guided by my reading of the literature on the management of change, adult learning theories and models of professional development which have been addressed in Chapters 1 and 2. I looked for comments which indicated particular difficulties or strengths in the approaches used for the teachers' learning and development and how the teachers had responded to them. This allowed me to compare the teachers' previous experiences with the QLC intervention and subsequently develop four major themes. These themes emerged from the interview data with the teachers and indicated significant phases in the QLC journey. The phases concerned the structure and pattern of the QLC meeting time, the sharing of ideas and concerns about practice, classroom visiting and the dissemination of learning. Key words and phrases were then inserted as quotations to support the themes and are illustrated in Chapter 4. These themes were related to the questions I had asked about previous

learning experiences, the teachers' involvement in decisions about learning processes and agendas, their reflections on practice, opportunities for sharing ideas with colleagues, classroom application and the type of support provided for new learning.

In extracting meaning from the interview transcripts I paraphrased each response with the teacher's name alongside and supplied a page reference to the interview transcripts for later selection of quotations on my summary sheet. My next step in analysing these responses was to look for responses which were endorsed by more than one individual and to place these together. The remaining responses not mentioned by the other teachers were kept to one side for later consideration. I used a highlighter pen to draw attention to those responses which related to the themes appearing in my reading of the literature. Details of this process are explained through the following example from an interview question relating to the uniqueness of the QLC model (see Appendix B, question 3).

In this example, the responses showed that teachers' enthusiasm was dependent on an active involvement in their learning. This is illustrated by responses such as, "you'll get out of it what you put in" (Lois), "it's putting the onus on those in the circle to make contributions" (Lois), "everybody has to do something" (Mavis), "having like minded people who want to be there and are willing to share their experiences" (Harriet), "having to do an equal amount to bring to the group" and learning "being dependent on the energy and interest of the participants" (Mary). For Diane, it was the sharing of what worked in other people's classrooms that had helped her to become enthusiastic and committed to the NEMP tasks. Her comment was, "it has prodded us [to say], oh that looks alright. Oh I think I could handle that one and I'll give it a go". Taken as a whole, these responses highlight the importance of teachers spending time with one another and sharing what works in the classroom.

My selection of quotations was made from this clustering of responses to reflect the range of response across the teachers. I was careful to be inclusive of each of the teachers' responses. Where responses fell outside what had been said by others in the QLC, I added details of the contextual circumstances to explain their significance. For example, Mary's comments about liking the input of others and developing a professional rapport with others indicated important differences in the way the QLC operated from her school's usual pattern of professional development in its staff meetings. She commented that in her own school environment, the other teachers showed little, if any interest in professional conversations about the craft of teaching. I considered that it was important to record this comment because it explained why Mary found

the QLC such an attractive alternative. Similarly, Katrina's comments about valuing other people's ideas were important for a different reason. There were no other teachers at the year 8 level to exchange ideas of practice. Given this reality, it was no wonder that the QLC had some appeal for her because she was able to interact with year 8 teachers in the group and gain new ideas. The attraction of the QLC for the remaining teachers was the enthusiasm of a group of teachers committed to learning and sharing ideas of practice. These teachers did not share the same enthusiasm for meeting with colleagues at their own schools where typically teachers attended meetings with some reluctance.

I am confident that my selection of quotations and commentary of the QLC experience for the eight teachers is indeed a balanced and fair reflection of their experiences and views. My analysis has allowed me to match the teachers' responses with themes from the literature and at the same time to note any responses which have been bound by contextual differences. My coding has accounted for these differences so that the unique contexts for teachers' learning and development have been appreciated and understood. While my starting point was one of identifying broad literature themes, individual responses have highlighted the need to acknowledge differences in the nature of learning, its processes and the conditions under which learning might be possible. Thus it was entirely appropriate to base my selection of quotations around the teachers' experiences of what they had learned, how this had happened, their frustrations and successes and what they would like to see done better in the future.

The data presented in Chapter 4 includes the teachers' experiences of teacher learning and development in general as well as their experience as members of a quality learning circle. It shows the developmental stages of the QLC and its overall value as a professional development strategy for teachers.

Chapter 4

The QLC Experience

This chapter describes the planning and progress of the QLC experience. It is told through a combination of the researcher's observations as a participant observer in the circle and interviews with each of the teachers at three different points in the life of the QLC. Emerging themes are presented and discussed at each of the interview points to highlight the QLC as a learning journey, both about the NEMP reports and the teachers as learners themselves.

The word 'journey' was an apt description of the QLC experience, but it was one which had no set destination. The researcher had no preconceived notion of an end point for the journey that could be conveyed to the teachers. It was merely hoped that the process would increase teacher confidence in the planning and implementation of classroom assessments through a focus on the NEMP reports.

The QLC design had considerable appeal because it allowed room for experimentation, discoveries and the opportunity to learn as individuals and as a group. However, just how the learning journey might be planned by a group of relative strangers from different settings was another matter and proved to be a particular challenge. This began by sharing a willingness to explore the NEMP reports with the sole purpose of expanding knowledge about what good classroom assessment meant. This was a very broad goal given that there were at this time nine NEMP reports covering a range of curriculum areas and essential skills. This pile of unfamiliar reports was daunting for the teachers who did not know what lay ahead of them. Before the journey of discovery could begin, some agreement on a 'game plan' was needed to allay these fears and satisfy everyone's needs including the concurrent areas of development focus in each of the teachers' schools. This step marked the beginning of the QLC journey which is unfolded in three distinct stages covering the journey's beginning, mid and end points over the time span of the year in which the QLC meetings were held. These appear as:

Section 1: Beginning the learning journeys
Section 2: After 5 months journeying
Section 3: After 8 months journeying

Section 1: Beginning the learning journeys

The notion of a quality learning circle was new to all eight teachers. This approach was totally different from any professional learning or development programmes of these teachers had ever experienced. Until their QLC experience, these teachers had been accustomed to attending highly structured programmes, which told them what it was they had to learn and subsequently implement in their classrooms. When they met as a QLC the tight structure of previous models was missing and they faced the dilemma of having to find their own structure for learning to begin. Thus considerable negotiation was required amongst the QLC members to clarify the nature of the task, the QLC's features and what involvement would mean. For them a clear structure meant they could proceed with the task of learning about NEMP without delay, and so this was an obstacle to be overcome in the first few meetings of the circle as members came to terms with a structure they determined themselves.

Details of the model were conveyed using extracts from a video of New Zealand teachers engaging in professional development with the QLC model. This became a starting point for discussion and was useful because it included teachers talking about their learning experiences with a QLC model. However, the examples portrayed on the video did not include teachers using a new resource such as the NEMP reports and so the circle's members began exploring ways in which they could adapt the model viewed on the video to suit their focus on the NEMP reports. The researcher's suggestion to the circle was that this might involve:

- Attending 4 meetings a term
- Visiting the classrooms of the other members of the circle
- Keeping a record (in a notebook) of all staff/personal development using the NEMP tasks
- Reporting to each QLC on trialing with the NEMP material and showing samples of work to the circle's members
- Agreeing to individual interviews with the researcher at the beginning and end of the project.

Because the meetings were to be held in school time at a venue away from each of the schools, reimbursement was needed for travelling expenses and the employment of a relieving teacher for each of the teachers for an afternoon. This generous support from the Ministry of Education through the NEMP project made their involvement possible in school time.

Following the initial meeting of the circle, a memo was circulated to all members as a written record of the expectations for the next meeting. Amongst other things it said:

> We agreed at today's meeting that each person would give consideration to how they might match experimenting with the NEMP tasks with their existing staff development in their schools.
> Reporting to the circle on 24 February should include one or more of the following:
> - How the associated NEMP report content might fit with classroom/school development plans
> - Comments about a particular NEMP report e.g., test content, results, implications for classroom practice
> - Any trials or adaptations of the NEMP tasks
> - Sample of work (if appropriate) from NEMP trials or adaptations.

In between the first and second meetings of the circle, interviews were held with each member of the circle in their schools. As all but one member of the quality learning circle were unfamiliar to the researcher, this was a valuable opportunity to gather individual impressions about the first QLC meeting, the teachers' backgrounds and familiarity with NEMP, constraints on their school/classroom trialing and to establish a rapport with the members.

After the first meeting of the QLC, the eight teachers admitted that their looking at the NEMP reports had been more of a 'flick through the pages' and now they realised that there was much more to the programme than their initial 'flick' had provided. It seemed that even at this early stage of the circle's existence, the teachers preferred learning in the company of others rather than being left to their own devices with a document to read. Since they had not had opportunities for focused talking about NEMP in their schools, it was no wonder that they were largely unfamiliar with the assessment ideas offered to them and were anxious about any expectations placed upon them.

Initial viewpoints from the QLC teachers

Interviews were held with each of the teachers following the first QLC meeting (refer to Appendix A for the questions). This collated data is now presented under five themes to reflect each of the teacher's viewpoints according to their:

- current context for professional development
- satisfaction with professional development
- views about an ideal programme

- current barriers to effective professional development
- hopes and dreams for the QLC as an alternative professional development opportunity.

The current context for professional development

For each of the QLC teachers the dominant approach to professional development was whole school development which had in all cases been associated with the Ministry of Education development contracts and the implementation of new curriculum documents. Here the overriding message was one of too much change in too short a timeframe.

Yet despite this reality, positive attitudes towards these changes were evident amongst all of the teachers who it seemed actually welcomed new learning opportunities. Diane even saw a funny side to the arrival of documents in her school when she referred to this as being a bit of a joke. In making this comment she was not denying the necessity of the document in question but rather its timing which had not taken into account the existing overload for teachers who had not absorbed their previous documents and yet here was another one arriving on their doorstep requiring attention.

Thus the question of how teachers would find even more time for the developments expected of them was a shared concern. They were all in agreement that there was insufficient time to become fully familiar with a development before the staff moved on to a new area. The only solution they could see was for teachers to come back in their holidays and this was not favoured. Mavis indicated that teachers were already coming back in weekends and having long meetings after school and would not want more of their personal time used for the job. She felt that all schools could do under these circumstances was to develop their own coping strategies, being sensitive to staff and taking each development slowly. Her advice was, “keep it in proportion. Make sure you are doing something and whatever you do, do it properly and then move on to the next one. There’s a lot to do.” Stopping the number and flow of documents and programmes to implement was not even mooted as it seemed that all the document development was needed if schools were to respond to the changing needs of society and their learners.

While Mavis acknowledged that it was hard keeping up with all the developments and extremely time consuming, she also said she was fortunate to have the temperament to keep going with it. In this regard she could not be seen as a ‘victim of change’ as her words indicate:

> *I'm interested and always have been in learning what I can and adapting and being a better teacher. That's what I'm here for and that's why I'm evaluating all the time… I always say to my student teachers, I'm not a perfect teacher and I'm always looking for better ways and if I said to you, well I've got it now, I've learnt to do it, that would be really worrying. No my philosophy is I'm a learner… Once I had a teacher here say to me, 'how long are you going to go on learning for? I thought, well, we'll be learning forever, won't we, you know?*

Mary also mentioned being positive about change. Her suggestion was to look for the long term gain and get in there and give it a go. This view suggests that she accepted some personal responsibility to make changes work and did not expect others to do the work for her. She said her approach was:

> *If it doesn't work first time, well, try and work out why it didn't work. See if you can make it fit… I think, oh well, there must be something I could do that would make it easier to work out or whatever. Try and find the way.*

Similarly Sarah indicated that she found change exciting but admitted that it had taken a toll on her personal life. She said of herself, "I think I have the energy and enthusiasm to absorb the changes and be open to lots of new ideas and new ways of doing things." Together these comments demonstrate how committed teachers are to doing their best even when overloaded with constant change. It is therefore no surprise to find schools trying to do everything and as a result completing nothing to any real degree of satisfaction.

At another school Lois mentioned the dilemma of multiple themes and having to maintain two or three projects at any one time and said:

> *I think time is always the greatest factor in all these things. That we keep up with the things, the demands are huge. Things keep coming and we know we're doing one thing but another document arrives and we think perhaps we should know something about that so it's external forces and there is only so much you can do. So we're often juggling that.*

For Lara the role of external agencies was another factor which contributed towards the pressure to keep up with the new documents. She saw her school's development as being purely to satisfy the Education Review Office. Her words were:

> *That's all we're doing making sure all the profiles are up to date and when ERO comes along everything can be…They can say oh that looks good. We're happy with that. Your school has the right kind of objectives. We're not learning much about how to teach anything because the teachers are busy…It's all we're doing fixing up for ERO…It just seems ridiculous to me that we have to spend all that time into making everything look so*

> *good for them. There is a purpose to it, so that we're all doing the same amount of things, you know, but yeah, we don't get much time to do other things, like NEMP. It would be last.*

Lois referred to teachers being on a treadmill. She had expressed a real concern for the lack of on-going monitoring once new learning had occurred and said:

> *We go to a lot of trouble in one year and put it all in but a year later does anyone go to see what was actually happening? Had we made a difference? Had there been any value added to the way we are teaching or have people fallen back to their old habits? So perhaps some monitoring of staff development, one or two years down the track.*

Diane also talked about the frustration of having lots of loose ends in curriculum development and said that her school had chosen not to launch into anything new for 1999 in order to consolidate. Mention was made too of the need to keep it all in proportion and do something well before moving on to the next.

Katrina spoke about the tiredness factor saying:

> *We are too tired and too busy to develop things from scratch. We are more than happy when it comes to October when a teacher comes back from a teacher development course with a scheme that's been used by a couple of other schools and it's presented at staff meeting…and say look I've come up with this, are you happy with it?*

In case anyone thought that Katrina and her teachers were lazy she added that this was not the easy way out but simply the most practical way to go about things and keep up with the demands.

So the message to be gained from this discussion about the current reality of professional development in these schools is that quality is being compromised for quantity and teachers are caught between keeping pace with the developments or falling behind and having to justify their non-compliance.

Teacher satisfaction with professional development

All of the teachers had stories to tell of their experiences (both positive and negative), with the Ministry of Education contracts. One popular topic of conversation was the quality of the facilitators. Harriet mentioned the delivery skills of the facilitators as being especially problematic and referred to some facilitators "spitting the information out with little vim".

However, not all her experiences had been in this vein. She could also recall positive experiences where a facilitator had used an imaginative approach to win staff attention and had made the learning interesting and worthwhile.

Two other teachers also made mention of the quality of the professional development presenters and facilitators. Sarah talked about having really good presenters with practical ideas who motivated staff and regenerated their love of the job rather than merely giving teachers just another thing to try. Lois indicated:

> *It's the calibre of the people who have led in a contract that sways your staff... One thing had to be that you led with passion and you had to believe that this was the best thing since sliced bread and deliver it with total belief so you sell the product.*

It appeared that the QLC teachers appreciated opportunities to lead professional development themselves and their levels of satisfaction were related to their principal's willingness to involve other staff in these leadership roles. For example, at Lois' school, teachers were assigned to curriculum teams and worked alongside a key person to lead a curriculum development. This also served to strengthen the support base available in a school and was an example of leadership being shared at the teacher level rather than remaining with the principal, deputy or assistant principal.

Syndicate level professional development was also important for these teachers. Here syndicate leaders such as Sarah and Lois appreciated having a small amount of freedom to choose other projects for attention, especially those which would permit a sharing of practical classroom strategies. In this regard Sarah mentioned the professional reflection time she had been able to introduce with her syndicate's small action research projects and Lois referred to her five minute sharing of a good resource or teaching strategy.

In determining the overall satisfaction with current professional development offerings, it is significant that the teachers' criticisms of professional development programmes were not concerned with the content of what was being delivered but how this learning was being presented to teachers. This would suggest that the 'how' dimension of learning requires better handling by those training the trainers if the needs of reluctant, tired or overwhelmed teachers are to be better met in professional development sessions.

Components of the ideal staff development programme

This was deemed to be a hard question by those interviewed, who seemed to have just accepted what had been offered to them and had not considered other possibilities. After some initial difficulty listing the components of what they considered the 'ideal' staff development programme would look like, the teachers began thinking about how this staff development time was currently being used and this led to improvements being suggested. They gave examples from their existing programmes that they considered were working well. Katrina for example mentioned the need to have a group of teachers who provided ideas, shared concerns and were available when needed. While others might have a group of teachers serving this purpose at their school, Katrina was aware from her own situation teaching in a smaller school that she needed to look further afield for this professional talk and be proactive about networking opportunities. Regular attendance at in-service courses had partially met this need and this was evident when she said:

> *What they taught on the course was irrelevant, but talking to teachers and they go 'oh yes, I have that problem in my class. What do you do about it?' That's what's important. We've lost the camaraderie of teaching, that we support each other.*

What she was saying now was that it was up to individual teachers to find additional networks for learning support.

Better use of the available staff development time was thought to be highly desirable. Harriet wanted more meetings which focused on actual development rather than housekeeping matters. She argued:

> *I find it to be here at 5 o'clock and be just starting to look at, you know, appraisal, is just, I mean ridiculous. I'm not even, really, my mind is not operating on, you know, full power at that stage. For me it's not, for other people they may not mind so much, but I don't think we're gaining as much as we possibly could.*

Lara considered a recent teacher only day with the SES had been a great success because it had been held in quality time. A special feature of this development had been a venue beyond the school where teachers had been treated to a nice meal and outside speakers. Lara warmed to this more professional approach and had also appreciated the gesture of closing the school early on two afternoons to complete this programme. She was careful to emphasise that these extra

sessions reinforced and summarised earlier learning and were not 'heavy stuff' at the end of a day's teaching.

Likewise Sarah also referred to the need for more quality time for professional development with the Ministry Contracts. She used an example from her school's involvement in the ABeL contract to highlight this point. Teachers at her school had opted for a 4-9pm session rather than give up a Saturday in order to satisfy the time commitment. While she personally preferred the Saturday option rather than a later finish on the top of a day's teaching because of concentration and quality reasons, she had been out numbered. Her ideal was therefore time for development when teachers could concentrate and did not resent their attendance.

Mary talked about staff development being needs based as well as being interactive. She referred to the amount of passive sitting and listening at the end of an already long day. She wanted:

> *Really useful material to digest and implement… I get a wee bit frustrated at the amount of paperwork we actually come back and file somewhere and probably don't look at again until a need arises, unless it really is dynamic, interesting and useful.*

Time without interruptions was Mary's ideal for the professional development of teachers. To this end she admitted a willingness to give up her own personal time to have a solid day of working.

Factors contributing to the effectiveness of professional development can be summarised under four headings: dispositions of teachers, and issues related to time, the delivery of professional development sessions and the broader role of the education system.

Figure : Factors for effective professional development

Teachers

- willing to share ideas and concerns
- opportunities for talk about teaching

Issues of Time

- managing staff meeting slots
- timeframes for dissemination
- time for consolidation
- competing agendas for staff development

Delivery

- credible presenters
- quality
- teacher engagement
- relevance to classroom
- content adapted to the context, needs and abilities of teachers as learners

System

- meeting compliance demands
- quantity of learning

Hopes and dreams for the QLC

Each of the teachers wanted the QLC experience to help them as individuals and also benefit others within their schools. Thus dissemination of any learning gained through the QLC experience was considered to be of prime importance. As syndicate and curriculum leaders they each had a firm commitment to ensure that other teachers also kept up to date with new developments and this meant acquiring ideas from beyond their schools, either in terms of reading material or networks of other learners. It was important that they actively sought opportunities that gave them this new knowledge so they could maintain the upper edge and therefore had something to offer other teachers. This was certainly the case for Harriet who viewed the QLC as an opportunity to strengthen her own knowledge base about effective assessment practices so that she had practical offerings for her syndicate. Katrina admitted that assessment was not one of her strengths as a teacher and saw the QLC as an opportunity to remedy this deficiency. She wanted to link her assessments more closely with her teaching as diagnostic tools which would be of benefit to her teaching and her learners, and not just for the sake of compliance and accountability.

For Lois, the QLC offered a new learning group beyond the confines of her school environment. She was particularly concerned about most of her professional development occurring within her school where she was normally on the giving end of the spectrum as one of the more senior teachers amidst a preponderance of beginning and inexperienced teachers. For her own stimulation she recognised the need for input from further afield and this is where the QLC offered her another group of enthusiastic practitioners who shared a similar commitment to learning within a restricted focus about the NEMP reports. Her quest for additional learning opportunities is apparent in the comment:

> *We are never sure what others are doing. I think it is important to know what is going on across the city…the opportunities to do anything outside the school are so rare really, unless you go to AST courses.*

Lara also expressed feelings of isolation from ideas. She reflected what she was missing from her own school as a learning environment when she said:

> *I'd like to get some really good ideas for teaching and I'm already getting some new assessment ideas. I think it's great being with a variety of different teachers. To me that's enough to get out of it, just talking with other teachers about something and getting their ideas.*

It was not just talking to other teachers that appealed to Sarah. She wanted to see other classrooms in action and gain ideas from classroom observations where the children were working with the NEMP assessment tasks. She saw her learning as a sequence of reading, talking about the NEMP reports with other teachers as learners and then seeing how this information worked in the practical settings of classrooms and said:

> *I really firstly would like to get a better knowledge of the reports and what they contain and also with the support of the rest of the group (QLC) see how we can apply those. So upskill myself in being able to apply what's here. The other thing I'm really looking forward to doing is getting out into other classrooms and seeing a different style of teaching, a different way of using them. That part is really exciting.*

The application of the NEMP material for personal and wider use in the school was important for two other members of the QLC. Diane hoped that she could show other teachers how they could use the NEMP assessment tasks to benefit their teaching. Similarly Mavis said:

> *I would like to see if I could make more use or if teachers could be motivated or helped to make more use of the NEMP reports as they come into the school system… I think we haven't used them as a working document and teachers who sort of need to be helped a bit, need to find easy ways which they can make use of them.*

That the teachers' hopes and dreams for the QLC moved beyond what happened at the QLC meetings was particularly encouraging for the wider dissemination of the NEMP reports. Not only did the teachers want to disseminate their learning but also they were able to suggest ways in which this might be achieved. Team teaching was suggested by Sarah as being the most practical way to support teachers to try new things in the classroom. She mentioned the ease of giving and receiving support from a colleague in the next door classroom. She also suggested that someone needed to draw attention, highlight the relevance and practical value as well as make it exciting for teachers to want to take on new learning.

Mary saw a place for the development of teaching resources to make up for the learning deficits noted in the NEMP results. Her view was that the results would have little impact unless teachers were supported with further resources and training. She did not see this as just more written material being sent to schools. She said:

> *You are so pressed by time and junk mail. I think it needs… a personal approach…You don't often read exciting material unless there's sort of a front up with it. Make it easy, not time consuming, hands on or readily accessible at a reasonable cost.*

To this end both Diane and Katrina were packaging some of the NEMP tasks according to classroom themes to make them more accessible to teachers and were deliberately finding time to show these to teachers as they noted a possible and relevant teaching moment appearing.

This approach was endorsed by Lara who believed that teachers were influenced by what they saw other teachers doing, especially if they could see relevance to their own classroom programmes. Her response was:

> *You can try and push it (NEMP) down their throats but they're still not going to use it unless they can see the value in it, like someone taking them through it. Just showing them the books is not going to do the trick.*

For her the 'show and tell' approach was not sufficient to engage teachers. This is worth remembering given the large number of principals in the initial questionnaire who were reported as having disseminated the NEMP reports through a waving of the covers rather than any indepth discussion.

Harriet hoped that future NEMP reports would be more user friendly for teachers. Her suggestion was for a different kind of presentation, perhaps on cards or publishing the tests in a separate book. While she thought that the media had played a useful role in highlighting some of the results at the time reports had been released, she was also worried the reports were not being used. In this regard she thought teachers needed some direction with assessment and saw the NEMP reports as having the potential to address such needs by presenting assessment ideas for teachers in a more practical way.

Mavis saw more hope of successful dissemination of the NEMP reports occurring at the syndicate level than at the full staff meeting. It was her opinion that these smaller groupings of teachers allowed more opportunity for practical support to be given to teachers. Perhaps also teachers could not ignore attempts to introduce new material or approaches when they were part of a smaller group that emphasised classroom planning and monitored its collective performance. She said:

> *Like anything, you can make suggestions or motivate and inspire but once it goes to the individual teacher's classroom, some teachers, unless it is required of them, it won't get done. That's life isn't it?*

Thus there is a delicate balance between bringing an awareness of new knowledge and skills to staff and then going the next step with an expectation that new learning is developed in practice. It is clear from these initial interviews with the QLC teachers that many teachers partake in staff development determined by others and as individuals feel little commitment to something which is imposed on them. It was therefore rather interesting to witness the way these QLC teachers were so determined in their desire to spread the word about NEMP, yet do this in ways which would impact on classroom practices. They believed commitment developed after seeing other teachers work with the new material in exciting and meaningful ways to enhance learning.

Section 2*: *After 5 months journeying

Data for this section comes from a combination of observational notes from QLC meetings and a round of interviews with the QLC teachers in June 1999. At the time of this second interview round, the circle had met over two school terms. Eight meetings of the quality learning circle had occurred and the circle had studied a total of six reports. In addition, there had been some school visits, in which the teachers had both visited another's school and in return had that teacher visit them.

The questions asked in this second round of interviews revisited some of the themes discussed in the earlier interviews. The extent of each teacher's familiarity with the NEMP reports was explored as well as their use of the reports and ways in which sharing had occurred within the teacher's own schools. Additional questions related specifically to the model of the quality learning circle and its perceived value as a tool for professional development (see Appendix B for the interview questions).

Summary of themes

Four themes became apparent from the interview data. These covered decisions regarding what could be learnt from the NEMP reports but more importantly how this learning was to develop within the structure of a QLC. These four themes refer to the structuring of the learning journey, the need for sharing ideas, making classroom visits and disseminating NEMP related knowledge beyond the QLC.

1 Structuring the journey

The biggest challenge was to find a common pathway into the circle's selected theme. Most of the teachers had only a brief experience of the NEMP reports. This meant they were entering 'unknown waters', a situation that in itself took them out of their usual comfort zones. All of the teachers also wanted their respective work in the QLC to benefit their particular school situation. They wanted to make links with existing professional development areas and saw NEMP as a supplementary resource to enhance curriculum delivery.

This wish to link each school's priorities with the NEMP reports proved to be too broad for the circle as a whole to manage. It soon became obvious that if the circle were to bind and provide support for its members, then a narrower, common focus was needed. It was therefore decided, by mutual agreement, that the circle sessions would focus on one NEMP report per session and that members would share any details of trialing the reports' tasks and activities at the next meeting. Teachers often reported on other NEMP reports that they had not yet studied as a circle. This allowed them to link their trialing with classroom units of work.

Initially the circle struggled with its chosen focus because most of these teachers were accustomed to professional development models with a definite sequence and content to be followed. Unlike the usual professional development contracts they had encountered in their schools, the QLC model did not offer a programme of work to be followed from A to Z. The purpose of the QLC was to let the circle decide on the route and destination. If the researcher had determined the destination then the teachers in the circle would have expected to be 'spoon fed'. Instead the aim was to trace the journey of the circle in whichever direction(s) it took and then analyse the reasons for the route and its particular landmarks. This would then highlight factors that either helped or hindered the individual and combined journeys of these eight teachers. As a feature of the journey, the tension between the teachers wanting a structure and the researcher resisting a leadership role played an important part of the *storming stage* of team development. During this stage there was a need to clarify the expectations of the study, the amount of work required of each of the teachers, the structure of the meetings and some idea of an outcome. Diane's words echoed the feelings of the circle when she said:

> *I like something structured. I want to know what is happening. I like to know why we're going there, what the purpose is and sort of basically what I then know I'll be getting out of it… I have to know exactly where to go and it will get done!*

The teachers' initial concerns related closely to Fullan's (1999) complexity theory which is explained in Chapter 3 of my doctoral thesis. In particular they were worried about lack of structure, of embarking on a journey without a set route and destinations, and they also were uncertain about what they were supposed to learn. One of the teachers' tasks was to become more familiar with the assessment strategies presented in the NEMP reports, and the process of doing this was like opening Pandora's Box. On seeing how much the 'box' contained, they became somewhat overwhelmed with the enormity of the task. As Diane said:

> *It was just the content that we were using that I couldn't get my hands around…It was a huge thing because I didn't know where to start. There were six books in front of me and I thought, "Oh no!" I didn't know whether I should be doing something that I liked doing, like say reading, or pick something like technology, which I don't even want to go into because that would expand me more. The picture was just too big.*

What the circle had yet to realise was that the challenge of this diversity, uncertainty and instability would involve a very satisfying learning journey. In the meantime, however, they managed to agree on a structure for subsequent meetings, and this eased their feelings of uncertainty. They agreed that each meeting would follow this format:

1 The teachers to share any trials they had undertaken of the NEMP tasks outlined in the report that they had discussed at their last meeting (or any other of the NEMP reports for that matter).
2 For the researcher to present a synopsis of the present session's report, highlighting the variety of tasks and assessment strategies in it.
3 The circle to comment on either the implications of these tasks and strategies for future classroom practice or their links with previous classroom work (for example, curriculum integration, units of work, suitability for various age and interest groups).
4 The circle to determine which report would be discussed at the next meeting.

This QLC experience highlighted the relevance of Fullan's (1999) theoretical frameworks of both complexity and evolutionary theories. It showed that the learning pathway was full of surprises and did not follow a linear pattern. The people dimension was also important as members of the circle came to learn from each other and felt a commitment to helping others in the circle learn more about NEMP. At times this was a painful process and not without risks for the teachers. However, as the members of the circle bonded, fear of risks diminished because of the growing strength of their collective learning and support for one another. The QLC helped

the teachers work through the NEMP reports thus meeting their own individual and school needs for obtaining and disseminating the ideas contained in them.

2 Sharing

Learning as a community of learners appealed to the teachers. Advantages seemed to be the support available from other teachers. This was knowing that others were also learning and, at times struggling. The likelihood of a reduced load was appealing because if others shared their learning this would save a duplication of effort and time.

Once the circle was comfortable with its structure and the use of the QLC meeting time, the established pattern became one of discussing the layout of the reports and how their content might be shared with other teachers in schools. That they all shared a common desire to disseminate information from the NEMP reports gave an added reason for coming together and discussing how this might be accomplished. It also meant that they might find a better solution, which could perhaps save them time or unnecessary struggles. Lois said:

> *I probably wouldn't have done anything as in-depth on my own. It has been a focus and definitely made me look at the exemplars and think which ones I could use. I wouldn't have done it without the meetings.*

Katrina also felt she benefited from the circle focus and commented:

> *If I'd just had the reports sitting on my desk, I wouldn't have done any more than dipped. Because you [the researcher] had gone through them and summarised them, which makes it a lot easier, and focussed our attention on a different one each time, I've made a point of using them in the classroom and selling them to other teachers. So they've now become a useful part of my programme, rather than an extra dumped on top of everything else.*

Application of the content of these reports in the classroom was very important to the teachers as comments from my observation notes on 10 March reveal:

> *I felt throughout this [introducing the maths NEMP report task by task] that I was doing a 'selling' job on the tasks. I got the impression that they were looking for something practical to take away and use. It was like bells were ringing when an activity appealed. I noticed Harriet was jotting down ideas of things she wanted to follow up later.*

As the number of trials increased, more and more of the meeting time became devoted to sharing information, with the teachers increasingly directing their own learning and becoming less

dependent on me to facilitate the meetings. (In fact the researcher's role was often one of ensuring that the agenda was covered). Diane had this to say:

> *I think being able to share with each other the things we were doing… has prodded us into, 'Oh, that looks all right. Oh I think I can handle that one', and I'll have a go at it, you know? I think they've [the meetings] developed into a style that's functional and effective.*

In regard to the fortnightly spacing of the meetings, Katrina mentioned the momentum that gathered as each meeting approached:

> *When you know you have another meeting coming, you think, 'Oh I must remember to do something for that', so you get the books out. So they've actually encouraged me to use them, because the others, and you [the researcher], expect something at each of the meetings. And I suppose, in all fairness, it's not fair of me to have my Wednesday meetings unless I have done preparation or follow up… I look forward to seeing everybody and seeing how they've gone on the tasks. I look forward to what we are doing next, and I'm always enthused when I go away to try some of the activities.*

The need for teachers to talk regularly about their teaching practice with interested others was clearly an important feature of the QLC, as is the case with a 'learning community'. These teachers loved talking to each other, and once they started, it was often hard to interrupt them. Lois felt that teachers at her school were becoming less inclined to talk about their professional practice when they sat down with other staff in the staffroom. She said:

> *I'm not sure why it is, but they won't talk about the last lesson they took. They never say anything that's going well. They don't talk about children and that is the difference about the QLC. It's OK to talk about what you've done…It's a shame because years ago we used to say, 'look I just took something and it was wonderful' that's a no-no now. You don't hear anyone. In fact you wouldn't even know they had been in a room with kids come lunchtime. That is something that is sadly lacking because if they don't reflect on what they are doing, I think they are going down into a hole and it is so important to be sure that what you are doing is educationally sound. So if they don't ever get a chance to discuss with anybody. It's become a very private business.*

There was a sense of excitement with the sharing of the tasks some of the teachers had used. For example Lois came to a meeting and recalled an evaluation task for a Social Studies unit on the Chatham Islands. Here she had adapted the stamp activity as a group activity whereby children in groupings of four, designed a new set of stamps depicting the Chatham Islands. The children were allowed to use a wide variety of resources to help them make their designs and could refer to books, pictures and video clips. Perhaps what appealed to the teachers was the time this activity took for a high quality result to emerge. Lois had used this activity on the last day of the

term and told the circle that it had lasted for most of the day plus how much the children had enjoyed it. This appealed to the others for several reasons, not just keeping children occupied at the end of a term!

The circle teachers were surprised at the depth of the discussions they were experiencing with the QLC model. This confirmed the researcher's 'hunch' that they were not accustomed to such free flowing discussions in their professional development times. Instead they were used to a more formal lecture type delivery with the information condensed into the shortest possible timeframe. Discussion time was seen as an extra if time permitted. Teachers' conversations on the school visits had been similarly worthwhile. Sarah had welcomed the focused talk, which had not been accompanied by distractions, or what she called 'personal baggage'. She described her school visit in these terms:

> *You didn't have any responsibility for any other staff and helping them or supporting them or whatever personal things they were going through. So it was actually just catching up with the professional outside your situation and being able to empathise with, you know the workload and the job at hand. But also we did discuss in quite some depth at the end of it, how we could apply the assessment tasks, how they worked, and what was interesting to note… maybe we should have taped it, as it was really good quality thinking!*

Teacher talk seemed to be the key for these teachers. Since the development of collegiality in schools is closely aligned with teacher talk, the work of Judith Warren Little (1981) is appropriate here. She writes that collegiality depends on the presence of four specific behaviours in schools. By coincidence, each of these can be linked to the QLC approach, even the classroom visits (discussed below). According to Little, adults in schools:

- *[T]alk about practice. These conversations are frequent, continuous, concrete and precise.*
- *[O]bserve each other engaged in the practice of teaching and administration. These observations become the practice to reflect on and talk about.*
- *[E]ngage together in work on curriculum by planning, designing, researching and evaluating curriculum.*
- *[T]each each other what they know about teaching, learning and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated and shared (pp.12-13).*

When comparing the usefulness of QLC to teacher talk in their own schools, the teachers offered several comments. Mary said:

> *I like, actually, professional rapport with other people, and I think the difficulty sometimes is discussing some things that others aren't interested in, whereas here, we all have a common focus.*

All of the teachers felt that they were better able to reflect on their practice outside of their school environment. Katrina spoke about her realisation of a personal need to 'bounce' ideas off somebody else and the value of looking at other people's teaching styles in order to understand her own. Lois (who worked in the largest of the schools represented by the group) developed her earlier comment about needing to move beyond her school as a teacher learner when she claimed:

> *As teachers we need time to reflect, and this situation with the QLC is perfect in that it is away from school…It's people who have similar interests or experience…It's actual time to talk to other people about what we do. And as a teacher, I don't feel I do enough of that perhaps in this school. I do have other people in the community I ring and say… "I want to discuss…*

Mavis was enthusiastic about the QLC model for a different reason. Having described her experiences of school professional development as spoon-feeding, she had found the QLC model quite different and indicated:

> *Here we are having to do an equal amount to bring to it because we are all helping each other… I think the QLC is good in the fact that we are feeling we have some sort of ownership in it.*

Similarly, Lois also mentioned this theme of having ownership of the circle's direction and content. She said:

> *It's really been, you'll get out of it, what you put in… so the more I do, the more I'll have to share. It's putting the onus on the people in the circle to make contributions. So if you have a lot of people who have got the energy, and we are interested, then it is obviously going to be more successful than if you have got people who perhaps are not as committed.*

The sharing component of the QLC meeting also served to address assessment concerns each of the teachers had. At the meetings interest was shown in the following concerns:

- How much assessment information should be passed on to the next teacher or school?
- What does a manageable assessment profile look like for a whole class?
- How do you get consistency between teachers?

- Do we place an additional barrier for children when we ask them to write their answers down on paper rather than verbalise them?
- How much probing should an assessor do in the testing situation?
- How realistic is 1:1 testing for a whole class and how can this be effectively managed?
- When doing group assessments, how do you encourage all children to participate when the group includes some very dominant characters?
- How do teachers know what a high, middle and low range performance is?

3 School visits

After a term of meetings, the teachers were ready to exchange classroom visits. While the idea of school visits had been mooted at the first session, this had been a source of anxiety for the teachers. They certainly liked the idea of going to another classroom, but at the same time were anxious about the return visit to their own classrooms. This related to them not being completely confident about NEMP and how it might be used in a whole class setting.

As before with the issue of structuring the meetings, there was considerable discussion. No one wanted to rush into the school visits before they felt secure and comfortable with the idea. The idea of having an observer in their classrooms meant that they needed to reach a certain level of confidence with their NEMP work before they could welcome the visit of a colleague. It seemed that opportunities to talk with colleagues were rarities. Mavis said:

> *Just mixing with the other person and visiting another school. We hardly ever do that as experienced teachers either… We don't get time in our schools to talk with our colleagues, let alone go to another school and talk with other colleagues. So I think we've all really enjoyed that as well.*

While beginning teachers had the chance to visit other classrooms and schools, the more experienced teachers did not. Lois spoke about the school visit offering a break from the routine of her classroom. She described it as a refresher after twenty years of classroom teaching without breaks in service and commented:

> *I've felt stale and burnt out and I think this opportunity plus the PE contract has lifted my spirits. I've had 2 suspensions in my room so it has been one of the most difficult classroom years that I've ever had. Probably my first ever suspension, but I feel that I'm working longer hours and later into the night and I'm more enthused about the sort of teaching I'm doing than I've ever had before. That is because I've had fresh ideas.*

> *Whether it has been the NEMP meeting or going to someone else's school. That's got me through.*

It was fortunate that the teachers gained access to some of the NEMP resources (for example, video extracts, card equipment and photographs). These provided them with a real incentive to trial the NEMP tasks and marked another turning point in their journey with NEMP. Suddenly the arrival of the resources took away some of the anxiety. As Katrina observed at the time:

> *Well having the gear has helped. You know, as soon as we got our packs of gear, I could try activities that I couldn't try without it… Before I was picking out activities that I could adapt to worksheet or teacher talking stuff. As soon as I got the equipment, I could try different activities… Also when we went to other schools, we could try tasks that could be taken with a smaller group and we divided the class into three groups of 10.*

This arrival of the resources reduced some of the pressure of preparation work for these teachers. It also answered their initial concerns about whole class management when using NEMP activities because they could now involve the visiting teacher in a meaningful way rather than have that person simply observe. Usually, the extra pair of hands allowed the two teachers to divide the class into groups for station activities, freeing them up to discuss with each other the class, individual children and the success of the activities used. Comparisons were possible across the schools, as several teachers repeated the same activities. Sarah referred to this as a 'reality check' and spoke about the tasks she and Katrina had used with their different year levels. They had noticed the development of the children's group skills in particular.

Most of the teachers experienced four visits, either visiting someone else or having another person visit them. They valued these experiences, seeing them as a rare chance to go beyond their own school gates. By trialing the various activities across age groups and schools, the teachers obtained a good idea of how their children related to those at other schools. Suddenly, when a teacher spoke about using a particular activity at the QLC meeting, the other teachers wanted to try it, even though it perhaps didn't quite fit alongside their classroom themes of the moment. Here was 'movement over the threshold' and a willingness to give anything a try. Earlier caution had disappeared. Having accepted the need to take risks, the teachers were now experiencing real learning.

Spending time in each other's classrooms was important for the circle and the members became closer once they had worked alongside each other. Increasingly, the teachers stayed to talk with

one another after each QLC meeting and further ideas were shared for units of work. Lois spoke of these professional friendships by saying:

> *It's valuable in the sense that I have developed some sort of relationship with those people and I think that's most noticeable when I went to the school that I actually felt that, that person had become a professional sort of colleague. So that has worked very well.*

4 Dissemination of NEMP-related knowledge

As has already been mentioned, all of the teachers wanted to share their newly gained knowledge about NEMP with colleagues in their schools. This proved to be a challenge, as the staff development programmes were already full and teachers had no other meeting slots. This created a dilemma for the QLC teachers who firmly believed they should be given time to demonstrate the merit of the NEMP tasks. While one solution may have been to have shared additional written summaries about how to use the NEMP tasks, they were not satisfied that this would have any real impact on their colleagues. Their experience with the QLC can be seen as a reason for this particular stance. The QLC had clearly demonstrated how children's work samples could be used as a focus for discussion when exploring the usefulness of various approaches to classroom assessment.

How each teacher went about disseminating NEMP to their colleagues was a fascinating process to follow. Having faced the same pile of documents themselves, the QLC teachers were particularly sensitive to the feelings of staff who might see it as more work and requiring a total overhaul to their existing ways of assessing children's work. And so always at the back of their minds was the need to ease the teachers into the reports so that they did not feel overwhelmed or inadequate. Lois' sensitivity to staff feelings was evident in her comment:

> *I have shared where I felt it wasn't going to bore them or look like I was coming from a position of knowledge and that they might feel, 'oh there's another thing that I haven't done that that class is doing.' So you have to be a bit careful not to put people in a situation where they feel that they are not keeping up with things. It's a tricky one.*

At the same time, the QLC teachers wanted to make the most of any time allocated for their dissemination even if this were only five or ten minutes at the start of a meeting. This was to prove a real challenge because they could not duplicate their QLC experience of learning within such a limited timeframe and yet it was felt that some exposure to NEMP was better than none at

all. They were to face the same problem that every other presenter of professional development encounters in the present context of change overload.

Despite this challenge, ways were found to disseminate their NEMP learning. Katrina and Diane were able to 'drip feed' information to their colleagues after each QLC meeting. For Katrina this involved updating staff once a term on her involvement with the study, and leaving NEMP resources on the staffroom table for teachers to view. Diane would find out who was doing particular units of work and would then rush to each teacher with a bag of NEMP resources. She did this to 'hook' the teachers and made it easy for them by providing typed sheets ready for use. Her enthusiasm for sharing a NEMP task is evident in the way she described her dissemination with staff when she said:

> *I whizzed over to the year 4 class and said, 'hey if you try this out (chocolate factory task), you could actually use this sort of model as your assessment model finally for your baking unit. This one will take you 3 minutes today.*

In Mary's case, she was particularly conscious of finding the 'right time' to introduce NEMP to her staff. She was aware that they just wanted to be left alone for a while. Staff development was already onerous and little energy was left for tackling more new things at her school. Above all she did not want to risk having NEMP received like a lead balloon and was aware that the two teachers on the curriculum contracts were having a hard enough time disseminating their message and enthusing staff. This was why Mary had a longer wait before she could introduce NEMP at a staff meeting. Timing was also an issue for Mavis who encountered a similar long wait. Their wait paid off because it eventually coincided with the release of the latest NEMP reports adding further justification for NEMP to be explored. They were delighted to have their colleagues asking for even more NEMP sessions. So all of the QLC teachers, with the exception of Lara, recounted their opportunities for disseminating NEMP in their schools. As a part time teacher Lara did not have the same influence or opportunity to share information with staff. She had seen her involvement with the QLC experience solely as personal development because it offered a new source for professional development when she had limited opportunities for learning.

While the QLC teachers were keen to share their NEMP learning with others at their schools, Lois had been disappointed that staff had not asked her about her NEMP involvement despite her principal's effort to make this public with her name on the staffroom whiteboard. This was further proof that teachers were accustomed to playing a waiting game. If new information

needed to be acquired then the pattern had been for it to be presented to them. They did not need to go looking for it and indeed there was little time if they were so inclined. So both Lois and Mary had reluctantly accepted that NEMP was their project and not that of the other teachers on their staff. These teachers continued to face these challenges of disseminating the content of the NEMP reports at the classroom level to empower teachers to use the information for the benefit of teaching and learning.

Section 3*: *After 8 months journeying

A third round of interviews with the QLC teachers marked the end of the QLC meetings (refer to Appendix C). This data is presented according to four themes:

- Progress in disseminating NEMP at the school level
- On-going issues for using NEMP at the classroom level
- An evaluation of the classroom visits for QLC members
- Teacher views about principals' roles in staff development

Progress in disseminating NEMP at the school level

Despite the teachers' willingness and enthusiasm for sharing their NEMP learning with other colleagues, this had not been an easy task. In fact it was a source of continuing annoyance that it was proving to be so difficult to talk about their NEMP or QLC experience with other teachers. Everyone was just too busy and only fleeting moments were possible. Various approaches had been attempted with individual teachers, as well as syndicate and whole staff groupings. In all of these situations there had not been sufficient time to do NEMP justice. All that the teachers could hope to do was to share one or more small snippets from NEMP reports that they thought teachers might find useful additions to their existing classroom topics or assessments. Then if these assessment tasks appealed to teachers, some might try them out and even decide that there were other tasks, which would be worth using as well. So it was very much a motivational, quick sell exercise that needed to be very convincing for there to be any impact on classroom learning and assessment practices in their schools.

It had been easier to disseminate NEMP information at the syndicate level than at whole school staff meetings. Agendas for whole staff meetings were already full coping with the implementation of new curriculum documents and their structures were more or less controlled

by the Ministry of Education contracts, which supported these developments. Since NEMP was interpreted as an assessment exercise outside these developments it did not stand much chance of being included in the whole staff meeting time. Its dissemination was almost totally dependent on the efforts of persistent and determined teachers who had seen for themselves what NEMP had to offer them as classroom teachers. For the majority of teachers, however, NEMP was merely a national accountability exercise far removed from individual classrooms and was something about which they did not need to be concerned. It was a different matter for teachers of year 4 and year 8 children who might find it useful to compare the national data with that of their own children's performance and is where syndicates at these levels really did need to find out about NEMP.

It was interesting to discover that for some of the QLC teachers, a letter and phone call to their principal requesting an interview to talk about the QLC project work had suddenly meant that a slot for NEMP was given at a full staff meeting. Such a slot served two purposes. Firstly it was an expression of interest in the QLC teacher's work over some months and secondly it was a way to alert the principal to what had been done so that they would be in a better position to answer questions.

For Mary, a request for an interview with her principal resulted in a positive outcome for her NEMP dissemination. This arose from the interview situation with her principal, which opened up ways in which NEMP might be linked to existing professional development. For Mary it was real progress to hear her principal talk about the possibility of using NEMP as a tool to assist the process of curriculum review in the school. This was her signal that the 'right moment' to disseminate NEMP had indeed arrived. Her delight was evident when she started verbalising strategies for setting this in place and said:

> *So the fact that to you, he was actually quite receptive suggests to me that maybe next year might be a good time to bring it up. And I think I would just ask outright.*

Later in the interview she was saying:

> *I could probably say to Kevin, I'm sure, 'look I want ten minutes every staff meeting for 8 documents' and I'm sure he'll probably say, 'yeah that's fine, remind me about it next year'. I mean I could probably programme it in now, but I'd probably have to let him know now that this is what my intention was, which isn't such a bad idea to say to him now.*

This enthusiasm spread to other things she might do to get ready for this dissemination and she talked about finding time in the holidays to gather a box of resources together for staff use. This was an idea she had gleaned from the QLC group.

The drip feed approach was adopted by Lois, Sarah, Diane and Katrina. For Lois this was first and foremost a leading by example showing others what she had used with her own class. She had deliberately made time to share one NEMP activity at each syndicate meeting at which she was the leader. This approach was also adopted by Sarah. While their words were similar, Sarah said she would share her experiences of trialing the activities by saying, "I've tried this, do you want to try that?"

On one occasion Lois had had a couple of teachers show interest in a set of sequential pictures from the NEMP writing report and these were taken away to use. However, this giving of tasks to others was not as effective as the sharing of work samples of children's work with a NEMP task and a discussion about what it indicated in terms of future teaching needs. Her successes with dissemination were small but significant. After having shared some samples at the Senior Staff meeting and explaining how she had adapted their use for full class situations she commented about their response:

> *They were enthusiastic but there is nothing like doing something yourself to own it. The response is, hmmm, averagely warm I would say. They are not jumping out of their skins about, ' we must have this', but they listened and read the examples and laughed at the appropriate places.*

This need for ownership was demonstrated when Lois noted a change in her deputy principal's attitude towards NEMP after attending an assessment course led by Terry Crooks. This led to another person advocating NEMP who could reinforce its potential value for classroom and school wide programmes. She commented, "since she [DP] has actually had a taste of it herself, she has shown greater interest in what I was doing and felt that we should try to work with some staff development next year".

At Sarah's school, her work with the NEMP reports was able to be linked with the school's review of assessment and she was identified as the person appropriate to lead this development. This involved leading a series of staff meetings on assessment where she set up a new school wide assessment scheme and managed to build in some of the NEMP activities as some of the benchmarks. In addition, selected NEMP activities in handwriting, information technology, observational drawing and listening and speaking were identified as being ideal for the student

portfolios. This example reflects the deepest level of dissemination amongst the group of QLC teachers. Katrina had also made significant headway in school-wide assessment of written language but this was only one curriculum area as opposed to Sarah's broader sweep of reporting to parents across several curriculum areas.

Harriet had started on a small scale with NEMP sharing within her syndicate. This had given her the confidence to move into small slots in full staff meetings. After several sessions she had found a ten minute slot was sufficient to provide an overview of one report per meeting. Her pattern was:

> *I have an introductory speel. I start with the survey at the back, flip to the front, show them the framework and then basically flick through all the activities… I sell it as a resource rather than an actual assessment.*

This pattern was similar to the one that Mary had used in her two staff meeting slots. She said:

> *I've shared a couple of reports with the staff of late at the end of the staff meeting and on one occasion at the beginning, just briefly. I've gone through the booklets with them and had the activities ready for them and most, or actually, they all were quite responsive and showed some interest in what I was doing.*

It was her opinion that it needed to be short, sharp and fairly brief allowing time for teachers to experience it for themselves. Diane reported similar regular sharing about NEMP with her staff. The pattern she had adopted was one of taking the staff through one report shortly after her return from the QLC meeting where it had been discussed. She said:

> *I just did a little bit each time. Then if there was a really good activity in there that I thought that the whole staff would use, I typed it out into a user friendly sheet, like the Ashton Scholastic thing. I actually held back the Ashton Scholastic and handed out the sheet with it.*

Working in a smaller school, it was easier to get alongside teachers and know what their current theme was. In this way Diane could highlight particular activities and hand them the activity all set to use. She commented, "they haven't objected to me saying, 'hey' there is a really good activity in whatever".

To help teachers locate topic based activities in the NEMP reports, Diane and Harriet had worked together to produce a planning grid. This was well received by the QLC teachers. Diane

was also planning to add the NEMP reports to the library bar coding system to help teachers locate teaching ideas. She explained how this might work saying:

> *Every resource that is coming into the school is bar coded and everything within the resources is noted down. So if someone went and typed in a topic they were doing, out of the computer would come, a list of teaching resources, non-book resources and everything on that topic.*

Mavis on the other hand had found it more difficult to disseminate NEMP across the school. She had the disadvantage of teaching in the junior syndicate and not being amongst the age groups for which the reports were intended. She had shared part of a full staff meeting and provided an overview of the reports as well as introducing the Forum Comments. Like the other QLC teachers, her purpose had been to generally motivate and excite teachers so they would want to use the reports in their teaching. Staff had been receptive and a good percentage of them had ordered personal copies of the reports through her. She felt they had shown an interest and would like more time spent on NEMP in the school. One idea she had in mind was:

> *It would be quite a good idea just to put up an OHT, have the resource there, perhaps things photocopied and something that would be generally interesting school wide to motivate people to go off and use. Like here's a quick idea with Santa Claus's feet in the bucket? (Activity from the Writing Report)*

She believed that the staff needed somebody to share ideas with them rather than them being expected to go and read and find out for themselves. This was a view shared by other QLC teachers.

On-going issues for using NEMP at the classroom level

While sharing some issues in common, each of the teachers had their own particular hurdles to overcome. In each case the teachers realised that NEMP was just another new area to be introduced to teachers and were sensitive to this *overload*. They felt that their first task was to help staff see the possibilities of the NEMP activities as teaching tools rather than assessment. Harriet's sensitivity is summed up as:

> *It could go all sorts of places, but yeah, I mean, judging from the looks on their faces, like not another document. However, at the end when you flick through them, there are at least one or two things out of every document that you could use.*

Diane mentioned that the *layout of the NEMP books as reports* had made them appear more difficult than was the case. In saying this she argued that it was the pink colour on the pages where the results had been listed which had made it difficult for teachers to photocopy the pages if they wished to repeat some of the activities. If it were possible to photocopy the pages as they appeared in the reports, then she felt teachers might use them. In the meantime, she saw that her contribution was one of making it easier for teachers and spoon feeding them with ready-made sheets to use.

Negative attitudes towards assessment were an issue for Diane as well. For some of her teachers, assessment meant pen and paper testing and they were unsure about assessing co-operative activities. In the reports, the NEMP activities were described as individual or small group tests and this was off putting for some teachers who were concerned about *manageability* in the class situation. They raised questions such as, "how am I meant to do that with a class? Or, NEMP has only one child, how can we get the whole class doing that? Or we haven't got the video for that anyway or the commercial".

Interestingly enough, these questions were not unlike those the QLC teachers had themselves expressed at the beginning of the project, yet this was not acknowledged by any of the teachers. Over time, they had moved beyond these concerns and learnt to adapt the activities for full class use. In the meantime, Diane for example would counteract this negative response by offering to tape a different commercial from the television and showed them ways the idea could be used even though the equipment might be slightly different. This extra effort was something she was pleased to make if it meant the teachers used the NEMP activity. She felt some obligation having had release time for NEMP, whereas the other teachers in her school had not.

Of all the QLC teachers, Lois was perhaps the one who was the most disappointed in the uptake of NEMP by other teachers in her school. Working in a large school meant there was also a *significant range in expertise, motivation and teacher knowledge.* Sadly, she wondered whether some of the teachers were even interested in professional development and developing their teacher knowledge!

For Mavis her biggest problem was *finding time* to continue this NEMP awareness raising. She spoke about:

> *It's just the fact that our staff meetings are so planned down a term ahead etcetera to what is going to be put into them. Next year has already sort of been planned so it will just be me having some time where I can actually, or even whether I can push in a little bit of each staff meeting time just to give a warm up or motivational type thing out of different curriculum areas that they are interested in.*

Mary mentioned having *flexibility to alter the classroom timetable* to fit in NEMP work. While she had not felt guilty about putting NEMP ahead of handwriting or physical education to trial some NEMP tasks, the next door teacher had not been so willing to dismiss the other teaching. What Mary planned to do for next year was timetable 20 minutes a week for NEMP to keep the momentum going.

However, while this continual drip feeding to keep a curriculum focus 'alive' sounded worthwhile, the difficulty was that this needed to happen with every curriculum area. Primary teachers have a challenging job in this respect with so many curriculum areas to cover.

An evaluation of the classroom visits for QLC members

Our QLC experience included classroom visits to others within the circle. These were thoroughly enjoyed by the teachers in the group who said they seldom had any opportunity to visit other schools. They did, however, qualify this by saying it was possible for teachers to visit another classroom if this were linked to their professional development goal, but these were generally 'one off visits' rather than a regular occurrence. Both Mary and Lois said that by going beyond their own school, they had picked up fresh ideas. Lois said:

> *I went from this school culture to somebody else's and they were both quite different. I was absorbing a different way of school organisation and classroom practice, whereas within this school, we might be very similar from class to class.*

She thought that perhaps 'cloning' was a problem within a school, where teachers wanted to copy someone else's model as being the best model. One reason she gave for this was young teachers tended to stay in the one school once they became a permanent staff member and this lack of movement from one school to another was preventing them from learning other ways of teaching. She saw a real danger of younger teachers getting set in their ways once they had moved beyond the survival stage. It was Lois' opinion that schools had become more inward looking under the self-managing school's regime, and sharing with neighbouring schools had disappeared. This aspect of the QLC model was therefore seen to be refreshingly different

because its membership was drawn from beyond one school and it included teachers from a range of school communities and experience levels.

Following this theme of inward looking schools, Katrina spoke about pooled ignorance, which may have been more of an issue with a small staff of six than in the larger schools. She likened this to being stuck in a forest and unable to find a way out. In this respect she thought that staff development often needed someone else coming into the school with fresh ideas and motivating the staff to try new ideas. Mavis, at a larger school, considered that there was a lot of expertise within her school and it was just a case of making time for the sharing to occur.

In essence, classroom visiting was viewed as worthwhile, but not an essential activity. Sharing was the vital ingredient for staff growth and if time were devoted to sharing ideas of good practice in the staff or syndicate structure, the teachers were contented. For them, classroom release could always be arranged informally between teachers. This was a case of 'where there is a will, there is a way'.

However, there was a difference in the notion of classroom visits for the QLC teachers. The circle had carefully manoeuvred its way around teachers observing each other in action towards opportunities for both teachers to work with the same class in smaller groupings of children. This made the emphasis one of concentrating on what a particular group of learners knew and could do rather than an appraisal of a teacher teaching. It also enabled comparisons to be made between intakes as the teachers spent time with a QLC teacher in their own classroom as well as returning to the QLC teacher's classroom. An additional feature of each visit was the discussion time after the class time. This was considered to be the most valuable part of the exercise and was a further indication that teachers benefited from focused talk about the craft of teaching.

It was rather interesting to watch how the idea of the classroom visits had moved during the time of the QLC experience. Initially the classroom visits had been a drawcard for involvement in the QLC. The teachers expressed delight at being able to visit other schools during the school day. When discussion focused on how this might be organised the teachers were noticeably worried that they were still learning about the NEMP reports and wondered whether they could offer something worthwhile to an observer. Thus a time of reassurance and confidence building was needed before the classroom visits were possible. In the end, the teachers became so absorbed in their trialing that this was not an issue. The waiting period had been sufficient. Harriet's recall of her classroom visits captured this transition from fear to enjoyment as:

> *Hell, what are we supposed to do? It was when we actually had to do it, it was fine and it wasn't an issue…. In the groups that I actually was involved with, none of us watched each other… We kept them busy. We divided the class into three and just rotated around.*

For her it had been important to be amongst like-minded teachers who were equally focused on what they could do for the child. Lois, likewise noticed the difference between the commitment and passion for learning evident in the QLC group and the teachers with whom she worked in her school setting. She wondered how teachers could continue to be teachers if they did not get into reflection and questioning of their classroom practice. And so the QLC experience showed these teachers how their learning and development had operated at a deeper level when there was time to talk, share ideas and concerns, experiment in a safe environment with no time pressures. This structure had also allowed the teachers to be planners of their own destinies in learning rather than victims of imposed change which they had come to see as limiting their potential for learning.

Teacher views about principals' roles in staff development

Since what could be disseminated in whole school staff meetings depended on what the principal could squeeze into the meeting schedule, it was appropriate to explore the processes involved in making such decisions from the perspective of the QLC teachers. It was hoped that this would promote an understanding of the barriers for the dissemination of the NEMP reports in each of the schools and indicate why it was proving so difficult to include the NEMP material in these programmes. This data is presented according to the QLC teachers' impressions of:

- Principals as decision makers
- Principals' roles in staff development

As decision makers, each of the teachers recognised that their principal was torn in several directions in planning the scope of staff development for a school. Not only were there Ministry of Education requirements to meet and deadlines for implementing new curriculum documents to a school, but each school had its own unique needs to identify and remedy with staff and children. While each of the principals tended to be quite definite about their role and commitment to active involvement, this was not always viewed in the same way by staff. Teachers who were not part of the senior management team did not always know how decisions

were made and did not necessarily appreciate the difficulties principals faced trying to please everyone.

Two teachers, in particular, were critical of the way their principals determined the nature of staff development programmes in their schools. For example, when Harriet was asked this question, her initial reply came as a revealing question with the words, "what he runs or what he dictates we do?"

Was this sense of determining what it was that teachers would do the consequence of a non-teaching principal having a voice and feeling the need to be assertive about directions? No doubt the principal concerned would have been horrified at this interpretation, knowing that the staff had been consulted and had reached a consensus opinion. Harriet's view could also reflect her lack of awareness of the consultation processes and her annoyance at seeing the decision announced in the way it was.

Others, like Lois, referred to their principal basing their decision on other factors. Her principal wanted to see a focus on information technology and it was thought this had developed from the principal's network beyond the school rather than from within the school. She said:

> *It is often not a point for discussion really and we are not at this point asked what we want, so getting your particular subject is often traded off. I know Maori has actually been in the pipeline but it has been pushed off, year after year.*

She was also aware that teachers in her syndicate were asking for help with the 3Rs rather than what were termed peripheral subject areas in the arts. To her this was not a meeting of the teachers' needs and as a syndicate leader, she felt annoyed that the school focus was overriding real needs at the classroom level. This was also an example of how primary schools could never hope to satisfy personal needs alongside the pressure to meet national deadlines for specific curriculum implementation across all curriculum areas.

Mavis talked about her principal's system for gathering staff opinion about possible areas of focus. She talked about the staff being given the principal's suggestions and then having to rank them. These were then collated from each of the syndicates and put on one sheet. Like Lois, Mavis felt that the principal's agenda was not necessarily the same as the staff's preference. She said:

> *It's not giving everybody a full chance and maybe it is not what the staff wants fully because the staff have shown they have a real interest that they would like to hear more about NEMP.*

It seemed that these principals from larger schools were also very aware of what other schools were doing and wanted to be seen to be up with the latest developments, e.g., multiple intelligences! This was mentioned by three of the teachers! As a staff member, Mavis was critical of developments which followed the principal's whim as was Lois who felt that there was little room for needs identified by senior teachers on their classroom visits to be addressed in the staff development programme. Diane, however, talked about the appraisal system establishing individual and collective needs and seemed satisfied that this was working well. In Mary's school, the principal also talked about the appraisal system as the method for establishing needs, yet she as a Scale A staff member was not aware that this was the approach taken. She simply did not know how staff development needs were identified.

Sarah felt that the consultation at her school made it possible for teachers to influence the decision making. At her school, information was fed both ways through the senior management team, and at times a working party would go away and return with work for the staff to consider. While all of the principals had made mention of the filtering through the senior management team, it seemed that this was a convenient filter downwards but not necessarily upwards. At Sarah's school the principal was very much in the centre of the action, even though not a teaching principal. Sarah said of her principal:

> *She doesn't have a classroom but she is still interested in, still at the forefront of learning and how we can do better… Her focus all the time is the children and their learning…I see her as a professional leader, not just an administrator.*

Thus the credibility of a principal helped determine the level of staff acceptance for any new initiative introduced by the principal. Sarah's respect for her principal meant she was completely confident that the data gathering had been a thorough process through interviews and feedback from the syndicates. She realised that her principal was pro-active and would provide input if this were desirable, but at the same time could share the reins with other staff and give them leadership exposure. Such sharing indicated a secure principal who was at one with her staff. Interestingly enough, Sarah was the only one of the teachers who appreciated the principal's perspective, her history in the school and knowledge of where the school had come and where it might go next. This was maybe due to the fact that a lot was shared with the senior management team and the relationship was open. There were no hidden agendas or power games.

Within the group, differences were noticed according to whether the teachers were working with teaching or non-teaching principals. As one might expect, generally speaking, teachers thought the teaching principal was more in touch with the needs of the children and teachers. It was much harder for principals to please teachers in the larger schools where principals did not teach a class. As already mentioned, principals from the larger schools were criticised for following their own interests, or influences from outside the school rather than those inside the school. Being a teaching principal was clearly a real asset in the eyes of the teachers in the QLC group. Diane said:

> *It depends on whether the principal is teaching or not. If they are teaching, they are right on board with that, how long it takes to do things and what needs to be done and can I think gauge the stress and pressure of bringing a new curriculum area on board.*

In one school it seemed that the principal had to find ways of asserting himself as the principal at staff meetings. Harriet explained that her non-teaching principal asked lots of questions when other people were leading the session. She said, "he likes to be a bit of the devil's advocate, not necessarily a focussed devil's advocate" (laughs).

When asked how important the principal's role was in staff development, Harriet thought that principals had to be curriculum leaders if they were to keep their fingers on the pulse and know what was going on. This was speaking from the context of her own school, which was not one of the larger schools in the sample. Interestingly enough, while her principal did jump on bandwagons for staff development topics and was another to mention the possibility of multiple intelligences, staff received a good hearing when they took ideas to him.

Mavis thought that it was the staff who had the best idea of what the needs were. She did not consider the decision making was a shared activity in her current school and provided one recent example to illustrate her point. This was in relation to the format of the staff meeting schedule for the following year. She said:

> *We were given, told what the change would be and then we were suddenly told, 'you are to write down on paper what you think about that or it will happen'. People have written down on paper, nothing has ever come back on that. Now it may just go before the BOT 'this is going to happen'... I think it is really important that the staff get a full discussion. We know we can't please everybody, but there should be more discussion and consensus on that.*

Examples from this discussion strengthen the view that teachers' activities are controlled and determined by others. Whether this is from within their school or beyond, the pressure to comply is very strong. This continuing sense of overload has already impacted on the quality of teacher learning and is causing teachers to be frustrated and even angry because they are always on the run to meet the demands placed upon them. In terms of teacher learning, too much is happening for too little gain other than to say a school has devoted so many hours to a curriculum initiative. This is a sad state of affairs, and is the backdrop against which the impact of the NEMP reports is measured. Research questions relating to the QLC model show that there is some hope for teacher learning and development practices.

Research questions

How effective is the Quality Learning Circle Model for teacher learning and development?

1.1 Which features of the QLC model increase the likelihood of teacher learning impacting on classroom practices?

Comments from the QLC teachers have shown that teacher learning is enhanced when teachers have opportunities to share good ideas about classroom practice. The quality learning circle was set up to achieve this with time devoted to sharing both ideas and concerns in a supportive environment where each member of the circle was on an equal footing.

Teacher ownership of the learning was important. The teachers chose what they would trial and share with other teachers within the general agreed focus of the NEMP reports. This meant that there was sufficient flexibility for the teachers to work their new learning alongside their existing class themes. NEMP was not seen as an extra but rather an integral component of classroom planning. It was not viewed as a burden but as an exciting resource to incorporate into daily classroom practice.

Because the QLC meetings were held during the school day and release time was provided, the teachers felt special and had the energy to devote to their learning. They therefore approached their learning with enthusiasm. Concentration levels for this professional development could also be sustained more than for their usual end of the school day scheduling of professional development.

The circle's joint commitment to learning was a real bonus for the teachers. Not only did they feel an obligation towards the circle's learning but also they were motivated to trial NEMP activities in between meetings in order to have something to share at the next QLC meeting.

Classroom visits added interest to their learning. These visits were a valuable source of practical ideas and helped the teachers to compare their children's knowledge, skills and attitudes with those of another group of children. Talk after the classroom sessions had real meaning when the teachers sat down to reflect on what had happened in the classroom and were able to share of their different perspectives with one another. Sarah commented that there was a real depth to these conversations and noted their focused nature.

1.2 How well do teachers rate the QLC as a tool for professional development?

When the QLC teachers looked back at the progress they had made over the months of meeting as a QLC, they were delighted with their new learning. They had travelled a considerable distance in their knowledge about the NEMP reports and how they could be used to enhance classroom assessment practices. What pleased them also was the strength of their NEMP expertise as compared to other teachers at their schools. This position of strength gave them the confidence to seek ways in which they could disseminate their recently acquired enthusiasm for NEMP with other teachers. The QLC was seen as a sense making experience because the teachers had helped each other to explore various possibilities with the NEMP reports and their associated assessment activities. While they would have liked their teachers to have had the same experience, they soon realised that there simply wasn't time to squeeze in another development for schools and work it within existing budgets. This became a real source of frustration for teachers who genuinely wanted others to benefit from their QLC experience of NEMP.

While the teachers enjoyed the classroom visits, they felt that the model could exist without them. This was because the sharing component at the meetings was so valuable. They were able to glean sufficient information from a teacher recounting a particular NEMP activity and did not necessarily have to see it being used with a group of children.

1.3 How easy is the QLC model for teachers to use?

The model was relatively easy to use. It depended on teachers being willing to talk about issues of importance and share their classroom practices. The most difficult part of the model was for

teachers to accept that they would be taking risks, moving out of their comfort zones and their learning pathways might move in directions they did not expect.

Membership of the circle was important. Teachers accepted that the success of the QLC depended on its members making it work by encouraging discussion, the sharing of ideas and concerns and that all were equal learning partners.

1.4 Is the QLC suitable for use in schools?

The QLC is a suitable professional development model for teachers in schools because it encourages teachers to talk about their work in a focused, non-threatening manner. This is a real benefit since most opportunities for teacher talk in schools are infrequent, hurried and spontaneous. Where they are planned, as in the annual appraisal cycle, power and accountability issues remove the excitement of the learning.

Since members of the QLC model need to shape the direction and scope of their shared learning, this model is not a recipe set in concrete. Rather it offers a framework which can be adapted to suit the contexts of schools. It is not a panacea for every school to follow because clearly there are some combinations of teachers for whom the joining together would be difficult, and it would be pointless to force teachers to join a quality learning circle under these circumstances. It must be accepted that not all teachers welcome working and sharing with their colleagues yet they can still be effective as teachers. Others develop their expertise by working in a learning community, which supports and challenges them. Thus quality learning circles should be seen as an optional tool for professional development, and may need to include teachers from a number of schools where it is not appropriate to remain within a school.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

How effective is the Quality Learning Circle (QLC) model for teacher learning and development?

The effectiveness of the QLC model can be judged in terms of the direct benefits to the eight teachers involved and how it has highlighted the processes and conditions which make it possible for teachers to consider making improvements to their practice.

Indeed, one gain from the QLC intervention has been the way it has confronted teachers with features missing from their usual professional development experiences. Here one major difference has been that the teachers were able to choose their own focus for improvement and how this would be structured. While this element of choice was initially rather overwhelming, the teachers soon learnt that there were advantages in being able to shape and pace discussions to suit their needs and not be tied to someone else's imposed agenda and timeframe. There was also less pressure with the QLC model because the end point had not been determined in advance. The teachers knew that they were on a journey and would support each other no matter which direction it took.

The QLC teachers responded well when they were actively involved in the learning process. In particular, having time to talk with one another about their practice meant they could discover that their colleagues were additional sources of learning. Ball and Cohen (1999) argue that such discussions and teaching of each other "about practice in practice" are invaluable (pp.11-12). It was also interesting to see how the QLC teachers' experiences matched Ball and Cohen's view that discussions "centred in practice" did not necessarily require classroom situations in real time. While the QLC teachers shared several classroom visits with one another, they agreed that these had been useful but not essential to their learning. What they did value were the samples of work that the other teachers brought along when discussing their NEMP trialing. This matched Ball and Cohen's suggestion that better learning opportunities can be created by using strategic documentation, copies of students' work, videotapes of classroom lessons, curriculum materials and teachers' notes. For the QLC teachers, such sharing had motivated them to explore similar activities themselves and then

report their findings back to the group. Sadly, such sharing time was often not able to be included in their usual staff meetings because the dissemination of features of new curriculum documents dominated meeting times, leaving little or no time for discussion.

While schools tend to operate under "cultures of separation", the QLC model encouraged "cultures of connection and integration" (Day, 1999, p.79). Here the QLC teachers welcomed opportunities for networking with colleagues and showed a clear preference for what Argyris and Schon cited by Day (1999), call double-loop learning. It is argued that there is better learning when others are involved in the learning loop because they can influence the direction of the learning by asking questions and challenging assumptions held by individuals. Single-loop learning is considered to be less effective because it occurs without the involvement of other learners. Day argues that this more radical approach to learning and the evaluation of one's practice is extremely difficult to achieve on one's own, and learning actually deepens with this added loop.

Such a preference for more collegial approaches, where teachers spend time talking, planning and evaluating as a team, is currently hard to achieve in schools, given the pressures of time and quantity of learning required. Darling-Hammond (1996) is adamant that schools are currently structured for failure because of this isolation and privacy from colleagues who might be able to help teacher learning. She maintains:

> *Today's schools are organized in ways that support neither student learning nor teacher learning well. Teachers are isolated from one another so that they cannot share knowledge or take responsibility for overall student learning (p.195).*

The QLC model has also highlighted the need for schools to change structures to enable quality learning to occur. For example, the provision of teacher release to allow the teachers to work together in school-time produced a greater learning productivity. Even the teachers themselves were conscious of their increased energy levels because the meetings were held within the school day and not in their usual 'tired' time after school. Day (1999) suggests that in supporting a learner-focused perspective rather than a training-focused perspective, there is a need to reconsider the

time allowance and organisational structures underpinning provisions for teacher learning and development.

Similarly, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) maintain that professional development is about providing occasions when teachers can reflect on their work and reassess and reshape their beliefs about content, pedagogy and learners. This requires settings that support teacher inquiry and collaboration and strategies grounded in teachers' questions and concerns. More specifically this involves:

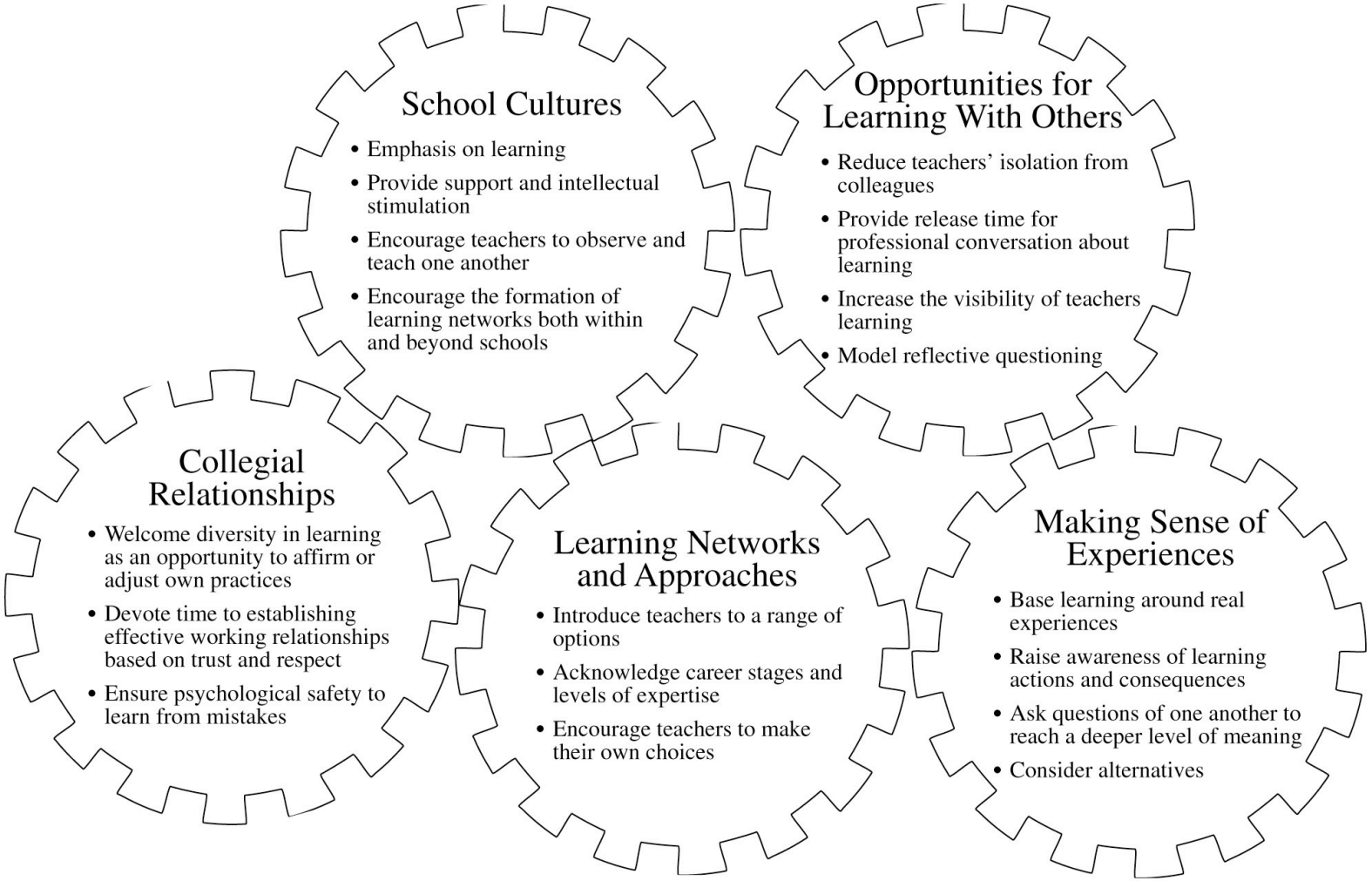
> *Crea[ting] new images of what, when and how teachers learn, and these new images require a corresponding shift from policies that seek to control or direct the work of teachers to strategies intended to develop schools' and teachers' capacity to be responsible for student learning (p.598).*

The QLC model offers such a setting for effective teacher learning because it addresses concerns about how and when teachers learn as well as identifying the conditions which promote teacher learning. While admittedly the QLC model is an expensive option with its teacher release costs, it does provide teachers with the quality time they so desperately need for learning, one with another sharing ideas and concerns about their teaching practices. Since meetings held after school cannot easily include this element of sharing, it is important to create other opportunities for this to occur. If this means bringing teachers together within the school day and paying for teacher release, then this is the price we must pay for quality learning. A continuation of current practice is a bigger waste of money if teachers are not benefiting from their learning time.

Conceptualising teacher learning and development

I have identified five principles which I believe underpin effective teacher learning and development. These principles are integrally related to each other and can be represented as five interconnecting cogs (see Figure3). These include school cultures which value learning, opportunities for learning with others, collegial relationships, learning networks and approaches and making sense of teachers' experiences.

Figure 10: Conceptualising Teacher Learning and Development



The success of teacher learning and development rests on *school cultures* which value learning. Barth (1990) claims the "school need not merely be a place where there are big people who are learn*ed* and little people who are learn*ers*" (p.162). For him a good school "is a place where everyone is teaching and everyone is learning– simultaneously under the same roof" (ibid). This view matches the intent of a learning community and the QLC approach used in this project, where regardless of status, everyone is accepted as a learner, teacher and student alike.

However, just saying that everyone is accepted as a learner is not enough to ensure this is reflected in reality. *Opportunities for learning with others* need to be deliberately created and structured into schools' programmes because they are too important to be left to chance encounters. Learning can motivate others when it is shared with enthusiasm. In today's climate of constant change it is even more difficult to enthuse others to engage in learning, because time is a precious commodity and learning agendas seem to be endless, especially those imposed on teachers with set deadlines for implementation.

Teachers are denied a valuable source of learning if they remain in isolation from their colleagues. Even when teachers realise that their colleagues may have different ways of teaching, this diversity can serve as a reason to search one's own practice in order to justify or amend existing ways of working. Teachers who value interactions with their colleagues can be helped to reflect on their work and also have a source of support for improving their practice.

Collegial relationships matter for quality learning. When schools value collegial ways of working, "every teacher is a staff developer for every other teacher" (Barth, 1990, p.54). Collegial relationships depend on the establishment of trust and respect between learners which develops over time. Support is crucial to learning and this extends to being able to make mistakes without fear of failure. Such psychological safety is a prerequisite for further inquiry and reflection on practice which can lead to improvement plans being made.

As learners, teachers may also need to be introduced to a range of *learning networks and approaches* that can promote meaningful interactions with their colleagues. A wider choice of learning networks and approaches may be needed to suit the varying needs and expertise of teachers at different points in their careers both within and beyond schools. For example, peer coaching may offer a suitable structure for working closely with a colleague. Similarly, the critical friend or opportunity to participate in a quality learning circle or a collaborative research project may also serve a useful purpose. The common element underpinning each of these approaches is a plea for teachers to choose their preferred way of learning alongside colleagues rather than just accepting what and how others decide they should learn. Garmston and Wellman (1998) even go as far as recommending the modelling of seven ways of talking to encourage learners to be truly reciprocal in developing their knowledge about the teaching and learning process.

Teachers also need to *make sense of their experiences*. This is in part an exercise in consciousness raising, where teachers as learners are helped to consider what it is they are doing, what it means, how it came to be this way and then how they might do things differently (Smyth, 1989). While some teachers can ask these questions of themselves, others benefit from colleagues' modelling.

Reflections on methodological issues

My data gathering has acknowledged my teacher education background and my impact on the teachers' learning as well as the teachers' individual and collective journeys as members of a quality learning circle. This role came naturally to me as a professional teacher educator of 16 years standing. An interpretive paradigm has provided a useful framework for making sense of this experience using observations, semi-structured interviews and interview transcripts to record the successes, frustrations and issues for both the teachers and me as the researcher working with a quality learning circle approach.

I was careful to consider the possible impact of my actions when determining how to introduce the quality learning circle approach to the teachers. This was described as a journey which was a deliberate metaphor to convey from the outset that the journey

had no set destination and would evolve in response to the needs of the circle's membership. I was completely honest with the teachers that I did not have pre-conceived outcomes in mind and was prepared to follow whichever direction the journey took. This was problematic for the teachers, who saw the lack of structure as a possible time waster and were keen to get on with the task of learning about the NEMP reports. Their initial responses indicated strong preferences and histories of working with very structured approaches which I interpreted as being an acceptance that others could determine the nature of their learning rather than the teachers sharing responsibility for shaping learning agendas themselves.

I gave special consideration to the merging of these two approaches because I was aware from the conversations with the teachers that the quality learning circle required more active participation and was vastly different from the teachers' usual pattern of professional development. I sensed that the teachers needed to be reassured that their journeys would be meaningful, relevant and satisfying for them to remain committed to the project. In particular, they needed to know that I would be responsive to their concerns and that the quality learning circle approach could cater for this flexibility. It was in this way that the principle of reciprocity influenced my actions and shaped the way we worked together and made decisions about how and when we would share ideas of practice and make classroom visits. This reciprocity also impacted on the questions I developed for the interview schedules which were designed to capture the teachers' interpretations of their experience with the quality learning circle. I used the interviews as a time to check on the issues that were both helping and hindering learning for each individual and for the circle as a collective entity. Thus each interview round informed the next stage of development in the quality learning experience and determined the manner in which we worked together.

The quality learning circle was an ideal tool for creating regular opportunities for teachers to reflect on their work and consider alternative practices. Such reflexivity made it possible for the teachers to examine their own practices with the help of significant others who were members of the quality learning circle. The importance of teachers devoting time to talk and share aspects of their practice, concerns and strategies was an indication that teachers benefited from professional interactions about their work as teachers.

However, it is also acknowledged that there are problems associated with the notion of teachers as inquirers. Day (1999) raises two problems that have relevance for the quality learning experience. Firstly, inquiring into one's own practice requires a certain measure of self-confrontation and depends on the extent to which an individual can engage in this activity. Then secondly, there is the issue of whether teachers have the ability to cope with the consequences of that self-confrontation by themselves. Day writes:

> *If teachers are to extend their knowledge about practice over a career, (and thus gain the possibility of increasing their professional effectiveness), they will need to engage alone and with others in different kinds of reflection on both their own thinking, the values which underpin this and the contexts in which they work. To do this they will need intellectual and affective support. They will need to be both individual and collective inquirers (p.26).*

This discussion leads me to wonder whether the quality learning circle approach can be sustained without the help of an outsider for either content knowledge or, more particularly, process skills so that teachers develop the capacity and capability to help themselves in the future. I would argue that there is potential for the quality learning circle approach to improve teachers' learning and development if it can be linked to the growing professionalism of teachers as researchers. It is in this way that the quality learning circle approach can address Darling-Hammond's concern of teachers not knowing how to help themselves. Day (1999) cites Stenhouse (1975), and suggests four points should be noted. These are:

1. Commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development
2. Commitment and the skills to study one's own teaching
3. Concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of those skills
4. Readiness to allow other teachers to observe your work – directly or through recordings – and to discuss it with them on an honest basis (p.22).

These points highlight the need for teachers to form communities of learners for the purpose of joint reflection, inquiry and support so that teachers draw on their collective strengths and cooperate as staff developers for one another.

Contribution to knowledge

My research project has tracked the learning experiences of a group of Christchurch teachers to highlight the difficulties they have faced as learners in a period of continuous change. I have introduced a new element into the study of teacher learning and development by establishing a learning community for teachers which has included membership from eight different schools rather than being restricted to one school.

This project, despite its challenge and expense of bringing together a very diverse group of teachers has shown that learning communities are important for teacher learning. Interview data has shown that as individual learners, teachers can only get so far without the collective wisdom of colleagues and significant others to take them to the next step. This also highlights the need for professional conversations to provide opportunities for questions to be raised and concerns discussed as well as affirmation of existing practice. When this happens teachers' report greater satisfaction and commitment to their learning. This view supports Adair's (1986) three circle model and also Bell and Gilbert's (1993) overview of teacher development which similarly argue that teachers' learning must extend beyond a task focus to meet teachers' social, and personal development needs at the same time. While professional development has traditionally focussed on what teachers need to know and do and supplied programme ideas and opportunities for teachers to try out new ideas, this has been a short-term measure. Top-down initiatives have typically not shared the same success as those which have been able to combine initiatives planned from the local level. My findings have shown that for sustained learning, teachers must combine their own learning needs alongside mandates for external reform.

Collaborative ways of relating to other teachers present a further, often forgotten, dimension of teachers' learning. This is about teachers needing each other and gaining support and reassurance from the company of other learners. While teachers joining the QLC had initially been attracted to the group because it offered a new network, it was not until they experienced the depth of their QLC professional conversations that they realised how disappointing their own schools' offerings were. They considered that regular sharing with other learners in the QLC gave them the support they needed

to develop as learners. Once they had established a rapport and trust within the QLC, new risks were taken which allowed even bolder experimentation with new approaches, resources and ideas. This confirms Argyris and Schon's notion of double loop learning where professional conversations create a framework for reflection both on and in practice. It also supports two elements from Joyce and Shower's model of staff development, namely the need for feedback and follow-through support to show that teachers benefit from on-going support which is centered in practice. While Joyce and Shower's model also included the elements of demonstration and practice, the QLC teachers felt that classroom observations were not absolutely essential, provided that teachers talked and shared examples of children's work which then became a focus for discussion.

I argue that the requirements for quality teacher learning should not be restricted to one model. Rather what is needed is an awareness of the principles that guide effective teacher learning and development. These include accepting a menu of approaches which would acknowledge schools' flexibility of circumstance and experience levels of teachers. A single approach to teachers' professional development, while meeting some teachers' needs, will frustrate others. Time for teachers' learning should not be wasted for the sake of coverage, quality is also important.

If teachers are to realise the benefit of professional dialogue, they also need to see each other as equal partners in their learning. This requires a different way of working, where agendas are not determined by others but are developed by the teachers themselves. Where schools can create the conditions that make it possible for teachers to connect and interact, they will be more likely to be collaborative and collegial.

While much of my project confirms the international literature, practices in New Zealand have seemingly ignored these messages. I consider that my efforts to explore teacher learning and development within the New Zealand context have served a very valuable purpose in attempting to understand why New Zealand has not realised the messages conveyed in the international literature on teacher learning and development. The QLC has been an extremely effective approach for teacher learning

and development for a number of reasons. One of these is that the QLC teachers have been confronted with the notion that their schools' existing practices have not resulted in high quality learning outcomes for those involved. As an alternative approach the QLC has provided a much deeper and more satisfying learning experience. The next challenge is how to convince other teachers that their current learning and development could similarly be improved if they adopted or were offered an approach like the QLC.

Challenges

My study has highlighted a number of challenges which schools and those leading teachers' professional development would be wise to consider if they are serious about providing high quality learning experiences for teachers. Firstly, the QLC has enhanced the quality of learning outcomes for the teachers participating in my study. As an approach, the QLC has demonstrated that learning can be more satisfying and beneficial when conscious efforts are made to address the principles that underpin effective learning and development. The QLC approach has shown these teachers that there is more to learning than merely acquiring new knowledge. Learning is enhanced when it is accompanied by regular opportunities for teachers to talk, observe and learn from one another. This approach therefore challenges schools to make time and funding available for teacher release so that teachers can engage in productive and professional dialogue about the craft of teaching.

Secondly, the QLC approach challenges the notion of teachers' dependency on others to decide both what and how they will learn. As a vehicle for enhancing teachers' capacity and capability, the QLC has considerable potential because it supports teachers to inquire and reflect on their practice with the help of their colleagues. This support assists teachers to refocus their work with clearer learning purposes in mind.

Thirdly, the QLC approach is an acknowledgement that leadership exists across all levels of the school and teachers can be leaders for one another. However, it cannot be assumed that teachers automatically possess the necessary leadership skills for this role of supporting their colleagues' learning. Successful leadership extends beyond the introduction of new learning content to teachers and accommodates the unique

needs, attitudes and skills of teachers. Thus, teacher leaders who understand the principles of adult learning, management of change and school improvement theories are better equipped for their leadership roles. Schools also need to encourage teachers to develop this knowledge and skill base by supporting study in educational leadership courses. Schools should not be thinking that they can rely on teachers' initial teacher education qualifications to equip them for teacher leadership roles as well. Classroom teaching and leadership require different sets of skills and knowledge.

Evidence gathered in this study has clearly demonstrated the strength of alternative learning possibilities provided by initiatives such as the QLC which addresses the key principles articulated in Figure 3. While it is tempting for ease of management to continue treating teachers as 'empty vessels' to be filled with new knowledge, this is not desirable for the long-term quality and morale of teaching. Teachers must want to learn of their own accord throughout their careers if they are to remain as committed and enthusiastic teachers. While teachers can be guided by others in their choice of learning experiences, dependence on others should not dominate their learning agendas. Teachers must aim to be agents of change who share the philosophy of:

Ma te mohio ka ora
Te ora ka mohio

Through learning there is life
Through life there is learning.

Appendices

A QLC interviews Feb-March 1999.....

B QLC interviews June 1999.....

C QLC interviews Oct-Nov 1999 .....

Appendix A
QLC Interviews February-March 1999

This research has a general theme of professional development and a more specific context with the NEMP reports on the assessment tasks used in national monitoring.

NEMP

1 How familiar are you with the NEMP tasks and reports now?

2 Tell me about any NEMP ideas/tasks you have tried or adapted in your classroom (attitude surveys, marking criteria, etc.)

3 Have you hear about ways in which other teachers have used the NEMP material?

4 Has your staff development programme included any focus on NEMP? If so, tell me about it.

School Staff Development

5 What are the best features of your school's staff development programme?

6 What would you like to see improved/changed about the staff development programme?

7 Tell me about any frustrations you have about staff development.

8 What do you think are the components of an ideal staff development programme (support, feedback, reflection)?

9 How have you dealt with managing all the curriculum change on a personal level?

10 How do you personally keep up to date with teaching techniques or content in your teaching programme?

11 What have you learnt about managing changes in schools?

12 Have you any suggestions about how to get whole schools using or even reading the NEMP reports?

13 Do you have any ideas for getting individual teachers using the NEMP ideas?

14 Do you have any ideas for helping principals use the NEMP material?

15 What is your particular curriculum strength? How do you currently assess in that area and its related essential skills areas?

16 What would you hope to get out of this project?

Appendix B
QLC Interviews June 1999

Report Familiarity and School Visits

1 How have the QLC meetings helped you become more familiar with the NEMP reports?

2 What have you discovered so far about your own personal development needs through the QLC?

3 How has the QLC experience differed from your previous experiences of professional development?

4 In what ways are you personally making use of the NEMP reports?

5 Tell me about any sharing of your NEMP learning with other teachers?

6 What would help you to make even better use of the NEMP reports for your teaching and classroom assessment?

7 What have been the benefits of the school visits?

8 How did you use the school visit time?

9 What would you like to do with the next school visit?

10 Any suggestions for the QLC sessions/school visits?

Appendix C
QLC interviews October-November 1999

Disseminating NEMP at own School

1 Tell me about any recent sharing of the NEMP reports you have done with teachers at this school?

2 What has worked well when you have disseminated the NEMP reports?

3 What have been some of the barriers to your dissemination of NEMP at the school?

Principal's Role in Staff Development

4 What part does your principal play in staff development for teachers at this school? (Tease out involvement at three levels – whole staff, syndicate, individual in aspects of managing, planning and involvement)

5 How important is the principal's role in the staff development programme?

6 How does the principal know what the needs for staff development are?

7 Who contributes to the shaping of the staff development programme each year?

Extension of the QLC Model at your School

8 With your continued access to the NEMP resources next year, how might you work with other teachers to disseminate the NEMP reports and assessment practices?

9 How might you modify the QLC model for working with teachers at your school?

10 Do you see ways that classroom visits could be included in your model?

11 Do you consider that the QLC model is a viable professional development model for your school, and its ways of working? State why/why not?

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