

**ENGAGING IN SUSTAINABLE COLLABORATIVE
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: The case of a
West Auckland school cluster initiative**

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ABSTRACT

Leaders may benefit from having a deeper understanding of the factors that allow change initiatives to succeed and be sustained before they embark on such ventures. Understanding and insight about the process of change can make the difference between failure and success of innovation (Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher, 2009). This research set out to examine experiences of teachers and leaders in a West Auckland collaborative school-wide cluster initiative in order to identify what motivated their engagement, and to explore issues of sustaining improvement. A qualitative methodology was utilised for the study. Ten different West Auckland schools from the Waitakere Area Principals' Association 2020 Learning Plan took part in the research. Data were gathered from 66 teachers who responded via an online questionnaire, and from four principals in a focus group interview.

The research findings confirmed three challenges that teachers and leaders face: motivating engagement, managing change and sustaining improvement. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs, leadership actions and collaboration were identified as having influence on these challenges. Two conclusions are drawn. Firstly, sustainability begins with effective initiation and on-going management of the change to secure long-term improvement. Secondly, key leadership actions: shared decision making, shared learning together, and shared leadership create collaborative conditions in schools that influence teacher attitudes and beliefs. One recommendation is for leaders to develop an understanding of factors that contribute to sustainable improvement, including the dilemma of moving forward versus consolidating change. Another is for leaders to create collaborative conditions through their actions so that teachers are motivated to engage and sustain improvement.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFoL	Assessment for learning
EHSAS	Enhancing higher standards in schools
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICT	Information communication technology
LPDP	Literacy professional development project
NLC	Network learning communities
OECD	Organisation for economic co-operation and development
PB4L	Positive behaviour for learning
PD	Professional development
PL	Professional learning
SMT	Senior management team
SOLO	Structure of the observed learning outcome
UNESCO	United Nations educational, science and cultural organisation
WAPA	Waitakere area principals' association
WASIP	Waitakere area schooling improvement programme

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In a school context, teacher professional learning and development are the vehicles used to bring about sustainable change leading to improved educational outcomes for students. Schooling improvement for the specific purpose of raising student achievement is one widely agreed outcome (Timperley, 2011), but professional learning and development can also be linked with strengthening the school's ability to manage change or be innovative (Annan, 2009). Teacher learning and development can be utilised to change teacher achievement, skills and attitudes, and is even viewed as an effective way to improve job performance and satisfaction (Hattie, 2009b). Research tells us that the degree to which teachers engage with professional learning and development has a huge bearing on sustainable student achievement (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). If educational leaders agree with Hopkins (2007, p. 9) that our moral purpose is in "raising the bar and closing the gap in terms of student learning and achievement", then gaining a greater understanding of the factors that affect teachers' engagement leading to sustainable change should be of value.

Background and setting

I am an Associate Principal at a West Auckland primary school. One of the key drivers that has shaped my thinking recently is my involvement in a regional cluster project looking at lifting the academic achievement of the students in our area. This project, called the Waitakere Area Principals' Association 2020 Learning Plan involved sixteen schools in its two year pilot, and has grown to include twenty two in its third year. Based on the work of Stoll and Fink (1996), the project seeks to manage change and grow leadership capacity at individual school and cross-cluster level.

The Waitakere Area Principals' Association (WAPA) 2020 Schooling Sector Learning Plan was first formulated in 2006. Its aim is to raise achievement across the

Waitakere Area in West Auckland, and it comprises three strands: Student Achievement, Leadership, and Community Engagement. The global goal for the WAPA 2020 learning plan is to “raise student achievement across the Waitakere area through the development of systemic, collaborative, sustainable cluster initiatives” (City of Manukau Education Trust, 2012, p. 6). The two year pilot for the project began with sixteen West Auckland schools in 2009 as a response to the then Waitakere City Council’s desire to develop an education plan for the city, and improve the education and employment opportunities for the young people of the region. It was to encompass all Education Sector groups – Early Childhood Education, Schooling Sector, Tertiary, Special Needs, Maori, Pasifika, Refugee and Migrant and Adult Education. The city council employed a coordinator to interview leaders in all sectors, and to provide each sector with data to inform their section of the Waitakere City Council Learning Plan. The coordinator came to a WAPA General meeting and outlined the Council vision. With principals they did a visioning exercise that captured around 60 principals’ visions for what they wanted education to be for students in the region. A steering committee was formed from interested volunteer principals, and through the work of this Reference Group the pilot project emerged.

The pilot programme was structured around three strands: student achievement, community engagement and leadership. Schools opted into any or all of the strands as they saw fit and sent representatives to strand workshops and professional development days to join with colleagues from other schools. One of the goals of the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan is to grow leadership capacity at all levels, and the pilot project’s initial focus was on growing principals’ leadership capacity and also that of their leadership teams. The WAPA 2020 Trust was formed in 2010 – as Phase 2 of the project began. Phase 2 began in 2011 and now includes 22 Schools from five clusters in the Waitakere Region. These schools represent a range of socio-economic areas (Decile 3-10), and are a mixture of primary, intermediate, secondary and special schools. The Learning Plan involves 22 principals, 70 senior leaders, 1000+ teachers, and 16,000 students, of whom 7,800 are Maori or Pasifika (WAPA 2020, 2012).

My involvement with WAPA 2020 began virtually from the beginning as the principal of my school was part of the Reference Group. This group worked for two years bringing the Learning Plan pilot together and I heard about the progress they were making over that time. Once WAPA 2020 was launched and our Board of Trustees had given us permission to be a part of it, my initial role as Associate Principal was to communicate the ideas from the three strands of the WAPA 2020 project to the other leaders in our school, and together agree what learning to incorporate into our school systems and practices. Increased involvement, as time has gone on, of our syndicate leaders, and our curriculum and other learning area leaders in the various strands of WAPA 2020, has given our staff increased opportunities for shared leadership and a greater degree of influence in decision making. Hence I have first-hand knowledge and experience of being involved in a school-wide improvement initiative that is driven by the participating schools to meet common goals.

This research study into what motivates teachers to engage in school-wide improvement initiatives and commit to sustaining new learning is motivated by my experiences with WAPA 2020. I remember being impressed by the level of commitment from principals in terms of school resources, time and effort. I equally remember, in the first year especially, feeling overwhelmed by my responsibility for translating the key learning from the project into our own school. When I considered all the hard work and effort that was expended I wasn't sure how, or if, I could facilitate sustained learning and make lasting changes amongst our teachers. It seemed to me that some teachers were really enthusiastic about the new learning opportunities while others were quite cynical or resistant. I wondered if there was anything I could do to help those resistant teachers feel motivated to engage. I realised I didn't know much at all about how to successfully initiate or manage an improvement initiative, and thought that I was probably not alone in that lack of knowledge. To be fair, the Reference Group had considered this gap in knowledge, which was why one of the strands was all about growing leadership knowledge and capacity in change management. My concern about the challenges I was facing in motivating and engaging teachers, managing the change process and securing sustained improvement stimulated my interest in finding out solutions. This research

has enabled me to investigate what teachers and principals think successfully meets these challenges.

Rationale for the study

The world of education has seen huge changes over the past decade or so with an increasing emphasis on evidence based practice and schooling improvement (Harris, 2002; Stoll & Earl, 2003; Timperley, 2011). Much of the change has been in the form of imposed reform on schools and leaders from government policy and expectations. It is a great challenge for school leadership to transform, what is in many cases, an imposed government mandate for school improvement into a genuine collaborative learning opportunity. In contrast, the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan grew from the ground up rather than from top down as local educators united to try and find a way to collaboratively make a difference for the students in their region, and set out on a journey to try and find the best way to do this. Investigating the various aspects of the development journey experienced by the network of schools in WAPA 2020 could provide interesting information for other school clusters or other school leaders with a genuine interest in bringing about change that impacts on student achievement.

School improvement is “intimately related” (Fullan, 1990, p. 3) to staff development. There has been a marked shift in professional development or staff development provision from ad-hoc one-off courses to school-wide collaborative inquiry based projects (Fullan, 2001; Timperley, 2011). School-wide professional development has been shown to achieve far more for school improvement than individual focused professional development did (Harris, 2002). This shift could challenge some school communities to re-evaluate the way their professional learning programmes are delivered, and to grow in their understanding of collaborative practices. The schools involved in the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan came together to learn and grow as a cluster, and then took what they had learned and tried to apply it to their own schools and situations. The application of that learning looked different in every school. It is conjectured that cluster initiatives for learning, and subsequent application of

learning by teachers is not without its problems, but there is a gap in the literature on this subject.

Current research shows collaborative learning communities and collaborative practices in change management have the greatest positive effect on teacher efficacy and effectiveness (Frost, Durrant, Head & Holden, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Harris, 2002; Martin-Kniep, 2008; Sergiovanni, 2000; Wagner et al., 2006). However, collaboration only occurs with the full engagement of the participants, and achieving this is not as simple as it may sound. There is little literature on teacher perspectives of improvement initiatives that provide an insight into what teachers think, what motivates them to engage in new initiatives, and why they engage to differing degrees.

If change is to be effective, then it should be sustained in the on-going practices of teachers and schools. The sustainability of school improvement is brought about through lasting change. It is not enough to recognise the need for change or even to embrace the change process. The key lies in sustaining that improvement so that it becomes 'institutionalised' (Duke, 2004; Fullan, 2001) meaning it can survive things like changes in staff, downshifts in funding, or attrition due to time. Systems and structures are essential supports, but if classroom teachers do not embrace the changes to the point that they influence and alter their personal practical knowledge and practice then change will not be sustained. Timperley (2011) highlights the important role that leadership capability also brings to sustainability, pointing out that the adaptive capacity of the school as an organisation is developed through lead learners learning how to develop the "adaptive expertise" of their teachers. It is the collaborative partnership between all the different members of the school community, with all their different roles, that seems to make the difference. Again, in relation to sustaining cluster initiated change, the literature is not specific and a gap of knowledge is evident.

Research aims and questions

Four research aims were proposed for this investigation. These were:

- 1.To examine experiences of collaborative school-wide improvement initiatives from the perspective of teachers and leaders in a West Auckland school cluster initiative.
- 2.To identify challenges and successes teachers and leaders have experienced when involved in school-wide collaborative learning.
- 3.To explore issues of sustainability in initiatives related to teacher improvement.
4. To contribute to the wider body of knowledge that exists in relation to collaborative school-wide learning within school settings.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. Why are schools challenged when they participate in school-wide or region wide improvement initiatives?
2. What approaches are successful in implementing a West Auckland school-wide improvement initiative?
3. What challenges and successes have teachers and leaders experienced when involved in such improvement initiatives?
4. What can be learned about sustaining improvement in this context?

Thesis organisation

This thesis is set out in six chapters.

Chapter One

Chapter One is an introduction to the research project describing the background and rationale for the investigation, and the research aims and questions that guided it.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two is a literature review that investigates what has already been said about the research themes. It begins by looking at educational reform in New Zealand placing the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan within this context. Factors that

affect teacher motivation and engagement, building capacity, and managing the change process are considered. The importance of collaborative cultures and the challenges of collaboration and change management are also explored.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three describes the qualitative methodology chosen for this investigation and the data collection methods employed – the questionnaire and focus group. The rationale for the selection of methodological framework and research methods are explained. Data analysis strategies for each method, aspects of validity and ethical issues are discussed.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents the research data and analysis of the findings from the teacher questionnaire and the principals' focus group interview. Emerging themes are identified.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five contains a discussion of the findings based on the emerging themes. The research data is discussed and linked to the literature review in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six summarises the overall findings of the investigation and brings into consideration the limitations of the research. Recommendations for future practice and research are made.

The following chapter reviews the literature around change management and its challenges, the role of professional development and learning in this, issues concerning sustainability of change and factors that motivate teachers to engage in professional learning.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter begins by painting the big picture of educational reform in New Zealand and the effect it has had on New Zealand schools over the last two decades and considers the historic influence on current professional learning and development. The next part of the chapter investigates what the literature has to say about teachers engaging in professional learning and factors that motivate them to do so. The concept of building capacity in order to sustain improvement is explored at an individual level, an organisational and a regional level. Managing the change process and the role professional learning and development plays in that change is considered next, along with the importance of leadership. The next part of the chapter discusses collaborative cultures and the importance of relational trust; the challenges of teachers engaging in collaborative learning and the parallels to the challenges of change management.

Reform and improvement initiatives

To understand the difference of the Waitakere Area Principals' Association (WAPA) 2020 Learning Plan to many other cluster or region-wide initiatives, both in New Zealand and internationally, it is worthwhile to understand the educational environment in which it was conceived.

We live in a world of rapid change and increasing complexity. The New Zealand education system, in the last twenty years, has seen a huge degree of change. The *Tomorrow's Schools* document (Parliament of New Zealand, 1988) signalled a significant change in roles and relationships within the school system. Policy and administrative reforms dominated the first half of the 1990's, then came engaging low socioeconomic communities in schooling, before giving way to a much more explicit focus on raising student achievement (Annan, 2009). Former Secretary of Education Howard Fancy (2009, p. 40) quotes a study of the reforms – "Rarely has any country engaged in such a sustained and far-reaching overhaul of its education system." This shift has not only been in New Zealand. Duke (2004), when

discussing the nature of educational reform in the United States over the last 50 years, says that much of their reform has come from external drivers that seem to have little to do with education but much more to do with foreign policy, concerns about finances, perceived threats to the nation's well-being, or even employer expectations. He says that educators often confront calls for reform with caution or resistance.

When considering the influence of government policy on education reform Timperely (2011) suggests that it is the policy environments in which schools operate that make a difference to the achievement of outcomes. She recommends a much greater involvement of policy officials in “engaging in systematic and deliberate professional learning about the effectiveness of their professional activities” (p. 173) to make sure they provide relevant learning opportunities and appropriate levels of funding with conditions for sustainability built into them. This notion of using teacher professional learning and development to achieve the delivery of policy directives signals a shift from traditional methods or expectations of policy reform and goals. Recent examples from New Zealand that demonstrate this include the large Network Learning Communities (NLC) work begun in 2008 for the specific purpose of bringing school leaders together, in professional learning groups, to develop their understanding of The New Zealand Curriculum and to support its implementation in their schools. These groups were led and facilitated by sector leaders from within the group. Advisors from School Support Services provided guidance and resources to the sector leaders (Ward & Henderson, 2011). Another example is the Literacy Professional Development Project(LPDP), delivered by Learning Media on behalf of the Ministry of Education. This was a national project that provided whole school professional development in literacy to primary and intermediate schools. The project, which began in 2004 and ended in 2010, sought to achieve sustainable improvement in schools' literacy practices by supporting schools to engage in evidence-based inquiry at both the macro (school-wide) and micro (classroom) levels (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Both of these examples of improvement initiatives demonstrate the partnership between schools and external officials or “experts”, together seeking to bring about

change. Sponsored access to such support is available as long as the professional development a school is seeking to do falls within the scope of the official focus of the Ministry of Education. There are challenges for schools when they participate in school-wide or region-wide improvement initiatives, whether they have external support or not. The Waitakere Area Principals' Association (WAPA) 2020 Learning Plan, which began in 2006, is an example of a "home grown", rather than a Ministry of Education initiated, region-wide improvement initiative for the purpose of raising "student achievement across the Waitakere area through the development of systemic, collaborative, sustainable cluster initiatives" (City of Manukau Education Trust, 2012, p. 6). The teachers and leaders from the schools involved in the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan are the research subjects for this study.

Historic influence on professional learning and development

Tracing the history of educational professional learning and development provides a picture of how attitudes about and expectations of teachers have changed, and helps clarify the present model of professional development and learning informing the WAPA 2020 project.

For decades there has been great scepticism concerning the influence of teaching and teacher education on improving student learning. Influential reports from the 1960s and 1970s depicted schools as making little difference to student achievement, and helped develop the view in some that teacher influence "could never be significantly equitable or transformational" (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xx). Guskey (1986) states that the historic view of professional development was based on a training paradigm that implied teachers were deficit in skills and knowledge. This view has shifted in more recent years based on evidence emerging from more in-depth multi-level research studies that identified the influence individual teachers could have on student achievement (Cuttance, 1998). Teamed with economic evidence that increased student outcomes boosts annual growth rates of per capita GDP (Hanushek, 2005), pressure to improve school quality has multiplied. In an OECD Education Indicators report (OECD, 2005) professional development of teachers was seen as a key policy lever at the level of the education system. Loxley,

Johnston, Murchan, Fitzgerald and Quinn (2007, p. 265) point to the United Kingdom and Irish curriculums' "realisation of the importance of and emphasis on professional development for teachers to effect change in practice." However, Hanushek (2005) from the International Academy of Education and International Institute for Educational Planning in UNESCO stated that while he believed in the importance of teacher quality he rejected professional development programmes as a key policy lever because they had, on the whole, given disappointing results.

In New Zealand, The Ministry of Education state that their policy and strategy efforts are intended to result in improved education for all New Zealanders. Similarly to the United Kingdom and Ireland, The Ministry of Education states that, "Research indicates that professional development is a key lever for improving outcomes for students" (Ministry of Education, 2010a). The Ministry of Education states that strong leadership, effective teaching and effective partnerships with parents and whānau make the biggest difference for students, and that schools have told them they want professional development focused on these areas (Ministry of Education, 2010b). This government policy is designed to produce a high-income, knowledge-based economy that includes all New Zealanders and to equip "all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st century" (Ministry of Education, 2011). But while the Ministry of Education state that their emphasis on providing professional development is based on evidence of what works best, Eraut (1994) has a cautionary view. His view is that curriculum policy is often formed out of government reports and the views of curriculum experts who he says "cite research to gain credibility and may also engage in research themselves. But their policy recommendations do not depend on such research... because there is rarely any one-to-one correspondence between curriculum decisions and research findings" (Eraut, 1994, p. 32).

Despite Eraut's cautions, recent projects in New Zealand such as the Literacy Professional Development Project and Enhancing High Standards in Schools (EHSAS) have evidence bases that demonstrate sustained student achievement. The WAPA 2020 Learning Plan structure was partly modelled on principles learned through involvement with EHSAS, and has as its three main strands some of what

the Ministry of Education state make the biggest difference to students – leadership, student achievement and community engagement.

Motivation and engagement

Involving teachers in professional learning and development is seen by many as an effective way to grow teacher knowledge, change practice and improve student outcomes (Fullan, 1990; Harris, 2002; Martin-Kniep, 2008; Timperley, et al., 2007). There is some research that draws connections between professional development and teacher motivation and shows some of the varied reasons why teachers choose to engage in professional development.

Motivators to engage

Intrinsic motivators emerged as prime factors in studies by Blase and Blase (2000), and The Oregon School Boards Association (Hynds & McDonald, 2009). The most prevalent intrinsic motivators were the effect of leaders talking with teachers to promote reflection, and to promote professional growth; self-respect, responsibility and a sense of accomplishment. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators were found to be relevant in studies by Stout (1996) and Livneh and Livneh (1999). Their findings identified high internal motivation to learn and high external motivation (i.e. salary enhancement and networking opportunities) as key determinants.

Timperley et al. (2007) outline a number of motivators for teachers in their Best Evidence Synthesis of Teacher Professional Learning and Development. They credit school organisation as having “arguably the greatest influence on teachers’ practice and their motivation to engage in professional development” (p. 26). One other motivator was the use of assessment information which motivated teachers to engage either at the beginning or during the professional learning programme (Wagner et al. 2006). Another motivator was the importance of the perceived relevance of the professional learning to their teaching practice (Nolen, Ward & Horn, 2011).

Motivation is integral to the learning process and interwoven into every aspect (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Aspects such as the context in which teachers' practise being supportive of learning, the content offered being relevant to teachers' classroom practice and the learning activities being meaningful all have a possible role to play. Such aspects being present usually promote "iterative cycles of reflection and seeking new knowledge, with strong impact on teaching practice and student outcomes" (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 29). Under these circumstances teachers are likely to engage in on-going learning. If none of these conditions are present then motivation is likely to be low. Leithwood and Beatty (2008) say that leaders who integrate knowledge of teachers' thoughts and feelings about reforms into their collaborative decision-making help to engender a "sense of shared purpose that, with collective efficacy, adds to motivation" (p. 83) to implement such reforms.

Motivating teachers to change practice

Since research tells us that professional development and learning makes a difference both to the motivation of teachers to engage and to improved student achievement (Fullan, 1990; Martin-Kniep, 2008; Timperley et al., 2007) it makes sense for professional development and learning programmes to be as effective and appropriate as possible. Effective new learning should be able to bring about a change in teacher practice.

To successfully prepare effective teachers, teacher education and professional learning and development "should lay a foundation for life-long learning...[which] must become something more than a cliché" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.359). "Learning takes place during use" (Eraut, 1994, p. 20) so that there is a transformation from theory into practice. Learning to use an idea in one context does not necessarily mean it can be transferred directly into a new context. Each new situation requires an adaptation of ideas. Much of teaching is routinised skill and procedure (Eraut, 1994; Hattie, 2009b), but what lifts a teacher from competence to excellence is a shift from proficiency with the routine to the skilful handling of non-routine matters (Eraut, 1994). Such ability to be innovative and flexible when routines are not enough calls for teachers to be "adaptive learning

experts” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; Hattie, 2009b; Timperley, 2011, p.87). Adaptive experts “are prepared for effective lifelong learning that allows them continuously to add to their knowledge” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.3). They know “when and from where to seek help” (Timperley, 2011, p.181), they have empathy so that they can take the perspective of a student (Hattie, 2009b), and they are constantly reviewing student progress in order to address teaching strategies (Timperley, 2011). Finding ways to grow teachers’ self-efficacy so that they have faith in their own abilities to make a difference for their students is important (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Teachers with this faith are developing the “adaptive expertise” Timperley says produces the sustainability of “on-going learning and improvement” (2011, p. 163). Without this self-belief teachers may not be motivated to keep pressing on with the challenges inherent in changing their practice.

Professional learning can provide opportunities for teachers to develop awareness of information and skills that are consistent with their current values and beliefs, but many times this is not the case. Dissonance occurs when the new learning clashes with teachers’ existing beliefs or values and is only resolved by the acceptance or rejection of the new position (Timperley et al., 2007). This dissonance, when managed successfully, provides the opportunity for leaders and teachers to become aware of the ways in which they are inclined to defensive rather than productive ways of reasoning (Cardno, 2012). When defensive reasoning is used the overriding concern is to block information that is felt to create unpleasantness or lessen one’s control of the situation. Cardno believes that “the most effective professional development that leaders and teachers can engage in involves the understanding and skill learning related to uncovering a defensive theory of action and adopting a productive theory of action” (2012, p. 59). When productive reasoning is used one is able to take the emerging information or challenges and learn from them rather than block them.

Teachers that understand the principles of how people learn can not only help their students better, but can also help each other recognise possible dissonance and learn from it together. Schools that can work in such a way understand that “learning is primarily a social activity” (Hattie, 2009b, p. 246), it is “community-centered” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.33), in that “our intelligence is derived from our interactions with others” (Martin-Kniep, 2008, p.xiv). Our ability to make sense of our world and interact successfully with it, to learn from our experiences is due to our collaborative and collective problem finding and solving, and as such providing supportive, enriched and flexible settings where people can learn from one another is essential (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Martin-Kniep, 2008).

Building capacity to manage change

Throughout the literature concerned with school improvement, change in schools and sustainable leadership there is a common thread. Leaders cannot do it alone. Teachers play a vital role in leading learning individually and on a school wide basis. It is a leader’s challenge to find ways to grow teachers’ capacity to lead and to manage change effectively (Hoban, 2002; Wagner et al., 2006).

Research reveals that teachers’ beliefs about their abilities can make a huge difference to their actual effectiveness. High levels of teacher self-efficacy are “strongly associated with higher levels of student performance” (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 45). Within the context of school improvement capacity is the ability to enable all students to reach higher standards. Such capacity may be built by improving the performance of teachers, increasing their self-efficacy, showing teachers they are valued and important, adding more resources, materials or technology or by demonstrating organisational flexibility to meet needs such as restructuring how tasks are undertaken (Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2002; James & Connolly, 2000, Leithwood & Beatty, 2008).

Building capacity at an individual teacher level

Most capacity-building strategies for school improvement target individual teachers. Sergiovanni (2000) states that teachers count in helping schools to be effective.

Building capacity among teachers and focusing that capacity on students and their learning is the crucial factor. He believes that continuous capacity building and continuous focusing is best done with communities of practice. Internal capacity building is the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing pupil learning (Stoll, 2000). There are a number of variables in building teacher capacity. These include teacher knowledge and skills, and teacher capacity to teach in different ways. Teacher disposition to meet new standards for student learning and to make necessary changes in practice is also a factor, as is teacher attitude toward the subject matter and around their expectation of student achievement (Timperley, 2011). If teachers believe they can make a difference there is a corresponding transfer to children's beliefs in themselves, and an increased likelihood that teachers will engage in classroom and school improvement initiatives (Ross, 1998; Smylie, 1990, cited in Leithwood & Beatty, 2008).

Hattie's (2009b) research states that the factor that has the highest effect size on student achievement is teacher effectiveness. Leaders that create an environment that provides individualised support, intellectual stimulation and modelling, build capacity for teacher effectiveness (Hattie, 2009b). They build the knowledge and skills staff need to accomplish organisational goals, along with their commitment and resilience and the disposition to persist in applying that knowledge and skill (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Ultimately the success of a school depends upon the success teachers have in working with their respective classes. This happens most effectively when they are supported by other teachers and work together collaboratively. They need opportunities to enquire into and reflect upon their own practice. Sergiovanni (2005) says that "opportunity and capacity together" (p. 134) are essential for effective performance. Opportunity refers to teachers' perceptions of their options for increasing knowledge, skills and rewards. Leaders need to give teachers the opportunity to learn and respond. Capacity refers to the ability to get things done, to gather the resources needed to get things done and to interact with others who can help get things done.

Building capacity at an organisational level

This interacting with others who can help get things done is one of the hallmarks of an improving school. Pritchard and McDiarmid (2006) state that building school capacity comprises of development of teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions, the strength of the school-wide professional community and coherence of the school programme. At the school level conditions need to be such that a climate of learning is generated where change and innovation can be implemented. Among other things there needs to be a commitment to staff learning and development with practical efforts to involve staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions and a commitment to collaborative planning (Harris, 2002). Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins (1997) identified a series of conditions at the classroom level that facilitate and sustain effective teaching and learning. These include authentic relationships, rules and boundaries, planning resources and preparation, teacher's repertoire of teaching styles and internal models, pedagogic partnerships within and outside the classroom, and reflection on teaching. If both school and classroom conditions are met simultaneously there is the potential to build capacity within and across the organisation.

Stoll (2000) contends that there are four imperatives at the core of leadership of and for learning that enhance capacity in an organisation. These are keeping a clear learning vision so that it permeates learning at all levels of the school organisation (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008); creating the right emotional learning climate by devoting time and energy to building trust and openness between staff, pupils and the community (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009); becoming learning experts and building an inclusive learning community so that parents and the school community are invited to join in collaborative learning opportunities (Martin-Kniep, 2008); and to practice organisational learning, because a school engaged in organisational learning works systematically to develop its learning capacity and therefore its ability to keep adapting and changing as and when necessary (Robinson, et al., 2009).

Building capacity across a region

One of the actions Hattie (2009a) proposes, in order for New Zealand schools to move forward, is for them to stop competing with each other and to find ways to partner together across a region. His suggestions include a region of schools sharing one board of trustees, a cluster or group of schools making resourcing decisions together, greater collaboration among schools, government agencies, Education Review Office and all involved in schools in order to bridge the “many islands of excellence in New Zealand” (p. 131).

Capacity building across a region begins in schools. Hattie highlights Levin’s belief that schools can well be the unit of analysis for improvement. Levin is quoted as stating, “Improving capacity requires sustained effort...this means that there are policy, leadership and system-procedure implications to capacity building” (2008, p.126). Hopkins (2007), based on his policy work in the United Kingdom, believes that encouraging local schools to work together will build capacity for continuous improvement at local level. This model of school improvement Hopkins calls “system leadership” where school leaders “care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own” (2007, p. 152). They do this by creating a culture where the learning potential of all students is at the core and where forms of internal collaboration on personalised learning and professional teaching enable schools “to network in order to raise standards across local areas, nationally and even globally” (p. 161).

Wagner et al. use an “ecology of change framework” (2006, p.133) to describe the way that schools, districts or regions can work more strategically for change. The framework has three phases – preparing, envisioning and enacting with three change levers – data, accountability and relationships playing a pivotal role in successful implementation of all three phases. Martin-Kniep (2008) has developed a rubric depicting the progression from readiness to capacity at the organisational level which has similar aspects. Hargreaves (1994) also talks about the use of qualitative and quantitative data or information that can be shared across schools to build up a picture of student success and well-being in schools. The on-going analysis of this data informs the organisation’s work. Hattie (2009a) calls for a greater evaluative

capacity in schools, which, when combined with relational collaboration across schools in a region, helps clarify the goals and direction of the cluster. Fullan (2005) calls on the “district” to assume responsibility to help schools develop the capacity to function in effective, autonomous ways but in a common direction. This is done by building a coalition of leaders at the school level. He believes that the school’s capacity is heightened and commitment to change is activated when districts engage schools in lateral capacity building. An example of this is when they routinely work collectively and plan collaboratively to shape the direction of change together.

In New Zealand groups of schools or people involved in education collaborating together for specific purposes is not new. A quick search on the internet shows a diverse range of groups ranging from schools forming internet “loops” or clusters (National Network, n.d.), to regional clusters of schools working together to more effectively market themselves to international students, to Ministry of Education ‘Network Learning Communities’ formed for the implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ward& Henderson, 2011), to the Virtual Learning Network, which is a Ministry of Education funded network of school clusters and educational institutions collaborating to provide online access to a broad range of curriculum learning opportunities for students (Virtual Learning Network, n.d.).

Between 2006 and 2008 the NZ government funded 537 schools in 87 clusters for Extending High Standards in Schools (EHSAS) projects. These projects were predicated on “collaboration and student achievement” (Sweeney, 2011, p.2), and were linked to existing Ministry policy developments, such as “Schools Planning and Reporting”, “Schooling Improvement Policies”, and “The Schooling Strategy” (cited in Sweeney, 2011). Sweeney’s conclusions were that although EHSAS cluster leaders understood that their leadership was important to enable teacher change and improve student outcomes their leadership lacked the evaluative capability needed to assess effectiveness of school and cluster activities. “Systems that allow teachers and leaders to engage in inquiry” (Sweeney, 2011, p. 93) would have developed this capability.

O'Connell (2011) agrees with this from her work with the Literacy Professional Development Project (LPDP). Her findings suggest that when schools “engaged in an iterative inquiry, re-focusing on persistent issues of underachievement that still existed, investing in continued knowledge-building and establishing coherence of instructional practices across curriculum areas, they improved on their achievement gains over time” (O'Connell, 2011, p. 2).

Le Fevre (2010) states that leaders need to make sure they prioritise change by identifying new professional learning opportunities that “create coherence across initiatives” (p. 75). Fullan (1992) believes that staff development will never have its intended impact if it is grafted on to schools in the form of discrete, unconnected projects. There is a need for leaders to set directions for change and have an overarching plan that is connected, focused and reasonable in scope (Le Fevre, 2010).

Sweeney (2011) highlights the value of also building relational trust throughout the cluster, the value of engaging expert outside advice and keeping the focus of cluster goals needs-based. These New Zealand examples identify the need to use data effectively, build in systems of accountability and evaluation, and develop relationships or relational trust, which are all aspects of the “whole system ecology of change” Wagner et al. (2006, p.133) describe.

Sustaining improvement

The role of professional development and professional learning

Professional development and professional learning are important ways to manage sustainable change (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Timperley et al., 2007). The terms professional development and professional learning are often interchangeable, but have gained greater difference in meaning amongst some authors (Hoban, 2002; Timperley, 2011).

The historic view of professional development being a means to give teachers mastery of prescribed skills and knowledge resulted in a one-off workshop model that several studies (Fullan, 1991; Guskey, 1986; Howey & Joyce, 1978; Johnson, 1989; Lovitt & Clarke, 1988; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978; Wood & Thompson, 1980, all cited in Cheng and Ko, 2009) found to be ineffective. Timperley, et al. (2007) describe professional development as “an intentional, ongoing and systematic process” with the term having “taken on connotations of delivery of information to teachers to influence practices” (p. 3). Ferrier-Kerr, Keownand Hume (2008) summarise research that describe teachers typically attending short term professional development, chosen for them by others, presented by outside experts and using direct instruction all of which teachers have described as boring, irrelevant and unmemorable. Ferrier-Kerr, et al. (2008, p. 124) go on to say that “much professional development is deficit-focused, assumes teachers need information from outside experts, and ignores key principles of adult learning by seeing teachers as passive receptors and not as sources of knowledge in their own right.” Professional development therefore has become a rather negative term in the eyes of many.

The ineffective attempts to motivate teacher change using this approach resulted in ongoing research in professional research and teacher change, with a significant outcome being the focus shifting from teachers having professional development “done to them” to one of much greater ownership and reflective participation (Campbell, Lindsay & Phillips, 2002; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Ferrier-Kerr, et al., 2008). School-based professional development grew out of this based on a belief that it could “focus on specific students’ needs and immediate classroom application more than professional development conducted outside of school” (Cheng & Ko, 2009).

In recent years, the focus of professional development has been subject matter and teaching and learning (Cheng & Ko, 2009) with an increasing emphasis on shared ownership of change, commitment to collaboration and an open and supportive learning culture (Campbell, Lindsay & Phillips, 2002). This learning culture is supported by and described in a variety of ways. Harris (2001) describes it as

capacity building for improvement, Senge (1999) refers to schools as learning organisations, Wenger (1998) calls them professional communities of practice, and Fullan (1993) talks about change cultures. They all have in common the central idea that "strong professional learning communities can foster teacher learning and instructional improvement" (Little, 2002, p. 936).

Professional learning, rather than professional development, is a term that has emerged as schools are seen as learning organisations (Evans-Andris, 2010; Martin-Kniep, 2008; Wagner et al., 2006). The term itself is not new, but is receiving greater focus in recent years. Professional learning implies "an internal process in which individuals create professional knowledge through interaction" (Timperley, 2011, p.5). Timperley (2011), in recommending a shift in thinking from professional development to professional learning presents a conceptual framework of professional learning that actively involves teachers in their learning, is demanding of their professionalism, and importantly, has demonstrated improved outcomes for students. She also highlights the active process of systematic inquiry that denotes professional learning. This inquiry into the effectiveness of practice is referenced both to the teacher themselves and to their students. The final shift in thinking that Timperley (2011) believes makes a difference is that professional learning needs to occur at all levels of the education system, from policy to practice, thus not expecting entrenched problems to be solved by our teachers alone. This is because teachers' beliefs and judgements about government intentions have a big influence on the efforts teachers make to understand and incorporate new learning or policy into their practice (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Fullan (2005) suggests that successful problem solving requires the whole system to be involved in co-dependent partnerships.

This conceptual framework of professional learning is rooted in a growing acceptance amongst the teacher education community that encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners and conduct inquiry into their own classroom problems is a far more effective way of creating engagement and sustainability of

long term professional learning than the more traditional expert-led professional development programmes (Comber, Kamler, Hood, Moreau & Painter, 2004; Ferrier-Kerr, et al., 2008; Timperley et al., 2007). Ferrier-Kerr, et al. (2008, p.125) describe collaborative teacher-centered action research between educational researchers and teacher-researchers as “one example of a way to facilitate teachers’ long-term professional growth and build their capacity to solve problems of professional practice in context.” This view is supported by Comber, et al. (2004) with their Australian research project in Literacy; Lai and McNaughton’s New Zealand work in reading comprehension (Lai, McNaughton, Timperley & Hsiao, 2009); and by Russell Bishop and his colleagues in the work they have done around improving Maori students’ achievement with Te Kotahitanga (Bishop, Berryman, Powell & Teddy, 2005).

Interestingly, research confirms that the involvement of external experts with teachers creates greater success for positive student outcomes, than just within-school initiatives (Hattie, 2009b). Identifying factors that support teachers to grow in their ability to be innovative in their professional practice has been the subject of research for many years (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). This growing ability to be innovative Wagner et al. (2006, p. 138) call “adaptive work”, the production of which transforms organisations into knowledge-generating rather than knowledge-using, and gives organisations flexibility to keep meeting “adaptive challenges” (p.10) thus sustaining their organisational learning (Timperley, 2011).

The role of the principal

Timperley et al. (2007), highlight the important role school leaders’ play in promoting professional learning so that substantive positive outcomes for students are sustained. Leaders that achieved such outcomes used a combination of the following. They developed a vision for possible student outcomes that teachers believed in and engaged with. They managed and organised their staff and their resources well. According to Timperley et al. (2007) they did this by reducing competing demands, by ensuring opportunities to learn were focused and

productive, and by promoting participation in professional learning communities that were focused on “promoting the teaching-learning relationship in evidence-informed ways” (p. 193).

Effective leaders do not leave the learning to their teachers but become involved themselves; setting an example by modelling “growing on the job” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 223). Robinson, et al. (2009) identified that leaders who promoted and participated in teacher professional learning and development achieved the largest positive effect on student achievement. Working together with teachers to plan, coordinate and evaluate teachers, and teaching, provided useful evaluations for teachers (Evan-Andris, 2010; Robertson, 2005). Leaders who were actively involved in professional learning had a deeper understanding of what was needed to achieve and sustain improvements for student achievement and well-being, and were able to provide useful advice about how to solve teaching problems (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Such leaders were connected to their teachers and promoted a strong sense of collective responsibility (Wagner et al., 2006).

The challenge for leaders is to create a culture where their influence motivates teachers to engage, because there is literature which suggests that unless teachers also see themselves as fully involved and as genuine co-leaders in the whole professional learning community, meaningful change will not ‘scale up’ to include all teachers and classrooms (Ferrier-Kerr, et al., 2008). Building a learning culture, becoming a learning organisation, where the learning of leadership is for everyone, including the principal, promotes “norms of respectful communication, openness to critical friendship and reciprocal learning at all levels” (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 69).

The concepts of sustaining change are linked to those of sustainable leadership. Fullan (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) agree that sustainable leadership has a fundamental moral purpose, that it preserves the best of what has been learnt over time and across successive leaders, that it develops leadership throughout the organisation in an increasingly distributed manner and that collaboration and

networking with other schools is a strong way to build capacity and accountability. What leaders do is crucial to how their organisation grows and sustains change (Duke, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1999). Sergiovanni (2000) believes that “deep change” (p. 160) in schools involves changing school cultures. These changing school cultures have a lot to do with shifting notions about leadership from traditional, hierarchical centralised authority and its control over teachers to one that encourages collaboration between principals and teachers, collegiality and norms of mutual influence (Evans-Andris, 2010).

One factor that built confidence and motivated teachers to sustain their commitment was leaders giving time for the consolidation of new learning. Teachers need multiple opportunities to learn, with sufficient frequency and over a sufficiently long period of time for deep learning of new content and skills to take place (Timperley et al., 2007).

O’Connell (2011) identifies the difficulty of sustaining change, but points out that there is no agreement on the definition of sustainability, whether it is measured primarily by particular practices being evident over time (Century & Levy, 2004) or by ongoing and improved student achievement (Timperley et al., 2007). Her work with the Literacy Professional Development Project (LPDP) identified two key dimensions for sustaining professional learning: coherence and inquiry. O’Connell describes coherence as the connection between the “big ideas” about improved practice and the “micro-world of teaching practice” (2011, p. 29). These big ideas may compete or conflict and so they must be processed or resolved in some way so that teachers can lift their thinking beyond the practices to the underlying principles that they represent. In this way, a school can develop a coherent set of principles and practices, both shared and explicit, which are regularly tested for their efficacy in improving outcomes for all students. In her study, the schools that improved on their student achievement gains had continued to develop their capability to inquire into issues of underachievement which had required a shift from evidence-based approaches in schools towards more systematic inquiry and knowledge-building practices.

Timperley et al. (2007) describe this monitoring and evaluating of change as leaders promoting evidence-informed, self-regulated learning in teachers. This resulted in sustainability of improvement in student outcomes because it gave teachers skills in inquiry and content knowledge and provided them with leadership support. Teacher and leadership self-evaluation is an important way for schools to gauge improvement and change, and is a strong mechanism for building the capacity for change and development.

Collaborative cultures

There is a lot of evidence that speaks of the benefits of collaborative leadership and culture for organisations. When the *Tomorrow's Schools* document (Parliament of New Zealand, 1988) was first released, the concepts of collaboration were expressed through its expectations around devolved leadership to local schools, expanded responsibility and accountability for school leaders, notions of participation and responsiveness to community needs (Cardno, 1990, 2012). These expectations have been further established through the revised New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), especially in its requirements for boards of trustees and schools' understanding of effective pedagogy. Features of collaborative practice in educational organisations contribute to professionalism and collegiality, and to partnership and community commitment to institutional goals that have as their ultimate focus the improvement of student achievement (Cardno, 2012).

Originally in the 1990's, the focus was on the role of the school leader in establishing and managing collaborative practices (Cardno, 1990). More recently focus has been on how leadership of collaborative practices can be spread wider to include teachers as leaders of learning (Durrant & Holden, 2006; Robinson, et al., 2009). Much of the literature refers to this as distributed leadership, or collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2011), within communities of practice or professional learning communities. The success of collaborative practice lies with the leader's skill and ability to actively manage the participation of others in decision-making (Cardno, 2012).

Professional learning communities

More and more, with the emphasis turning to collaborative models for professional development and learning, schools are exploring the concept of professional learning communities to help them transform themselves into true lifelong learning organisations that promote positive and lasting outcomes within schools and districts (Martin-Kniep, 2008). Professional learning communities are described in a variety of ways. Sergiovanni (2005) calls them collections of individuals who share ideas and beliefs, Wenger (1998) says they are members who join in common activities and learn together through the relationships with other people. DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005, cited in Martin-Kniep, 2008) describe groups of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research. “This conception poses an image of the teacher as a member of a professional community and as a lifelong learner, focusing upon collegial, career-long development” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 383).

Sergiovanni (2005) describes a community of practice as one that thinks about leadership as a practice rather than just a positional aspect based on individual agency. The entitlement to lead is balanced against the positional authority to lead. This sharing of power is one of the indicators of a learning community. Sergiovanni (2005) describes research that found that the more teachers were empowered, the greater the levels of satisfaction and performance were across the organisation. A learning community is all about developing self-regulating people capable of learning on their own who are non-dependent on externally imposed targets. Such ecological leadership emphasises a long term perspective, the encouragement of individual responsibility, and a value of interdependence, open systems and feedback loops, the cycling of resources and the embracing of adaptation (Robertson, 2005, 2011).

Timperley (2011) states that professional learning communities are better known for their history of advocacy rather than their effectiveness, but Martin-Kniep(2008) argues that an effective professional learning community has three main benefits. The first is that these communities can lead to improved student learning by enhancing teachers’ knowledge and skills. Improving teacher quality and expertise can have a direct link to improved student outcomes (Hattie, 2009b). The second

benefit is for teachers as they share in forums and find ways to observe and feedback to one another about the complex practice of teaching. This helps them develop a shared and collective expertise about teaching and learning, and gives them collegial support and a sense of personal agency (Robertson, 2005). Thirdly, professional learning communities benefit schools organisationally by providing an internal structure that incorporates and internalises the changes made by it. While external experts and facilitators can introduce and initiate positive school-based changes, sustainability of change is supported through professional learning communities and collaborative structures (Evans-Andris, 2010).

Relational trust

Collaboration and trust are “reciprocal processes” (Tschannen-Moran, 2001, p. 308) that depend upon and foster each other. Collaboration requires some level of trust to develop; the greater the level of trust developed the more openness and opportunity for genuine collaboration to occur.

In research conducted by Cheng and Ko (2009), looking at developing collaborative teams in Mathematics, their study showed that trust needs to be established before teachers can experience personal and professional growth. “Team development is an uphill task, particularly when team members are resistant to change. To build collégial relationships among team members, both team members and professional developers must make a commitment over an extended period of time” (Cheng & Ko, 2009, p. 16).

Brundrett (1998) believes that collaboration and collegiality are proven ways to bring teacher professional development and curriculum change together. Timperley (2011) draws the connection between collaborative cultures and the presence of relational trust. Trust is critical in contexts where the success of one person’s efforts is dependent on the contribution of others (Robinson, et al. 2009). Respectful relationships between leaders and teachers are vital for a well-functioning school and form the foundation for everything else. This interdependence creates a risk

and vulnerability that is worthwhile as Robinson et al. (2009, p. 183) have found a “strong statistical link between relational trust in schools and student improvement.”

Wagner et al.(2006) identify four elements of relational trust. These are respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity. Relational trust is built through day-by-day social exchanges and is based on respectful behaviours such as genuinely listening to others, willingly going beyond “the minimum requirements of their job descriptions” (Tschannen-Moran, 2001, p. 313), and believing in each other that colleagues have the knowledge, skills and ability to achieve what they set out to do. This sort of environment demonstrates collegiality by being strong on challenge but not on criticism, and by having a focus on “teaching as inquiry” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p35) with leaders as much a part of the learning as teachers (Timperley et al., 2007). This iterative focus on teaching and learning, grounded in relational trust, provides opportunity for capacity to be developed and sustained.

Teachers engaging in collaborative professional learning

Muijs and Harris (2006) reported from their research into teacher-led school improvement, that “high levels of engagement and involvement of staff in the developmental work of the school promoted high levels of self-esteem and a willingness among teachers to engage with new ideas” (p. 970). As Durrant and Holden (2006) say, “Teachers once initially engaged become committed, because as well as seeing the value in terms of school improvement, this kind of activity helps them to make meaning of their professional lives” (p. 167). Timperley et al.(2007) say that the key to improved student achievement is that teachers needed to engage with the professional learning process at some point. This engagement was seen as working with others in joint enterprise that is seen as important to the community (Nolen, Ward &Horn, 2011).

Another important implication for engaging teachers in professional learning comes from the provider or leader of learning taking the time to get teachers to engage with their existing “theories of practice” (Timperley, et al., 2007, p. 197). This may be because teachers’ professionalism has been recognised by the professional learning

deliverer, and not just ignored or dismissed as worthless. Crandall and Stoll's (2005) Network for Learning tool has a similar strategy. They suggest that teachers comparing their current reality to the learning focus help create the dissonance required for the reconstruction of current knowledge, and creates shift towards sustainability of new learning.

Challenges with collaboration

However, despite all the positives espoused for collaborative cultures there are several problems with teachers engaging in collaborative professional learning (Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2002; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Stoll & Louis, 2007). The success of a professional learning community is directly related to their willingness and propensity to change. This willingness is influenced by teachers' belief that the new learning will make a difference, by the perceived amount of support their leaders gave them and also by organisational and systemic issues such as timetabling, availability of resources and opportunities for planning and team teaching (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). There is a certain cynicism that collaborative practices are a political move to get staff "to do things they really don't want to do" (Stoll & Louis, 2007, p.170). Brundrett (1998) warns against "contrived collegiality" (p. 311), where collaboration is espoused but is instead used to manipulate and control under the disguise of democratic procedures. This contrived collegiality, Brundrett (1998) says, "is not a genuine exercise in collaboration but is, rather, a further method of ensuring centralized control and increased legitimacy for what is, in fact, a highly bureaucratic system" (p. 312).

Fullan (2001) draws attention to the ineffectiveness of weak collaboration, or even worse, the danger created by strong collaborative cultures when teachers reinforce each other's bad or ineffective practice. Leadership is the key to making the difference in these situations. There is a need to understand the difference between collegiality, which refers to the existence of high levels of collaboration, and congeniality, which is more about strong friendly relations which may or may not support the standards or purposes of the school (Hargreaves, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1999). Collaboration should be able to bring together different voices in the

educational and social community in an ethical way that does not induce compliance through contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994).

Teachers are concerned about increased workload, the competing pressure and demand on their time and decreased autonomy (Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2002). They may resist change for various reasons, such as unwillingness to risk failure, or a commitment to the status quo (Duke, 2004). This is because introducing new knowledge can require a deconstruction and reassembling of behavioural routines, which can cause “disorientation and the threat of a temporary (and the fear of a more than temporary) inability to cope” (Eraut, 1994, p. 26). Eraut goes on to say that the normal response to externally initiated change is to attempt to minimise its effect, which can result in poor engagement with the change initiative. Learning is change and while schools are adept at managing the learning process so that the anxiety levels produced by change are minimised, too much new learning at too fast a rate may cause an emotional response in teachers that translates into resistance. McQueen (2009, p.19) highlights the tension this brings to teachers when he says, “You can make education policy in offices in the capital, but you cannot implement it without the co-operation of teachers. They (teachers) are busy and to them change is disruptive.” The process of collaboration should be “viewed as the means to achieving educational ends and not as the ends in themselves” (Cardno, 2012, p. 125). Despite the challenges to effective collaboration there is a clear connection between improved student learning and achievement and collaborative leadership practices (Hallinger & Heck, 2011).

Challenges of Change Management

“Change management and collaborative management are two concepts which are inextricably entwined” (Cardno, 2012, p. 127). The strategies for collaborative professional development are basically change management strategies. Educational change is a complex system (Hoban, 2002), with a wide range of interconnected factors that influence the change process. These include factors such as school leadership, teachers’ lives and their work, school culture, school organisation and structure, politics, the context of the school and its community, and teacher learning

(Hoban, 2002). Wagner et al. (2006) identify three factors that drain momentum away from change: reaction to the urgent that overwhelms the important; compliance with proposed initiatives that mask scepticism or a 'wait and see' attitude and have nothing to do with genuine engagement; and isolation of adults at all levels in the education system that actively discourages their learning and capacity to improve their practice. While change leaders should pay attention to the larger, systemic functions of the organisation they should also be aware that change comes down to the individual (Hoban, 2002).

Whether or not change happens in practice is largely due to the quality of implementation. Many change initiatives flounder at this stage and lose momentum. Fullan (1990) calls this the "implementation dip". This is where a literal dip in performance and confidence occurs until new skills and understandings have been acquired. Fear of change is experienced and there is a feeling of being out of control. The absence of skills and abilities required to implement the change is felt. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005, p. 361) say that the adaptive innovation required to rethink key ideas, practices and even values can create high emotion, and that "the capacity to consider change without feeling threatened is an important ability." At this implementation stage leaders need to provide a balance between positive pressure on teachers and support for them. Too much pressure and stress will result; too much support and complacency will follow. Fullan (2001) suggests that effective leaders support others through the implementation dip by offering technical, emotional and physical support. Other key success factors at the implementation stage include having clarity about the purposes and intentions of the change, providing an appropriate mix of pressure and support, and sharing the control of implementation across the team. He also identifies the benefit of early evidence of success, sustaining enthusiasm and having the will and determination to persevere.

Change is complex because it is inextricably linked to our emotions (Eraut, 1994; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Whether it is imposed change or self-initiated change there is likely to be some degree of anxiety in the process. Managing these emotional responses to change, especially anxiety, is crucial in change

management. Most change involves taking a risk, and many of us will resist that or find ways to avoid it (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Eraut, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994).

Research has found a wide range of factors that can create resistance to change. Some of these have already been mentioned earlier when looking at some of the challenges to teachers engaging in collaborative professional learning. Some others include lack of trust, belief that change is unnecessary, belief that change is not feasible, economic threats (especially if job security is threatened), fear of failure, loss of status and power, threats to values and ideals, and resentment of interference (Hoban, 2002; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Timperley, et al. (2007) acknowledge that teacher resistance to change can be viewed negatively. However, they state that based on their investigations many change initiatives don't actually achieve their desired outcomes, and a healthy scepticism "may well be in the best interests of students" (p. 200). Le Fevre (2010) believes that talking about change has the potential to empower people to work with the challenges inherent in change. Her view is that if educational leaders and teachers do not have an understanding of the process of change, then it becomes more difficult to bring about sustainable change that improves outcomes for students. Hopkins (2007, p. 9) states that our moral purpose can be found in "raising the bar and closing the gap in terms of student learning and achievement", so an understanding and application of change management by leaders could go a long way in supporting this moral purpose.

The next chapter will focus on the methodology which guided the research approach and the methods employed to obtain data in order to achieve the research aims.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines and justifies the choice of research methodology used in the study of collaborative school-wide improvement initiatives in a West Auckland school cluster. It begins by justifying the use of an interpretive qualitative methodological approach, and describes the two data gathering methods chosen for their alignment with this approach, the questionnaire and the focus group. The chapter then outlines how the schools and study sample were selected for both methods. The analysis of data, reliability and validity are discussed with reference to triangulation and finally ethical issues associated with the research are addressed.

Methodological approach

Qualitative research “is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 199), using an interpretive approach and a set of practices that “make the world visible” (p.199). Qualitative research uses a methodology that is socially constructed, exploratory and largely inductive. It is social research seeking to interpret the meaning arising out of social situations; and as such sets out to examine situations through the eyes of the participants. This study sought to interpret from the perspective of teachers and leaders the challenges of school-wide improvement initiatives, and the issues of sustainability in such initiatives related to teacher change. The type of data to be gathered was the rich descriptions of teachers and principals about their experiences. Therefore, the most appropriate approach for this research study was an interpretive one, based on the premise that “people interpret events, contexts and situations and act on the bases of those events” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 21).

Another consideration was that the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the context or setting of the participants through an examination of the interpretation of their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Creswell (2002) says that this interpretation or negotiation of meaning is formed through interaction with others. It is socially constructed. Having a constructivist approach means the researcher often focuses

on the interactions among individuals as well as the specific contexts of people's situations so that they can better understand the historical and cultural settings. The context for this study was the school-wide professional learning and development teachers and principals had experienced. This constructivist consideration was appropriate for the context of the study, and fits within the interpretive approach.

Qualitative research values people's assumptions and beliefs and appreciates the subjectivity of their interpretations of meaning. This approach acknowledges that humans have the unique ability to interpret their experiences and apply that to themselves. It accepts that human behaviour and, thereby, data are socially situated, context-related, context dependent and context-rich (Cohen, et al., 2007). This situational, context dependent perspective is opposite to the positivist view in social science with its pursuit of objectivity, and its concentration on what is repetitive and predictable (Cohen, et al., 2007). This interpretivist position instead says the social world can only be understood in its multi-variant unpredictability through the eyes of the people actually in that world, and that the researcher needs to share their frame of reference. The researcher makes an interpretation based on their own experiences and background, and needs to acknowledge that as they seek to make sense of the meanings others have about the world (Creswell, 2002).

One criticism of qualitative research is that it can be too impressionistic and subjective due to researchers' views of what they consider significant, and the close relationships that researchers frequently form with the people they are studying (Bryman, 2004). There is concern that subjective reports may be incomplete and misleading, and that the close relationships formed may include a power imbalance so that the researcher may be able to influence the participants with their perspective (Cohen, et al., 2007). However, Bryman (2004) states that it is "the job of the social scientist to gain access to people's common sense thinking" (p.14), and from there to interpret what makes them act, feel and think as they do. It is true that researcher expertise or knowledge, personal experience or bias may have an influence on the interpretation of data. It is important to acknowledge this while seeking to report findings from the data. Such a subjective perspective is appropriate within the qualitative methodology (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich,

2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Another criticism suggests findings from qualitative research cannot be generalised (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007). It is not intended for the findings from this research study to be generalised to all school-wide professional learning initiatives. There is also a concern over the lack of transparency that can cloud qualitative research. Bryman (2004), states that to a large extent such areas as how people were chosen to be a part of the study and the process of data analysis and conclusions drawn, are increasingly being addressed by qualitative researchers. In the writing of this study I have sought to be as open and clear about these areas as possible.

A lot is written about the differences between qualitative and quantitative research. I did consider a quantitative approach, but rejected it based on the type of data I sought to gather. I wanted to hear about people's thoughts and experiences, and provide opportunity for any challenges and conflicts to be expressed, which required qualitative analysis of data. I therefore needed to choose a methodology that would be flexible enough to provide a pathway for that. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contend that quantitative researchers abstract from the social world and seldom study it directly, whereas qualitative researchers see the social world in action and embed their findings in it. I wanted to "seek to understand the context" (Creswell, 2002, p. 9) of engaging in school-wide professional learning, and so chose to follow a qualitative approach.

Research Design

Data collection methods

The qualitative researcher is able to use a variety of techniques for gathering information. There is no set single way that is advocated; rather the tools should be chosen for their appropriateness and whether they are fit for the purpose (Cohen, et al., 2007). Bryman (2004) argues against the viewpoint that research methods are so imbued with "epistemological and ontological commitments" (p. 442) that choosing one or the other aligns the researcher with a particular world view. Indeed, most researchers make decisions about the tools they will use based on practical factors such as time constraints, access to people and costs of materials (Cohen, et

al., 2007). I chose to use a questionnaire to gather information from the group of teachers, which was analysed using a qualitative approach. I also invited a group of primary school principals to take part in a focus group that gathered their thinking around school-wide professional learning. It was planned that these two different methods of data collection would provide a means of triangulation when analysing the two different sets of data that portray different perspectives held about the same phenomenon.

Sample selection and design

West Auckland schools that were involved in the Waitakere Area Principals' Association (WAPA) 2020 Learning Plan Pilot were invited to participate in this study. Ten schools responded; one was a high school, three were intermediate schools, two were full primaries and four were contributing primary schools. All their school principals gave me formal permission for access to research all their teachers via electronic questionnaire. Choosing these WAPA 2020 schools gave some similarity of context as these organisations are all managing change and will be expecting teachers to engage in the process. The schools are spread over the wider West Auckland region and a questionnaire seemed a more efficient data gathering tool than a series of interviews.

After gaining the principal's permission to approach their teachers I set up a liaison person within each school to communicate with. These were either the principal themselves or one of the deputy or associate principals. I either spoke face to face with the liaison person or phoned them to discuss their role in supporting the collection of the research data. They were all really helpful and supportive. The sample for the questionnaire was drawn from the population of teachers who worked in the responding schools from the WAPA 2020 project. I sent an introductory email with the survey link to the liaison in each school and they forwarded it to their teachers. Out of the 241 teachers from these schools each was invited to complete an online "Survey Monkey" questionnaire (refer Appendix A) and was able to respond voluntarily. The responses were random as I had no control over their choice to participate. Cohen, et al. (2007) state that as questionnaire response rates

are often poor, a large number of invitations are needed to be made in order to achieve the 50 – 100 responses required in order to use percentages in analysis; but, that a larger sample than this would be more likely to be representative of the population. It was hoped for at least a 50% response rate which would give approximately 100 questionnaires or more to be analysed. In the end, after sending out three different follow up requests for teachers to fill in the survey 66 teachers across all ten schools responded. This was a 27.4% response rate and, though a smaller sample than had been hoped for, the comments from these teachers resulted in rich and interesting data.

I drew the principals for the focus group from the ten school principals who responded to my invitation to be a part of the research. One of the principals declined being in the focus group but allowed me access to their teachers, so in the end I had nine principals for the focus group. The WAPA 2020 Learning Plan is a collaborative initiative between schools in the West Auckland cluster seeking to raise student achievement across the region. Principals who are a part of the Learning Plan have opted into it because they believed in the need for such a collaborative initiative. It was assumed that their schools will all have been influenced to some degree by the shared learnings around change management, capacity building, collaborative environments and leadership that the Learning Plan has focused on in the last two years. I emailed then phoned or visited these principals in order to outline my proposed research to them, inviting them to participate in the focus group, and asking for expressions of interest. I gained permission from the various Boards of Trustees for the principals to participate in the research gathering. I invited all nine principals to the group. Morgan (1988), states that the appropriate size of a focus group is between four and twelve people per group. I chose to invite all the principals that responded because I wanted to hear their views and the number was not too large. I was also concerned that not all the principals would be able to attend the focus group on the actual day and so decided to oversubscribe in case that happened. The focus group took an hour and we met at Learning Network in Henderson, which was neutral ground for everyone. On the day of the actual focus group only four principals were able to attend, from two intermediate schools, one full primary school and one contributing primary school. Although this was a smaller

number of participants than I had hoped for, Morgan,(1997) states that smaller groups are recommended when participants are likely to have a lot to say on the research topic, are very involved in the topic or the topics are controversial or complex. This was the case for the four principals who were open and honest and shared freely in their discussions that covered a range of topics that closely matched the teachers' questionnaire topics.

Despite the unanticipated low return rate of questionnaires and the small sample in the focus group, rich data has been collated and analysed.

Method 1 – Questionnaire

While questionnaires are generally associated with quantitative approaches, they can be qualitative depending on how the resulting data is analysed. The questionnaire or survey can be considered a form of written interview. Fontana and Frey (2005) see questionnaires as a form of qualitative structured interview with all respondents receiving the same set of questions in the same order or sequence. While it asks questions like an interview, the questionnaire has the benefit of efficiency and of reaching a wider range of respondents. A questionnaire is an appropriate research tool to employ for seeking information from large numbers over a relatively large geographical area, and when responses and comparisons will be used for development in a particular group (Hinds, 2000). A questionnaire is quicker and easier to administer than structured interviews (Bryman, 2004), and is convenient for respondents as they may choose when and where to complete it. Bryman (2004) also mentions the reduction in possible bias and interviewer variability of interview data as compared with using a questionnaire.

The questions for the survey were created to investigate key ideas or themes that had been drawn from the literature review. When considering engagement in professional learning, and the sustainability of this learning, aspects such as motivation for engagement, facing change, challenges and successes experienced, collaborative cultures and the sustainability of change were identified. The questionnaire was organised to contain a mixture of set pre-coded statements that

required a response from a Likert scale, and a number of open ended questions where teachers had the opportunity to comment further (See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire).

Managing the disadvantages

There are some disadvantages to using a questionnaire. A lower response rate is one of the most damaging (Bryman, 2004), as it increases the probability of bias and sampling error. Ways I took to improve response rate included visiting schools to talk to the staff personally. I explained the reasons for the research, why it is important and why they were chosen to be a part of the study. I also gave guarantees of confidentiality. Any questions the teachers wanted to ask were answered, and I explained how I would be sending their liaison person the survey link to forward to all teachers. I informed them of the approximate time it would take to complete the questionnaire and urged them to take the time to fill it in. A summary of these key points were repeated briefly in the introduction page of the questionnaire. It was necessary to send follow up requests to participants in order to achieve a large enough response to the questionnaire.

Piloting the questionnaire

Bell's checklist for formulating a good questionnaire (2007) summarises the pitfalls to look out for and echoes various other writers' perspectives (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007; Hinds, 2000). She recommends piloting the questionnaire in order to ascertain the clarity and specificity of the questions. The pilot increases the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire (Cohen, et al., 2007). The questionnaire was piloted by teachers in the school I am presently Associate Principal at. None of the teachers at this school were participants in the research project. They gave me feedback for me to consider around Bell's suggestions regarding clarity and specificity of questions. While individual teachers made comments regarding their thoughts about the questionnaire there were no trends that emerged and no common ideas picked up by two or more respondents. I therefore made no changes to the questionnaire format.

Bryman (2004) recommends keeping the questionnaire short. Youngs (2011) suggests it should take no longer than 15-20 minutes. Trialling of the questionnaire by teachers at my own school, which was not included in the overall study, established that the questionnaire would take about 15 minutes to complete. In compiling the questionnaire I ensured that the language used was clear and unambiguous, that there were no hidden assumptions in the questions, and I avoided leading or presuming questions. I made sure that double questions where more than one thing is asked were avoided, and that questions were worded in such a way that they could be answered without much hesitation. I tried to avoid potentially irritating questions (Bell, 2007; Bryman, 2004; Hinds, 2000), and I tried to make sure that the layout of the questionnaire was attractive and easily read.

Using "Survey Monkey" provided the opportunity to gather pre-categorised information as well as open-ended data. The pre-categorised data was analysed electronically using simple quantification. The open ended answers were analysed to find similarities, differences and any interesting comments or ideas. All the collected data were analysed and the findings used for comparison with the findings from the next stage of the research study – the focus group.

Method 2 - Focus groups

Although focus groups are "contrived settings" (Cohen, et al., 2007, p.376), where a specific group of people discuss a particular theme or topic, the interaction within the group leads to data and outcomes. Focus groups empower participants to speak out in their own words and allow data to be gathered on attitudes, values and opinions from them. Being semi-structured in nature allows for some flexibility, and so a certain amount of control has to be relinquished by the interviewer to the participants. The process of answering questions and bouncing ideas off one another, or the possibility of one participant challenging the views of another, means that the researcher may end up with some realistic viewpoints that express the collective perspective (Bryman, 2004; Hinds, 2000; Krueger, 1994). While the principals' views had a high degree of congruence, in a couple of places there was

slight disagreement between them as they gave their perspectives on a couple of areas.

Focus groups are considered a form of group interview (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007; Kreuger, 1994) where the focus is on how the individuals discuss an issue as members of a group rather than simply as individuals. They also share elements with the focused interview mainly due to the selection of interviewees being all involved in a particular situation (Bryman, 2004). They are semi-structured in design and are guided by the facilitator either by a topic guide or by a series of open-ended questions. In deciding between the topic guide or questioning schedule Kreuger (1994) gives some good advice stating that the questioning route is recommended until the researcher has achieved mastery of the skilful art of “spontaneously phrasing the topic into a coherent, single dimension question presented in a complete sentence” (p. 56). As I did not consider I had reached such skill levels I chose to create a Focus Group Schedule of questions (Appendix B).

Focus groups are structured around a flow of questions that each serves a distinct purpose. Kreuger (1994), categorises these as opening questions, which everyone in the group answers in a form of round robin quickly identifying characteristics the participants have in common; introductory questions that introduce the general topic of discussion and are intended to foster conversation and interaction; transition questions that help participants envision the topic in a broader sense and act as a logical link between the introductory questions and the key questions; key questions that drive the study and are the meat of the discussion; and ending questions that bring closure to the discussion and give space for reflection on what has been previously commented on. The questions in my Focus Group Schedule (Appendix B) were all framed around similar aspects that the questionnaire covered, and were designed to gather information about leaders’ understanding of teachers’ engagement with school-wide professional learning initiatives. Topics discussed included how principals got teachers engaged in school wide professional learning initiatives, aspects of change management, challenges and successes faced in the initiative, collaborative cultures and the sustainability of change. This is possibly a more structured approach than some focus groups might take. This is because the

purpose of asking the principals these questions was to gather data from a different perspective than the teachers' about the same phenomenon, and so seek to strengthen validity through triangulation. Focus groups are considered useful for this when triangulated with more traditional forms of data gathering such as questionnaires (Cohen, et al., 2007).

Managing the disadvantages

There are some disadvantages to using focus groups that Bryman (2004), and Cohen, et al. (2007), summarise. They can be difficult to organise trying to get all participants in the same place at the same time; the information gained may not be as much as through individual interviews; they can be difficult and lengthy to transcribe and analyse; group dynamics might lead to some people taking over the talking while others are more reticent and don't contribute their thoughts; or disagreements or conflict may arise. I found some of these to be true in my experience, especially regarding the difficulty of getting the principals together as only four could make it on the day; and also how long it took to transcribe the focus group interview. While not sharing may be an issue, Bryman (2004), makes an interesting statement about group dynamics working in the opposite way so that the group actually starts agreeing uncritically together about a viewpoint, which may mean a legitimate perspective held by just one group member gets suppressed. It is the task of the facilitator to try and ensure all participants get an opportunity to share their views, to keep the conversation from going too far off track and to make sure all research questions get covered. This was not difficult to do as the principals shared their points of view with each other clearly. The value of having a semi-structured interview schedule allowed me to ask individual principals their point of view if they had not shared it, and to follow a line of questioning more closely in order to get the most out of the discussion. All principals shared freely and gave their honest opinions and were open to challenging each other at times.

Analysis

Data analysis needs to be considered before designing the research instruments (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007). The techniques of analysis will depend on the

type of data to be collected and the type of variable under consideration (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007). “The role of analysis is to bring data together in a meaningful way and enable us as researchers to interpret or make sense of it” (Wilkinson, 2000). Tolich and Davidson (1999) suggest two strategic ways to do this. One way is through direct interpretation of the individual instance, and the other way is through “aggregation of instances” (p. 74), until new meaning can be drawn about them as a whole.

The data from the questionnaire were analysed in a mainly descriptive manner, describing and presenting the data in terms of various summary frequencies in order to report what had been found. Owing to the nature of the questions in the questionnaire some of the data was already pre-categorised and “Survey Monkey” had organised them into frequency summaries. This made the analysis of these questions more straightforward. The open ended questions were analysed thematically. Tolich and Davidson (1999) call this the search for patterns, or consistency as usually the important meanings will come from reappearance over and over. These patterns may be known in advance, drawn from the research questions and giving the analysis a framework or they may emerge unexpectedly from the analysis. While I had some broad ideas from my literature review I was not sure what patterns would present themselves, and whether there would be any correlation between the teachers’ views and the principals’ views which came from the focus group. As I analysed the comments from the teachers’ questionnaire I looked for the commonalities between them in order to establish factors that teachers agreed on. I then looked for the “individual instances” within each area to identify the differences in opinion that were emerging. I also looked for surprising or interesting comments or trends.

The focus group discussion was recorded and transcribed and a similar process for thematic analysis followed in order to collate information carefully and without ambiguity. As each piece of data was coded the “method of constant comparison” was adopted where the researcher compared the new data with existing data and categories, so that there was a perfect fit achieved between the two and all the data could be accounted for. Wilkinson (2000) suggests using a coding frame as a way of

classifying the data and drawing themes from it. I did this for each of the questions from the questionnaire that had comments that needed analysing, and also for the focus group questions. My coding frame was set up as a Word document table with a separate frame for each question. The headings that I used to help me sort through all the data were:

- Key Themes
- Key words used
- Number of examples
- Surprising/interesting
- Supporting quote from the document

Coding that occurs in qualitative research, is not governed in the same way by the “codified rules” (Bryman, 2004, p. 415) of quantitative research. Qualitative coding is a time consuming and often lengthy process. Transcripts of the focus group were analysed line by line to identify themes and ideas and coded. The comments from the questionnaire were treated in the same way. These categories were coded into component parts, which were given names so that the data was organised and rendered meaningful (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006, p. 200). The coding frames for the teacher questionnaire and the principals’ transcript helped organise the research data into definite strands which in turn helped bring clarity to the wealth of information that was gathered. Focused coding may build on the initial coding and results in overarching ideas or propositions that will occupy a prominent place in the analysis (Lofland et al., 2006). Wilkinson (2000) calls this process one of creating super categories where initial categories are subsumed into them in order to reduce the data into digestible chunks for the reader. Tolich and Davidson(1999) discuss the process of constant winnowing of data so that much of the accumulated data is eliminated.

Once the two sets of data had been analysed separately, then they were analysed against each other. In a similar way to how each group’s data had been analysed for similarities and differences and the unexpected, so too was the analysis between the two groups. I looked under each main area for what the similarities between the two

groups were, what differences of view were expressed, and also what surprising or interesting comments or trends emerged. Practical steps were taken in organising, filing and sorting data, which included using computer databases, developing and maintaining broad sets of generic files, maintaining a chronological record so that a set of materials was kept in the order they were originally collected, creating memos in order to keep track of the codes themselves, and taking many notes (Lofland et al., 2006).

Validity

Reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher. Qualitative researchers agree that their research should have the same quality, however most view reliability and validity differently to their quantitative counterparts. Common criticisms of the coding approach to qualitative data analysis are that the chunking of text in order to code it may fragment and decontextualize it so that it loses its narrative flow or its social setting (Bryman, 2004). These criticisms relate to the validity of the research. An invalid piece of research is worthless (Cohen, et al., 2007). Knowing this I made every effort to ensure that the coded chunks of text fitted the code they were given and were not taken out of context.

Bryman (2004) refers to external and internal reliability and internal and external validity. Other researchers, Lincoln and Guba (2005), use the terminology of trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. One aspect of credibility is using triangulation of data so that findings can be cross-checked to find similar themes, or to employ more than one method of data collection in order to increase confidence in findings. Using the two different participant groups to gather information from allowed for confirmation of themes, both within the groups and between the two groups, strengthening the credibility of the findings and also their confirmability.

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the reliability and rigor of their findings and seek to find ways to ensure this. They seek to highlight the perspective of the people being studied, to use thick description to emphasise the importance of the contextual understanding of social behaviour, to place an emphasis on the sense of process in our understanding of social life, and to employ data finding strategies that genuinely reveal the perspectives of the participants (Bryman, 2004; Cohen, et al., 2007). Another possible limitation arises from what Cohen, et al. call “the definition of the situation” (2007, p. 189) , where participants are asked for their definition of the situation yet they have no monopoly on wisdom and may be unaware of the real situation, deliberately distorting or falsifying information or being highly selective. While this phenomenon may have arisen in this research, the triangulation of findings using teachers’ views and principals’ views about the same topics hopefully goes some way to addressing this issue of reliability or validity.

As mentioned previously, one challenge to the validity of interview data could be bias found in the characteristics of the interviewer or respondent, and the substantive content of the questions (Cohen, et al., 2007). There is disagreement over the need to control the sequence and format of questions. Cohen et al.(2007) describe an argument for strong consistency and control of set questions, whereas Silverman (2006) makes a case for the importance of open-ended interviews. Leading questions also contribute to bias in interviews and should be avoided. The trustworthiness of a piece of research, its validity and reliability, derives from the integrity of the conclusions that are generated, and is important for assessing the quality of the measures used.

Ethical Issues

The validity and reliability of a piece of research does not necessarily make it ethical. Ethical issues can arise at a variety of stages in social research. Of paramount importance in ethics is how we treat others: that one cannot justify causing harm to people in order to benefit others. There is a lack of respect for the personhood or separateness of participants if one violates their rights (Wilkinson, 2001).

Taking into consideration the way in which the ethical principles discussed would be adhered to in this research I was granted permission by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee to conduct this study.

People are not to be negligently or deliberately harmed, their privacy should not be invaded, nor should they be deceived no matter what the research's alleged benefits may be perceived to be. This concept of harm is served by the idea of informed consent. I made sure that all participants in the research were given the choice of whether to participate or not. Refer to the Information section in the questionnaire (Appendix A), and the Information Sheet for principals and Boards of Trustees (Appendix C). Informed consent means that researchers must ask for permission from participants and can only proceed if they agree. Teachers were informed that their participation and submission of the questionnaire was consent for their data to be included in the research. Principals had a consent form to sign before beginning the focus group (refer Appendix D). Informed consent is voluntary and given on the basis of information about the project. No coercion, force or manipulation must be used in case the moral validity to consent is undermined. Research subjects must be adequately informed about the project whether they have asked for it or not, and they must have any questions about the project answered truthfully by the researcher. In setting up the research study and in the gathering of data I adhered closely to these principles. One other ethical issue is confidentiality. I made every effort to keep the identity and records of the participants of research confidential. When findings were published care was taken that individuals were not able to be identified.

Ethical considerations specifically for the research tools I used are listed in Cohen, et al. (2007). I made every effort to follow these. For questionnaires it was important that the respondents chose to participate and were not coerced in any way. Participants were involved based on informed consent, and knew they had a right to withdraw or not complete some questions; they were made aware of any potential benefit to them of the research findings, and were assured of their confidentiality. In addition, I ensured to the best of my ability that the questionnaire was valid, reliable and unbiased, and capable of capturing the perspectives of the participants. All

analysed data was securely stored in my home office so that only authorised personnel had access to it.

The focus group had slightly different ethical concerns because the human factor was involved. Three main ethical areas were identified – informed consent, confidentiality and the consequences of the focus group interview (Cohen, et al., 2007). While most of the issues listed above for questionnaires also apply to interviews there were a number that applied more specifically to interviews. These included making sure the identity of the participants was protected and their anonymity guaranteed when the findings were written about. The focus group was conducted in an appropriate, non-stressful, non-threatening manner, with sensitivity on the part of the interviewer. The verification of data and transcripts was offered to each participant, and any that requested it were sent copies of the transcripts for checking. Researchers have a duty of trust placed in them by the participants to use privileged data appropriately. Cohen, et al., says the key to the successful resolution of any ethical issues lies in establishing good relations so that a sense of rapport develops between the researcher and their subjects (2007).

The following chapter explains in detail the process followed for analysing the data and the findings drawn from them.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This research study utilised two methods to gather data from two participant groups. The methods used were an online questionnaire and a focus group interview. The two participant groups consisted of one group of teachers and one group of principals. 241 teachers from across ten West Auckland schools were invited to participate in an online questionnaire; 66 teachers responded, a response of 27.4%. Nine principals from these schools agreed to take part in a focus group. On the day of the focus group four principals were able to meet together. Gathering data from the two different sources meant that the perspectives of the two could be compared within each group and between the two groups. Analysis of the sets of data through thematic coding meant that similarities of views were identified as well as differing views, and the surprising or interesting could also be identified. This analysis was conducted firstly within the teacher participant group, then within the principals group, and then finally between the two groups of participants to highlight themes that both groups identified, those that were different and those unexpected or interesting items that were revealed.

The findings are arranged under five main headings which were used to organise the questions in both the questionnaire and the focus group interview. These are 1. Nature of the initiatives; 2. Motivating engagement; 3. Successes due to involvement; 4. Challenges of involvement; and 5. Sustainability. Under each heading, where applicable, the findings from the teacher questionnaire data, then from the principals' focus group are summarised, and then the synthesis between the two sets of data is summarised and discussed in order to identify emerging common themes. This analysis and its resulting themes will lead to discussion of the findings in Chapter Five.

Nature of the Initiatives

The opening question from the questionnaire asked teachers what school wide professional learning initiatives they had been involved in recently. All the schools

that participated in the research study are part of the Waitakere Area Principals' Association Learning Plan (WAPA 2020), and have been learning together as a cluster for the past three years, seeking to raise the achievement of students in West Auckland. I was interested to see how this translated back into individual schools. Over 75% of the school-wide professional learning or development examples were curriculum based with the majority of initiatives being focused on some form of literacy improvement, though numeracy was the other most prevalent initiative. Inquiry based learning, ICT, cultural, education for sustainability (Enviroschools) and special needs development were some of the other curriculum initiatives that schools had recently been involved in. The two other areas that schools had committed themselves to improvement in were behaviour/student well-being and teacher pedagogical knowledge. Every school had done some form of professional learning or development, though two teacher participants said they had done no school-wide professional learning. The following Table 4.1 summarises the range of professional learning and development that schools have been involved in recently.

Table 4.1: School-wide professional learning initiatives

Categories	Examples	Frequency out of 66 responses
Curriculum	• Literacy- <i>reading, writing</i>	62
	• Numeracy- <i>Num, ALIM</i>	16
	• Inquiry- <i>Inquiry, SOLOTaxonomy</i>	9
	• ICT- <i>ICT, Knowledge Net, Ultranet, mimeo, google apps, MUSAC</i>	8
	• WAPA/WASIP(Cluster initiatives)	7
	• Cultural- <i>Ukelele, Kapa Haka</i>	4
	• Enviroschools	3
	• Special Needs- <i>ESOL, Antiviolence, Depression awareness</i>	3
	Behaviour/ Student well being	• Positive Behaviour for Learning(PB4L)
Pedagogy	• Restorative Practices	7
	• Assessment for Learning	6
	• National Standards	2
	• Te Kotahitanga	5
	• Academic counselling	1
	• Curriculum mapping	1
	• Star Path	2

Motivating Engagement in Professional Learning

A range of questions were asked under this heading to elicit information from teachers and principals about the factors that motivated teachers to engage in school-wide professional learning and development. Teachers were asked, “What is most important for you in order for you to feel motivated to engage in school wide professional learning?” and “What strategies did your school leaders use to gain your initial engagement in the school wide professional learning?”

What teachers said

Teacher responses were gathered from a range of schools involved in the research. Four were contributing primary schools, two were full primaries, three were intermediate schools and one was a high school.

Having their say

Despite the range of school types and the varying management structures inherent in each, over 60% of the teachers agreed that they had a say in the on-going direction of their school’s professional learning and development. However, nearly 40% of teachers disagreed, with the ones who most strongly disagreed making statements such as:

Nothing, it just happens to us. (Teacher)

One principal, however, when discussing the input of teachers to decision making said:

So that’s why we are using writing as a context for PD in our school, and it was identified by teaching staff- if you went and you interviewed them I would be interested to see if they felt as though that they did decide, ‘cause sometimes they don’t, they forget. (Principal)

Relational aspects

One factor that almost 30% of teachers said made a difference to their motivation to engage with school-wide professional learning and development was the relational

aspects of the workplace. The quality of the relationships they shared with others accounted for over half of the reasons stated in this area.

Passionate people leading the staff meetings etc. On-going communication after the initial first hit. (Teacher)

That the PD facilitator is inspiring but understands the reality of the classroom. (Teacher)

The other half of the reasons given were mostly around being consulted and feeling valued by others.

To have your say without being criticised or ignored. (Teacher)

Of benefit

Nearly 20% of teachers stated that they needed to see that the professional learning and development was going to be of benefit to themselves as teachers, and an equal 20% needed it to be of benefit to the students.

That it is going to make a difference in my teaching and a positive effect. (Teacher)

That PL's have a direct influence on raising student achievement and teaching practice across the board. (Teacher)

They wanted their teaching practice to improve because of it, that it would add to their effectiveness with students, that they would see results and that the learning needs of children would be impacted.

Relevance (meeting needs)

Almost 29% of the respondents said that they needed to see the relevance of the professional learning and development in order to feel motivated to engage in it.

They needed to see its relevance to their own beliefs or needs and goals, but also to their students' needs and to a lesser extent the school's needs.

*That it meets the needs of the staff, students and community we are in and that we are consulted on this and we have time to engage in it effectively.
(Teacher)*

Motivating strategies used by school leaders

Communication

Virtually all teachers agreed that the most common strategy school leaders used to gain their initial engagement in the school wide professional learning and development was some form of communication. This ranged from talking to teachers one on one to the far more prevalent use of staff meetings and small group meetings with team leaders and syndicates as common examples. A smaller number of teachers mentioned the use of information gathering through surveys or feedback requests or through the appraisal process. 20% of the respondents who talked about forms of communication said they were told what was going to happen.

Reasons for PD were given to teachers. (Teacher)

We usually get told when the contract is signed. (Teacher)

From this it could therefore be assumed that teachers like to be communicated with, and appreciate the opportunity to give feedback.

Using evidence

One other strategy teachers listed was the use, by leaders, of student achievement data.

*Collaboratively identified gaps and needs of students through analysis of data.
(Teacher)*

A common thread that ran through all the comments were of teachers looking at school wide assessment data to see where the needs were to improve teacher practice and hence student achievement.

Other strategies

There was less emphasis by teachers on the use of an external facilitator or expert, and the use of Teacher Only Days or workshops as factors that helped engage teachers initially in the school-wide professional learning and development. Most teachers listed multiple factors that they recognised had made a difference to their initial engagement as the following example shows.

Showing whole school data - identifying the need. Discussion with staff in staffroom initially, invited discussion in syndicates and these thoughts and ideas were then fed through to the Management Team. From there an external facilitator was enlisted to support with school needs. (Teacher)

The principals' perspectives

As part of the focus group interview principals were asked slightly different questions than the teachers were. They were asked what strategies they had used to set up new professional learning and development initiatives, and how they gained initial engagement from their teachers. Their responses highlighted slightly different perspectives to the teachers.

Communication

All four principals agreed that they communicated an expectation that all staff would be involved in the school-wide professional learning and development. As far as they were concerned it was non-negotiable and included, in intermediate schools, their technology staff also.

One principal acknowledged that having his teaching staff identify the need for a particular direction in their school-wide professional learning and development made a difference to their initial engagement.

Using evidence

All principals agreed that they used school data as evidence of the need for the professional learning and development.

We show them the data and we really expect everybody to be involved. And it is data driven – the justification for doing it – it's data driven. (Principal)

We got our teams looking at their data and enquiring into their data...data driven practice. (Principal)

They also used other forms of evidence such as teacher appraisals, drawing attention to the connections with previously successful professional development, and allowing staff to see the benefits of the proposed learning through observations in classrooms of other teachers or at other schools, through professional readings and research findings.

Organise for a facilitator

Two of the principals felt that organising for a facilitator who would work in the school was an important factor.

I want a facilitator who comes and works in the school. I'm not a fan of sending people off to courses. (Principal)

Summary of key motivators

When looking at factors that motivated initial engagement in school-wide professional learning and development the expectation that all staff would be involved in the initiative came through clearly from both groups, as did the use of student achievement data as a justification for the professional learning and development, and the fact that there was a process of information gathering, feedback and consultation. Both teachers and principals felt that allowing staff to see the benefits of the proposed learning made a difference to initial engagement.

Delivered a synopsis, provided readings to inform, invited in visiting speakers, visits to other schools where it was already embedded in their practice, whole staff discussion and feedback. (Teacher)

I do have staff who are quite selective, they're quite experienced; most of my staff are quite stable and they're cynical so they do need to see the benefits of things before they will really buy into it. (Principal)

Most teachers and half the principals agreed that the use of external facilitators or experts was a factor that helped gain initial teacher engagement.

The only difference between teachers' and principals' views under this heading of motivating engagement was that one principal stated they used information gained from teacher appraisals to help gain teacher engagement.

I also look at the appraisals from teachers at the end of the year and look for some common themes where there might be a need. (Principal)

Interestingly, both principals and a small number of teachers agreed that having the principal and the leadership team in the professional learning and development was a positive factor in gaining initial engagement.

Successes related to Involvement in Professional Learning and Development

In the online questionnaire teachers were asked about any successes they may have experienced based on the benefits they had seen or changes in capacity they had experienced. They were asked what sorts of things had changed for them through their involvement. I wanted to see if teachers had experienced any success that they attributed to the professional learning and development, and if so where that success was being demonstrated. I specifically asked about capacity as growing teacher, school and cluster capacity is one of WAPA 2020's goals.

Teachers were asked about factors that made adopting change easy or difficult for them. I wanted to know what made a positive difference for teachers when faced with having to make changes.

Principals were asked what factors they identified that made the adoption of change easy for teachers, and they were also asked about the successes they had seen through their schools' involvement in the improvement initiatives. By asking both participant groups similar questions I wanted to find out if one group had identified something of significance that the other group had not.

What teachers said about success

Despite the challenges associated with new learning, when asked in the questionnaire about the successes that teachers had experienced it was obvious from the tone of the responses how positive they were.

Benefits, growing capacity

Improved teaching

Teachers expressed their belief that benefits had been widespread, with growth in student and teacher capacity being the strongest. Nearly 80% of teachers felt they had personally benefited from the school-wide improvement initiatives. They felt their teaching knowledge and pedagogical capacity had increased, they gave specific examples of changed practice, they felt they had a fuller understanding of what the professional learning and development was seeking to achieve, they had increased confidence and felt their teaching had improved. One teacher made an insightful comment:

Professional development showed gaps in my knowledge which I then needed to take responsibility for, and address. (Teacher)

Improved student achievement and engagement

Over 90% of teachers felt that students had benefitted from the professional learning and development that the school had been taking part in. They stated that students were achieving better results, they were more engaged in their learning, they were able to talk about their learning more and were responsible for their learning. Teachers felt students were more motivated. They made comments such as:

Students are benefitting from better teaching and are able to talk about their learning and next steps. (Teacher)

The students benefit because we are more confident and that seems to allow them to take risks and become more confident learners. (Teacher)

Improvement across the school

A moderate number of teachers (40%) also felt that school capacity had benefitted, and a smaller 20% felt that the network as a cluster of schools in the WAPA 2020 group had also benefitted. In describing the school benefits this 40% of teachers talked about improvements in achievement across the whole school, greater consistencies across the school, greater standardisation of systems and processes and a sense that the school supports their staff in their learning and as a professional community. Teachers said things like:

We are all singing from the same song sheet. (Teacher)

There are greater consistencies in practice across the school. (Teacher)

Benefits of being in a network

Though only a couple of teachers made comments about the network benefits they had experienced, both were positive.

I have been able to develop some good networking with other schools. (Teacher)

I have found networking with other schools extremely beneficial. To find others facing similar dilemmas and listening to different ways they have managed them. (Teacher)

The principals' perspectives about success

These were the questions I asked the principals. "Due to the involvement of the school in school-wide professional learning and development what successes, if any, have you seen?" and "What factors do you attribute to these successes?"

Benefits, growing capacity

Stronger teacher understanding and knowledge

During the focus group interview the four principals shared the same view as a high percentage of teachers that one of the clear benefits of professional learning and development was growth in teacher capacity. They talked about the stronger understanding of pedagogy and curriculum content knowledge teachers displayed. One principal said:

They (the teachers) seem to have a strong, much stronger understanding of pedagogy and curriculum content knowledge through the professional development. (Principal)

Growth of teachers as leaders

They also talked about how through the improvement initiatives teachers were being grown as leaders throughout the school, and they were all very positive about their role of improving teacher leadership. Principals had this to say:

We're growing leaders throughout the school because of it (teachers leading literacy development) too. (Principal)

Improved student ownership of learning

Principals' views also agreed with the teachers' views about student achievement and improvement being evident. They were more strongly impressed with the greater ownership and articulation of learning that the students in their schools were capable of. Typical comments were like these:

Children are owning what's happening a lot more than when I started teaching. (Principal)

I realised children had got the message. They know that that's where they have to goal set, and get to that level. (Principal)

Shared school culture

All four principals talked about the shared culture their schools were experiencing with everyone all on the same page and talking about the same themes. Any issues that arose were freely shared and dealt with, not "tucked away". One principal said his staff were proud of their school:

The teachers are proud of what we are delivering...they're tired but proud, simple as that. (Principal)

Principals also talked about the supportive environment they believed was evident in their schools. Two believed that there was more support for new staff as everyone could talk about the same learning and teaching focus. All four principals described how staff felt safe to share, that there was always someone they could talk to who was not necessarily on the management team and so concerns were not tucked away. One principal described staff working together sharing about school learning goals, which allayed fears. One principal saw staff working collectively for all students in the school not just for the ones in their area.

The thing that I've noticed has been that, particularly with the moderation, that we're doing more of, and looking and sharing, it actually allays a lot of people's fears, and allows them to progress as well. (Principal)

There was warmth from the principals when they talked about their schools' shared culture and supportive environments, and the role teachers played in that.

Benefits of being in a network

Principals also felt very positive about being involved in the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan, and felt that a positive feel between schools was one of the benefits. All four liked the idea of working together for the good of West Auckland, sharing data and addressing cluster wide needs as a group. They believed in the value of principals being collegial and talking together. They made comments such as:

I believe we need to work together for the good of the West. (Principal)

I think collegiality is really important among principals, that we all talk to each other and get out of our shells. (Principal)

What teachers said about factors that made adopting change easy

In the questionnaire teachers were asked, "What factors, if any, make adopting change positive/easy for you?"

Support

Nearly 35% of the respondents listed aspects of support as being influential in making the adoption of change positive or easy for teachers. The role of a supportive leadership was important. Included in the various manifestations of leadership were the school leadership team, the facilitator, the professional learning and development leader, team leaders and other schools. Words used to describe these different groups were: inspirational, practical useable ideas, positive feedback, well scaffolded, presented clearly. Teachers also listed support in the form of collaborative practices such as modelling, coaching and involvement together as a positive factor in adopting change, and they also considered a collegial environment a positive support. They made comments such as:

Positive attitude of everyone involved. (Teacher)

Changes being noticed and acknowledged. (Teacher)

Seeing what others are doing, being able to discuss with colleagues what is working and what is not working. (Teacher)

Teacher beliefs

The beliefs that teachers said made adopting change easy were based on their own personal motivation, that they could see the relevance of the professional learning and development and that they understood its process and content. This 26% of respondents showed teachers were excited about the possibilities offered, they were willing to engage in their own learning, they agreed with the professional learning and development and found it interesting. They made statements such as:

I'm always looking for new ways to improve what I do. I'm very open to it. (Teacher)

Enjoy a challenge and thrive on new initiatives especially when they involve major changes in students' learning. (Teacher)

Organisational

Being given the time to implement change and absorb the new concepts, and being given the resources such as regular release or explicit training made adopting change easy for 18% of respondents.

Change needs to be done slowly and gradually. The PD needs to be carried on longer than one year. (Teacher)

These teachers seemed to appreciate being given space and time for consolidation of learning.

The principals' perspectives on factors that made adopting change easy for teachers

The principals were asked what factors they thought made the adoption of change easy or difficult for teachers. When principals discussed the factors three main themes emerged. They believed that the quality of leadership made a difference to teachers, that the attitude of teachers made a difference and that the quality of the facilitator made a difference. Although the facilitator was included, by teachers, under leadership support it emerged as a separate theme by principals as there was quite a difference of opinion between some of the principals about which facilitation was the most effective.

Quality of leadership

Expectations of staff involvement

The most important factor that principals felt made a positive difference for teachers was the quality of leadership. When principals discussed the quality of leadership a lot centred on leaders' expectations of staff and their involvement in professional learning and development. One principal talked about developing a school culture of learning as a "deliberate strategy", and other principals agreed that they had similar views. This principal said:

*It's not negotiable that will we or will we not do PD, it is what PD will we do.
(Principal)*

Another said:

We need strong principals. It's good to have collaboration, it's excellent; however, we also need people who can be insightful, to look at what the gaps are in a school. (Principal)

Learning alongside staff

Every principal also agreed that there was value in principals and the leadership team all being involved in the professional learning alongside their staff. One principal put it this way:

You just have to bash through the comfort zones a little bit. And the best way to do it as a leader is to actually get alongside them and do it as well, and I think that's all your management team too. So you're saying it's for all of us – we're going to change the way we're doing things. (Principal)

This comment reflected all four principals' expectation that the professional learning and development was for everyone on the staff, including themselves.

Attitude of teachers

There was agreement amongst all the principals that the attitude of their teachers made a difference to how easy the adoption of change was. The attitude that principals agreed made adopting change easier for teachers was having a shared sense of vision, where everyone accepted the challenges ahead of them and believed that together they could achieve success. One principal put it this way:

We are a changing school, and we know that our learners have big needs, and that is generally accepted by everybody, and we have a strategic plan, and that is outlined and everyone knows it and everyone has had input into it to some extent, including our students. (Principal)

They also agreed that teachers having an attitude of sharing with and learning from each other made a difference. One principal in describing this in their school said:

We have an expectation within every teacher as well as throughout the school that we are lifelong learners, and we don't know everything, no one does, and therefore it is in our best interest, and in the interest of our children, to go on learning ourselves and inquiring. (Principal)

Quality of the facilitator

A factor of less weighting identified by principals was the quality of the facilitator. Although all principals gave it less weighting than leadership or teacher attitudes it was the first place where there was a disagreement of opinion between the principals. They agreed that the facilitator needed to engage with the staff and work

in the school with the staff. They discussed the dissonance that could arise between facilitators and staff members, when teachers especially were challenged to think about their practice more, and when the facilitators failed to engage with teachers' existing prior knowledge at the start of the process.

The facilitator came in and looked at creating a bit of dissonance with our staff so they could think about their practice more, but actually the facilitator didn't engage with my staff's current schema at the start so there was a bit of resistance to that. (Principal)

One principal's comment summarises the group's discussion:

We've had good and bad facilitators over the years and that does alter how it (professional learning and development) is received. (Principal)

The differing views between principals arose when discussing the effectiveness of using an outside facilitator compared to using staff from within the school itself. One principal looks for a facilitator who will be prepared to come and work in the school alongside their staff, saying:

It does come down to the standard of facilitation, and I've found that a good presenter who's there for a year or more has the most impact. (Principal)

Another principal asked to slightly disagree with this saying:

For us the best facilitation has come when we've had facilitation from within our staff, rather than outside facilitators. (Principal)

He went on to give examples of situations in his school where for various improvement initiatives their own staff had facilitated school-wide professional learning and development, and it had been well received and accepted fully. A third principal felt that it was a case of "both-and" rather than "either-or" in their school. This principal said:

I think that it's a bit of both that I see in my school. We've got this recent professional development initiative; we've got our literacy team that's leading

a lot of the development in the school, they're observing teachers and coaching and feeding back and feeding forward where they're going, but they're actually getting support from the outside facilitator on how to have those conversations and what to observe. And I think that having the outside person to come and give advice and mentoring the people in school is really growing a strong in-school facilitation team. (Principal)

The principal who had made the first comment about having a facilitator to work in their school rounded off the conversation with the following:

It's also good to have somebody come in for us I think - to get us out of our comfort zone. (Principal)

Summary of key successes

The factors that contributed to the growth in capacity, that both groups identified, were having a shared vision – all being on the same page; sharing leadership across the school; increased moderation and looking at and showing results together as a staff; having school-wide systems, practices and organisation; and finally both groups believed student success was due to improved teacher practice. Both groups also agreed that having a good facilitator, good leadership and a collegial supportive culture in the school made adopting change easier.

The factors that teachers said made adopting change easy for them, and which helped increase their engagement in the professional learning and development, which principals did not mention, were experiencing success for students, seeing evidence the new learning was working, having the time to practice, reflect and tinker with their class programmes, and finally their own self-motivation to want to learn and grow in their teaching practice.

Being given time to firstly observe how others are implementing what they have learnt, then later engage in professional discussion with colleagues has made me much more engaged. (Teacher)

I disengaged at times when there were too many things to do. (Teacher)

Principals mentioned further contributing factors that they considered beneficial to creating school capacity. Two principals said that having other people than the leaders articulating school goals was positive as it widened the effect and focus of them.

Getting that leadership team, other people articulating what we're trying to achieve in the school, and that grows that critical mass. (Principal)

Another principal talked about the value of having shared targets. They said:

Targets are good in the sense that you are working as a team towards a target...people are working collectively to getting children, every child in the school, to a certain level. (Principal)

A final factor that emerged was how the principal and leadership team deliberately worked to create the culture they wanted. Although principals did not directly attribute this to themselves it was revealed through their comments such as:

I think we've established a very successful culture from having this whole learning environment in the school. (Principal)

We have to see ourselves as lifelong learners. We can't just have it in our mission statement, we must have it in our hearts or in our heads that we have not come to the end, and there are other ways. (Principal)

The other approach that I have used is to just work with the ones who are really strong to begin with. Don't let the blockers stop the progress. (Principal)

I actually think you have to say yes. It's not a bad thing to critique or resist but don't do it to the detriment of development. Give it a chance and put your money where your mouth is – see if it works. (Principal)

An interesting factor that a small number of teachers (5) attributed to their engagement increasing was that they were involved in leadership of the professional learning and development in some way. Correspondingly an even smaller number of teachers (2) said that their engagement decreased because they lost their leadership role in the professional development. Teachers made comments such as:

PD has become more teacher involved, it is no longer being done “to” us. (Teacher)

I got involved in the leadership side of things. (Teacher)

I was on the Literacy team, but I'm not anymore. (Teacher)

Challenges of Involvement in Professional Learning and Development

Teachers were asked in the online questionnaire to list any challenges they may have faced during the school-wide professional learning and development they were involved in, plus any factors that made adopting change difficult for them. Principals were asked what challenges they had faced as leaders, and what they believed made adoption of change difficult for teachers.

What teachers said about challenges

Feeling overwhelmed

When asked to summarise the challenges teachers typically faced during their school-wide improvement initiatives the key factor 42% of the respondents identified was a sense of feeling overwhelmed. Teachers put this down mostly to time constraints and extra workload, but a few teachers also mentioned information

overload and a lack of self-confidence as contributing to stress levels. When describing what contributed to them feeling overwhelmed they made statements such as:

*Keeping up with the paperwork on top of our already huge workload.
(Teacher)*

Long staff meetings after school. (Teacher)

Time management – “too much on plate” added to stress levels plus added expectations/workload from management. (Teacher)

Teacher beliefs and feelings

A further 27% of respondents also recognised that their beliefs and feelings were a contributing factor to the challenge they experienced. Reluctance to embrace change, and boredom or a lack of interest were the two strongest examples, though lack of understanding, lack of confidence and personality clashes with the facilitator were others mentioned having a weaker influence on their beliefs or feelings.

*My own habits and the observed reluctance of other staff to embrace change.
(Teacher)*

Maintaining interest when I already knew things. (Teacher)

From these types of comments it would seem that a number of teachers were aware of the negative impact their own beliefs and feelings had on their motivation and engagement with new learning.

Changing teacher practice

Another factor identified by teachers was the challenge of changing their own teaching practice, of applying what they had learnt into the classroom. The

challenge of transforming theory into action was a very real one identified by 26% of the respondents. These teachers said they felt challenged due to:

Not understanding how these new practices would translate into my classroom. (Teacher)

The application and action of new thinking. (Teacher)

Finding a way to implement the new ideas into the programme without overhauling it. (Teacher)

The principals' perspectives on challenges

I asked principals what challenges they had faced during the school-wide professional learning and development, and what strategies they had used to overcome those challenges.

Teachers who don't want to learn

Principals agreed that their key challenges were teachers who felt they didn't need to learn anything anymore.

One principal said:

I found the biggest barriers and dissonance to professional learning in school are people who consider themselves to be good teachers, a bit older, and don't think they need to be learners anymore. (Principal)

Compliance

They identified teachers who gave them compliance – “but only while you're looking”. There was agreement between both teacher and principal groups that compliance was mostly due to a lack of understanding, or a reluctance to embrace change or new practices.

Reluctance to open classrooms up to others

Principals also acknowledged the reluctance of some teachers to allow others into their rooms as a challenge. One principal said:

I think the most difficult thing for older teachers is to allow other teachers into their classrooms to observe and to give feedback. (Principal)

To which the others said that they didn't think it was only old people, but a personality type who found it difficult.

Challenges of being in a cluster

Principals also discussed some of the challenges of being involved in a region-wide cluster initiative. They felt that there was a tension between their desire to support the cluster goals and their responsibility to meet the needs of their own schools. Sometimes the cluster's goals did not mesh with their school's goals, and so three out of four of them found they picked and chose the professional learning and development offered by the cluster based on their own needs, not the needs of the region. They said:

I'm not being negative at all, but I'm not sure that it has always addressed the exact needs of our school. (Principal)

What I have found difficult sometimes is the scope of WAPA 2020 is quite broad, so that, as I've said earlier, we've tended to go into things, and I don't know if it's the right way to do it, and emphasise things that are more relevant to our school, which brings us back in reverse, to moving away from a cluster to what's relevant on your patch. (Principal)

I think one thing we have to consider too is that every school's different and that's why the cluster thing can be a challenge. (Principal)

These comments demonstrate the complexity of challenge that can arise when seeking to work collaboratively with other organisations.

What teachers said about factors that made adopting change difficult

Organisational

A moderate number of respondents (48%) listed organisational factors such as time and time constraints, workload, too much PD too quickly and resourcing issues as reasons that made adopting change difficult. Only two respondents had no difficulty with adopting changes due to the professional learning and development. Most comments were along the line of:

I am sometimes resistant to change if it's going to be a lot more work, on top of all the work we do already. (Teacher)

Time restraints – not having the time to reflect on/study/prepare resources etc to implement change due to existing school requirements that take up all of our time – moving onto new PD too quickly without being able to fully take in what we have covered in the last set of PD. (Teacher)

Teacher beliefs

A third of teachers acknowledged that their own beliefs, which they had also identified as one of their challenges, made adopting change difficult. This included any beliefs or prior knowledge they might have had that got in the way of accepting change, a lack of understanding of the professional learning and development process, and feeling the pressure to make changes to their teaching practice or belief systems. Teachers made the following comments about how their beliefs made it hard to adopt change:

Old habits and personal opinion based on my own opinions. (Teacher)

Just overcoming prior pre-conceptions or misconceptions regarding beliefs that are challenged. (Teacher)

The difficulty is when I am expected to make changes for change sake. (Teacher)

The principals' perspectives on factors that made adopting change difficult for teachers

Quality of leadership

One aspect of leadership that all the principals discussed during the focus group interview was the need for clarity of vision so that teachers had a good understanding of what the professional learning and development was seeking to address, and what the process would be. One principal said about this topic:

Maybe we didn't give them enough clarity about why we were doing stuff at the start, as a leadership team. (Principal)

This principal had noticed that the effectiveness of the professional learning and development had started to drift in one instance and that the new learning had not permeated into all areas of the school in another instance, and wondered if lack of clarity may have been a contributing factor.

Attitude of teachers

When there was a sense of complacency or a lack of reflection, or resistance because teachers thought they were already good teachers and didn't need to learn anymore, then all four principals felt teachers with these characteristics did not embrace new learning easily. They made comments such as:

Our staff had a belief that – oh we're doing a good job. But they didn't have that inner ability, that propensity to inquire into their practice about doing a better job. (Principal)

What teachers said about meeting the challenges

Teachers were asked, "What strategies, if any, did you use to overcome your challenges?"

Strategies teachers used

Collegiality

When teachers responded to the question about the strategies they had used to overcome their challenges, 30% of them said that the strategies that had made a huge difference could be attributed to the collegiality of their colleagues. They met with others, talked things through, shared ideas and resources. When listing their strategies teachers mentioned:

Talking-groups with other teachers. (Teacher)

Talking and sharing with fellow peers. (Teacher)

Working alongside colleagues and talking about progress. (Teacher)

Preparing resources and sharing with peers, sharing successes. (Teacher)

Adjusting their practice

About 21% of teachers said that adjusting their practice was a good strategy as they found ways to incorporate the professional learning and development into their own classroom practice.

One teacher said they:

Took time to think through what was achievable and did that – worked out steps I could cope with. (Teacher)

Teacher attitude

Another 20% of the respondents felt that their personal attitude made a difference to overcoming challenges. Teachers “led by example”, “tried harder”, “tried to stay positive and engaged”, and maintained “positivity toward the changes”. There were

only two teachers who decided to “harden up and get through it” or felt “just do it, get it done.”

Strategies leaders used

The question asked of teachers was, “What strategies, if any, did your leaders use to overcome the challenges?”

Organisational

Nearly a quarter of teachers (24%) recognised that leaders made organisational decisions and changes to meet teachers’ needs; things like timetabling of staff meetings, granting release time, providing further opportunities for more professional development. Teachers talked about:

*They provided us with mentors and with time to work alongside staff.
(Teacher)*

They tried to keep the PD meetings to a reasonable length of time and cancelled any other non-urgent staff meetings. (Teacher)

One teacher made an interesting comment saying:

I think they (leaders) have widened the spectrum of teachers involved in each initiative to spread the wisdom and work load. I think they were strategic about their choices and have allocated a time release to some staff to help with work load issues. (Teacher)

Leaders involved in the professional learning

Teachers (17%) identified leaders being involved in the professional learning and development as one strategy. Leaders were present at meetings; in some cases they shared, modelled and led the learning. Out of the 14 comments about leaders being involved in the professional learning and development two of them were negative comments about leaders who were not involved. One teacher said:

One thing that we noted though, is that the teachers are all in inquiry project groups, but our leaders aren't, they don't have to do it. (Teacher)

It would appear that these teachers appreciate and value principals and leadership teams being actively involved in the professional learning and development.

Asking for and responding to feedback

One other factor that 17% noted was that leaders asked for feedback and provided opportunity for feedback to be given and shared. And then, on top of that, leaders actually listened and responded to feedback. Teachers said things like:

They allowed discussion, listened to fears and responded. (Teacher)

They responded to concerns and issues as they arose. (Teacher)

Discussions with staff around how the PD could better be tailored to suit their needs. (Teacher)

There was a small group of five teachers who were not sure what strategies leaders had used to overcome challenges, and only one teacher who felt their leaders had done nothing.

The principals' perspectives on meeting the challenges

Strategies teachers used

Principals' views agreed with teachers' that a collegial and collaborative workplace made a difference to teachers. Every principal believed that teachers being able to see evidence in other classes, and with other teachers, was a strong strategy for overcoming the challenges of new learning. They also recognised that teachers needed to have a desire or an understanding to want to change. One principal stated:

It's not until you get that 'aha' moment or a desire or an understanding to want to change that real change will happen. (Principal)

Strategies leaders used

When asked what strategies they used as leaders to help overcome the challenges principals talked about many of the same things that teachers did. Principals talked about making organisational decisions in order to meet teachers' needs. They talked about meeting with teachers one-on-one or in small groups to elicit feedback, and also about how they sought to act on the feedback given to them by teachers.

Principals made comments such as:

I meet with them and talk it out really. And I try to listen, I really do. (Principal)

Two principals also identified being involved in the professional learning and development as one strategy they used as they had an expectation that all staff would take part. They all used evidence of success to motivate and challenge their teachers, with two principals stating an expectation that all staff would be life-long learners.

One principal made sure that they talked with teachers about the challenges of new learning, telling them of John Edward's learning pit and the loss of competence we experience when our context changes and we are placed in the role of learner rather than expert. The other three principals went on to talk about the different ways they encouraged their staff to embrace new learning, take risks, and talk things through with a colleague when things were not going right for them. Underlying this was the principals' belief in their staff that they would get through any difficulties.

And when they're not going right, talk to someone, don't give up, talk to someone. You'll get through. (Principal)

Summary of key challenges

Both principals and teachers agreed that teacher belief and prior knowledge, teacher attitude and the facilitator not fitting were factors that made adopting change difficult for teachers. The common comments from both groups were around teachers not engaging, feeling bored or feeling like they already knew what was being taught to them. Both groups also agreed that compliance due to a lack of understanding or a reluctance to embrace change was a challenge.

Principals and teachers both recognised a number of strategies that leaders used to meet challenges. The top two strategies, at close to 40% each, were firstly the organisational changes leaders made to meet teachers' needs, and secondly that they sought feedback and responded to it. The other factor, at nearly 25%, was leaders being involved in the professional learning and development.

Teachers however recognised many more factors that made professional learning and development challenging for them than principals did. The factors they listed that they said made adopting change difficult for them were around lack – lack of time, lack of resources, and lack of support, and also around increased workload and the resultant stress these factors brought into their working lives.

One difference used by principals, but which did not come out so clearly from teachers, was the deliberate influence principals brought to bear on their staff by encouraging, challenging, being positive and being permission giving.

Time and workload were listed by teachers both as a challenge and as a reason why adopting change was difficult, but was not mentioned at all by principals as a contributing factor. However, it is interesting to note that even though principals did not mention workload or time constraints as one of the challenges they experienced, it seems clear that in their actual practice in schools they recognised and addressed the challenges of workload and time as a matter of organisational leadership. They made decisions in order to support and facilitate teachers and meet their needs.

The question on the teacher questionnaire about what strategies leaders used to overcome challenges had a much lower response rate and a much higher skip rate than previous questions. Out of the 66 respondents only 38 filled this question out and 28 skipped it. One can only surmise the reasons for this. Teachers may have felt uncomfortable answering the question, or they may not have known how to answer it, or perhaps being half way through the survey they were getting tired of filling in answers and this one required a bit more thought as it wasn't directly about them. It is an interesting feature of the survey however.

Sustaining Professional Learning and Development

Questions were asked about the leadership and management of change, both in the questionnaire and the focus group interview, to see what could be determined about the nature of sustainability. Under this heading three main themes emerged – factors that made a difference to individual teachers being able to sustain improvement, factors that made a difference to schools being able to sustain improvement and thirdly, the impact of a collaborative and collegial environment.

What teachers said about factors affecting sustainability of teacher practice

When considering the concept of sustainability every single teacher agreed that they had made permanent changes to their teaching practice, to some degree, because of the school-wide professional learning and development they were a part of. The key factors that teachers attributed to them making permanent changes to their teaching practice were the support they received, the fact that the professional learning and development made a difference to their students, that they grew in their understanding and pedagogical knowledge, and to a lesser extent that they had a personal acceptance of the need for change.

Collegial support

One of the strongest factors 20% of the respondents identified was the support they received from others to make the changes necessary in their own teaching practice.

The collegiality and co-operation from their peers and colleagues supported them, and they also felt supported because the professional learning and development worked or was easy to implement. Teachers gave examples like:

It worked. (Teacher)

Collegiality between staff and agreement as to what works best for our children. (Teacher)

Modelling how it is done, prompts and visual displays to guide, remind me. Positive support from colleagues, high expectations and clear guidance from the principal and an exemplary model of this PD. (Teacher)

The value of a collegial workplace appears to be an important influence on a number of teachers.

Students benefitting

Equally as strong, 23% of teachers stated that seeing the professional learning and development making a difference for their students was an important factor for them making permanent changes to their teaching practice. They made comments such as:

The positive effects on student achievement when I applied the PD in my teaching practice. (Teacher)

The difference it is making to student motivation and outcomes. (Teacher)

This shows that these teachers will work through the challenges of new learning if they see it is making a positive difference to the students they teach.

Professional growth

A moderately small number of teachers (15%) attributed their own professional growth in teacher understanding and pedagogical knowledge to be a factor in them making permanent changes to their teaching practice. A specific example from one teacher who felt they had grown because of the professional learning and development stated:

Te Kotahitanga has changed my attitude towards teaching in a positive way. I started thinking that it was me who has to change, not the students. (Teacher)

What teachers think about factors affecting sustainability school-wide

When considering whether or not there was sustainability across the school only one teacher out of the 35 who answered this question disagreed, though the number that only slightly agreed rose to a third. Teachers (26%) identified the most important factor that affected school-wide sustainability, as being the quality of leadership. However, 21% of teachers equally attributed organisational factors, and the fact that everybody was involved in the initiative (23%) as other similarly important factors. A small 8% of respondents attributed school-wide sustainability to the fact that the professional learning and development worked and that teachers had experienced success.

Quality of leadership

The effect that the quality of leadership had was reflected in this quote.

Some managers in teams are fairly negative and reluctant to change and this filters down into their teams, whilst other leaders are positive and encouraging and this too has a filtered down effect. (Teacher)

A smart enthusiastic leader who actually shows she can teach and who has lots of great stuff to pass on. (Teacher)

In addition, the influence that a committed principal and leadership team has to sustaining improvement came through clearly from a number of the teachers who commented on this factor (7 out of 17).

Commitment of principal to this end. (Teacher)

The school leadership and managers are dedicated providing quality learning for staff and students. (Teacher)

This shows these teachers recognised the role that good leadership has on sustainability of improvement.

Organisational factors

Organisational factors included such things as the school investing time and money and resources into teachers, having systems put in place that enabled sustainability of practices once the facilitators were no longer in the school, and that the professional learning and development was regularly discussed, held up in front of teachers and communicated in an on-going way. Teachers made comments such as:

We had systems in place to carry on with the PD practice once the facilitators left. (Teachers)

Staff have been appointed and given time to oversee implementation. (Teacher)

The on-going discussions within teams, school-wide and just amongst ourselves on what we are doing well, could improve on etc. (Teacher)

The organisational factors were many times ones that could only operate out of decisions and changes made by leadership, and so appear to be recognised and appreciated by teachers as having a positive effect on their individual practice.

Everyone involved

There was a moderate indication from teachers (23%) that everyone being involved in the professional learning and development was a contributing factor to school-wide sustainability. They stated that there was an expectation that all were involved; that there was regular school-wide professional learning and development, and a high percentage said that there was school-wide buy in from everyone.

Expectations that we attend it and try it. (Teacher)

*Buy in from all teachers, especially SMT (senior management team).
(Teacher)*

This group of teachers appear to appreciate the involvement of leadership in the professional learning and development.

The principals' perspectives on sustainability

Principals had a much more prosaic view of sustainability from a school perspective. They talked about the paradox of seeking to be an innovative and forward moving organisation, and the need to stabilise and consolidate learning. There was tension that resulted because of the two often opposing needs. The list of difficulties to the sustainability of school improvement was long including aspects such as the moving on of staff and the need to employ new teachers, recognising holes in school-wide learning that needed to be plugged, the way learning was lost or forgotten, that Ministry of Education contracts were not long enough, that teachers were lacking in curriculum expertise and the challenge between moving forward and stabilising. This comment summarises their initial discussion:

So, while we try and have sustainability I think, in effect, the facts are that we move on and we sometimes forget what we have done, and you know, we have to manage that in some way. But I don't believe really that schools can completely sustain anything. We always move on, we always slip back, we always need reminding. (Principal)

However; despite principals initially decrying sustainability across the school as an almost impossible undertaking, when they began explaining how they sought to “invest in getting a culture that tries to give back that consistency” the fairly equal key factors principals identified were school culture, their own leadership practices and spreading the leadership load to the aspiring leaders in their organisations. All three factors could possibly come under the umbrella of the ‘role of leadership’ but were addressed quite separately by principals.

School culture

Principals talked about building a school culture of success, of consistency, giving some specific examples of how they do this. For example one principal uses their annual curriculum review to keep what is important about learning and teaching to the fore. Another provides new staff with extra PD so they can meet school expectations regarding school goals. There was quite a bit of discussion about the need to have teachers who were able to develop effective learning pedagogy as well as have strong curriculum knowledge. One principal deliberately hires new teachers with expertise in specific curriculum content rather than just generalist education degrees.

Quality of leadership

The leadership practices that principals utilised included maintaining the fine line between stability and challenge. This in particular was one that was discussed at some length as one of the challenges to creating sustainability. One principal put it this way:

It's a difficult one because sustainability and stability are two very similar things, and yet you want to bring in new blood to your school and you want to bring in new ideas and ways of thinking, but you invest in getting a culture that tries to give back that consistency. So it's like a fine line between keeping that culture strong, but also challenging it. (Principal)

Two principals said they also collaborated with and consulted staff about important issues such as the learning of students. They addressed what the data was showing

and found ways to make sure their teachers had the opportunity to do so also. One other approach that two principals found to be helpful was to try and build new professional learning and development on previous learning, to maintain a similar theme to the learning even if the context was different, and not to change the focus of the learning too frequently.

To try and keep a similar theme to some of the PD we're doing, so while it's a slight variation to what we're doing in the curriculum area whatever, there's a slight theme to what we're doing. (Principal)

You also walk that fine line that if you keep changing things too frequently you lose the faith of your staff. (Principal)

Principals agreed that the role they played was an important factor in achieving sustainability in their organisations.

Sharing the leadership load

Principals also believed that spreading the leadership load was a key factor to building sustainability school-wide. All four were growing that “second base of leadership” from amongst the teachers. Some of them appointed leaders for important initiatives in order to maintain momentum. They also drew on outside support getting in facilitators or experts to help present the new learning, keep them on track, push them out of their comfort zones and support the staff.

I think growing the leaders as that second base – not doing it as just the senior team yourselves, growing the leaders in the various curriculum areas and having them lead, 'cause that gives you more of that critical mass to help with initiatives. (Principal)

To bring someone in to support with what we're trying helps. (Principal)

This shows that growing leaders and succession planning are viewed by principals as aspects of sustainability.

What teachers think about collaboration

Collaboration and collegiality have been common factors that have emerged from teachers' comments when they responded to questions about sustainability of teacher practice and school-wide sustainability. It would appear that teachers feel motivated by the inclusiveness of a collaborative environment to commit to making permanent changes to their own teaching practice, and recognise that school-wide sustainability is aided by a collaborative all-inclusive approach to professional learning and development. Questions about the nature of collaboration were asked in the teacher questionnaire and in the focus group interview to determine its effect in participants' schools. Every teacher (100%) believed a collaborative culture was a positive thing to have in their schools. When asked if they believed their school had a collaborative culture nearly 90% of teachers agreed.

Teachers who disagreed

Of the teachers who disagreed, the main tenor of their comments was that they did not feel they had a share in the decision making, or that any collaboration was isolated to certain individuals or in some parts of the school but not school-wide. They made comments such as:

*Each staff meeting is like walking into a new restaurant – I don't set the menu.
(Teacher)*

*Management generally make decisions for staff – not a lot of collaboration.
(Teacher)*

I think individuals in the school are collaborative, but I don't see evidence of it being school-wide. (Teacher)

These few teachers appear to have identified the lack of their involvement in decision making as an influential negative factor.

Teachers who agreed

In contrast, the teachers who agreed that their school had a collaborative culture described a shared motivation to benefit students. They supported one another, shared ideas, planning and resources. The following are typical of the comments made:

There is agreement when initiatives are brought in and when there is disagreement, teacher/student voice is heard and acknowledged but the initiative may still go ahead. (Teacher)

We set a school-wide goal every year. Team leaders work collaboratively and mentoring across syndicates has supported a collaborative culture. (Teacher)

Our school has a strong collaborative culture. We are always motivated and interested in benefiting the students' learning. This is something that we all strongly believe in as a team. (Teacher)

Teachers felt they were listened to and worked well together.

Collegiality

A moderate number of teachers (37%) believed that the most positive thing to come out of their school's collaborative culture was the relationships that were built, the sense of collegiality. They talked about the sense of team that was between them and the sense of trust. They described people working together, getting to have their say, and their sense of ownership. Teachers said things like:

Two or more brains are better than one. (Teacher)

Makes the workplace a healthier happier place. (Teacher)

Everyone feels valued and has a much more positive and collaborative attitude. (Teacher)

Trusting relationships and a strong professionalism are necessary to facilitate change. (Teacher)

Teachers described relational aspects of communication and support most commonly when answering the question, “What does your school do to work in a collaborative manner?” 35 out of the 41 teachers who wrote comments for this question described various iterations of responsive communication back and forth between teachers, teachers and students, teachers and leaders, in syndicates, in professional learning groups, as a whole school; working in teams with collegial support, being pastorally minded of each other, valuing each other’s input and demonstrating a willingness to help each other. Shared planning, shared celebrations and events were indicators of collegiality for 14% of respondents, as was attending professional learning and development sessions together or other forms of learning for 11% of respondents.

We have our say on many things. We have a voice. (Teacher)

We interact positively; we ask questions and discuss issues. (Teacher)

Honesty is always promoted. We learn to accept and understand each other – both strengths and weaknesses. (Teacher)

There is a family atmosphere – people are open about their ideas – they talk openly during PD sessions and we can learn together and help one another – lively debates are viewed as a good thing. (Teacher)

Teachers appear to really value the collegiality and sense of trust that they experience as part of a collaborative culture.

A shared vision

Factors that 11% of respondents identified as demonstrating a shared vision were that everyone was on the same page and shared the same vision. There was consistency in expectations, communication was clearer and people accepted change better. Teachers said things like:

We all need to be moving forward together – this includes staff, families and students. (Teacher)

When everyone is on the same page then communication is clearer and the bigger picture can be achieved. (Teacher)

We generally all agree that we are aiming to deliver good quality learning to children. (Teacher)

Feeling a sense of unity appears to be an important benefit of collaboration for these teachers.

Sharing the leadership load

A small number of teachers (11%) described ways that they share leadership amongst themselves. They recognised each other's strengths, took responsibility for various aspects of school life, worked in teams, mentored others, organised things like sports rotations, and shared the leading of syndicate events like athletics days and assemblies.

My team is well-led with a leader who recognises others' strengths and builds our team by capitalising on these. (Teacher)

It would appear that this small group of teachers recognised that sharing the leadership load with each other was evidence of a positive collaborative culture.

Challenges of collaboration

One teacher said they were not sure how their school demonstrated collaboration, another teacher said that collaboration was “perceived as an expectation but is not a reality on staff”, and a small number of teachers did not feel included in the decision making, which went against their view of what a collaborative culture should be like. One teacher talked about the challenges of a collaborative culture saying that they thought it was a positive thing to have in the school, “but I don’t strongly agree because some people step on your toes, per se.” It seems that when teachers feel included in the decision making they commit to the journey of improvement the school is embarking on, and are prepared to work hard and push through any barriers in order to see success for themselves and their students. Conversely, a lack of collaboration challenges motivation and engagement, and interferes with teachers permanently changing their practice and applying what they have learned.

The principals’ perspectives on collaboration

Support and challenge

Principals recognised the relational aspects of a collaborative culture and talked about the ways they sought to be supportive and permission giving. They talked about allowing people to try new ideas, about handing over responsibility to people and giving them the time to try new things out. They spent quite a bit of time sharing with each other about how they challenge their staff by encouraging risk taking amongst their teachers, just as teachers expect it of their students. They talked about how they encourage the giving and acceptance of constructive criticism and about providing opportunities for teachers to reflect, not to be judgemental of each other, but to get help when it was needed, to ask for support and to talk things through. Systems were in place where teachers observed each other or themselves on video. They asked for input from all staff members and sought not to be reactive. They made comments such as:

I’ve learnt not to say no even if I think the idea is silly, but rather sort of say, well give it a try, see what you think. (Principal)

Encouraging teachers that it’s okay to take risks. (Principal)

Encouraging them to take the risk of allowing somebody to give you constructive feedback. (Principal)

People do make judgements, and they do make comments...that's the downside of it, but you just have to plough on through I guess and don't react to certain things you hear because they're only trivial. You know, don't sweat the small stuff. (Principal)

It would appear that principals used many aspects to both support their teachers and challenge them in order to sustain momentum of improvement and learning.

Sharing the leadership load

All four principals talked about sharing leadership opportunities with teachers and sharing the load by involving others. They sought to be aware of potential amongst their staff by recognising individual's strengths and seeking to develop them.

You share leadership opportunity. It's really about sharing the load, looking at talent, involving people. (Principal)

What I do is try and look at individual strengths in the school so everyone is having an opportunity to develop their skills. (Principal)

Principals talked about sharing the leadership load as a deliberate strategy they use to sustain improvement in their schools, and identified it as one approach that strengthened their collaborative culture.

Challenges of collaboration

Principals also talked about challenges in building a collaborative culture. They had a difference of opinion when discussing relational trust and the challenge of teachers opening up their room to others. Although they encouraged teachers about being

open to being observed by others and receiving feedback from them there was recognition amongst some principals that this was a difficult thing to ask of teachers. Two principals disagreed with this saying:

If you trust you are not being judged and whatever, and it is just part and parcel of us being a team. (Principal)

Whereupon another principal stated:

I have seen certain people who judge and it annoys me. And it has been a problem in our practice. (Principal)

One principal said:

I think it's a healthy thing myself. (Principal)

A different principal said:

If I jumped back into that now with this current practice I know I would have been the one just about melting into a - ...but I'd do it. I would have done it. (Principal)

One principal concluded honestly:

I'm not sure that I would practice what I preach in this area. (Principal)

From this we can see that principals are aware of some of the challenges that working in a collaborative environment can bring.

Summary of key factors regarding sustainability

When comparing similarities between the two groups the two main themes that emerged were the quality and determination of the leadership and how they were committed to growing leaders; and the strong emphasis on communication, feedback and collaboration. When teachers and principals described how their schools worked in a collaborative way there were three main areas where they both shared similar views. These areas were the relational, where both groups described staff

looking out for each other, being supportive of each other and where there was an environment where it was okay to ask questions; communication where leaders asked for feedback, where the sharing of ideas and planning was encouraged, and where everyone did professional learning and development together; and shared leadership with indicators being teams, mentors, coaches and using individual strengths. Other factors affecting sustainability were the school-wide culture and buy-in of staff; the use of an outside facilitator; and organisational factors such as systems, time, resources and money.

When looking at the differences between the two groups, teachers attributed sustainability to the professional learning having worked, with teachers changing their practice; and that students had achieved success and were motivated. Principals attributed sustainability to the on-going building of professional learning and development from year to year, and having a similar theme across different areas or contexts.

An interesting factor that linked sustainability of individual practice with school-wide practice was the balance between teaching pedagogy and curriculum content knowledge that teachers needed. Principals recognised the importance of teachers having strong pedagogical knowledge and strong current curriculum knowledge as being a factor that contributed to school-wide sustainability. Teachers did not mention this even though they listed it as an important factor for sustainable changes in their own practice.

Key Findings

The data revealed that leaders and teachers are faced with a number of challenges when seeking to get the most out of school-wide improvement initiatives. These include gaining teachers' initial engagement and motivation with the school-wide professional learning and development; managing the learning process so that the adoption of change is made less difficult; and sustaining improvement so that the hard work is not lost or diminished. Challenges to the learning process include teachers' attitudes and prior beliefs, and issues of workload and time constraints.

The findings indicate that creating a collaborative culture and a collegial environment within the school is a key factor in achieving success. A collaborative culture is also a key factor in sustaining new learning both in individual teacher practice and across the school. The vital role quality leadership plays is a theme that is interwoven through every aspect of the findings. These key findings are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings identified through analysis of the research data. The findings identify three main challenges which leaders and teachers face when seeking to get the most out of school-wide improvement initiatives. This chapter is organised according to the three challenges, which are 1. Gaining teachers' initial engagement and motivation with the school-wide professional learning and development; 2. Managing the learning process so that the adoption of change is made less difficult; and 3. Sustaining improvement so that the hard work is not lost or diminished. Three pervasive themes are woven throughout these challenges. These are: teacher attitudes and beliefs, collaboration and leadership. Each challenge is discussed through the lens of these three themes.

Motivation and Engagement

When embarking on a school-wide improvement initiative school leaders do all they can to plan for success. Even if they are fortunate enough to gain access to Ministry of Education funded professional development there are still further significant financial implications for the school to consider, as well as the mental and emotional effort that is expended whenever change is experienced (Duke, 2004; Fullan, 2001). Considering expense and effort, a school leader that has an enthusiastic and motivated teaching staff completely behind the proposed improvement initiative has navigated one major obstacle to success (Harris, 2002; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). The findings from the research investigation provide some insight into factors that motivate teachers to engage in school-wide professional learning and development.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs

Throughout every challenge that is faced in a school-wide improvement initiative the role of the individual teacher is crucial to success (Hoban, 2002). Their decision whether to fully engage with the process and make any required changes to their own teacher practice is the fulcrum on which all else turns. Teachers acknowledged their attitudes and beliefs made a difference to their levels of engagement. Leaders

are challenged to create the environment that enables teacher motivation and engagement to flourish (Ferrier-Kerr, et al., 2009; Timperley, 2011). Principals too acknowledged that teachers who had a positive attitude were much easier to work with than those who were resistant, with one principal saying that he looks for new staff that are “positive, half full people, non-judgemental people” when he is employing.

Relevance

In their responses to the questionnaire teachers were quite clear about the factors that motivated them to engage. One of the top factors that nearly 30% of teachers felt was important was the relevance of the proposed initiative. Teachers needed to see the relevance of the professional learning and development to their own beliefs or needs or goals, and also to their students’ needs, and to a lesser extent the needs of the school. When describing what that looked like to them teachers said things such as, “That it meets the needs of the staff, students and community we are in and that we are consulted on this and we have time to engage in it effectively.” Nolen, Ward and Horn (2011) state that teachers are motivated by the importance of the perceived relevance of the professional learning to their teaching practice. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) describe relevance as aspects such as the context in which teachers’ practise being supportive of learning, the content offered being relevant to teachers’ classroom practice and the learning activities being meaningful. Timperley et al. (2007) affirm that if these aspects are present teachers are likely to engage in on-going learning. If none of these conditions are present then motivation is likely to be low.

Benefit

Teachers and principals both felt that allowing staff to see the benefits of the proposed learning made a difference to initial engagement. Teachers wanted the professional learning and development to be of benefit to themselves as teachers stating, for example, their desire “that it is going to make a difference in my teaching and a positive effect”, and they wanted it to have “a direct influence on raising student achievement and teaching practice across the board.” One principal said of

his staff that “they do need to see the benefits of things before they will really buy into it.” Research conducted by Timperley (2011, p. xviii) affirms that “teachers’ motivation increased when their students showed accelerated progress.” So it would seem that knowing that the professional learning that they will be involved in will be of benefit to their students and themselves, and that it will be of relevance to them by meeting their needs or beliefs, is highly motivating to teachers. Leaders who provide opportunities for teachers to see the benefits of the proposed learning through observations in classrooms of other teachers or at other schools, through professional readings or research findings are creating the environment that enables teacher motivation and engagement to flourish.

Leadership

There were a number of actions that leaders took, that were identified by both teachers and principals, which motivated engagement in school-wide professional learning and development. These were everyone learning together, investigating and using evidence and using outside experts or facilitators.

All learning together

The first leadership action was an expectation stated by leaders that all staff would be involved in the professional learning and development. This included themselves and their leadership team learning alongside their teachers. This finding reflects what can be found in the literature about the role of the principal setting an example by modelling “growing on the job” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 223). The literature says that leaders who do this are connected to their teachers and promote a strong sense of collective responsibility (Wagner et al., 2006). Leaders who promoted and participated in teacher professional learning and development achieved the largest positive effect on student achievement according to Robinson, et al. (2009), and were able to provide useful advice about how to solve teaching problems (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008).

Using evidence

One other motivator was the use of student achievement data as a justification for the professional learning and development, which Wagner et al. (2006) identifies as a stimulus for teacher engagement either at the beginning or during the professional learning programme. Timperley et al. (2007) say that the key to improved student achievement is that teachers needed to engage with the professional learning process at some point. One teacher, for example, said they “collaboratively identified gaps and needs of students through analysis of data”. Principals agreed, with one saying, “We show them the data and we really expect everybody to be involved. And it is data driven – the justification for doing it – it’s data driven.” Knowing the needs that they are trying to address provides directive motivation for those involved.

Using outside experts/facilitators

The third leadership action that motivated engagement was the use of an external facilitator or expert to work in the school. Robinson et al. (2009) state that “to meet specific goals, it may sometimes be necessary to identify and recruit individuals with the required expertise from outside the school” (p. 113). Evans-Andris (2010) affirms that external experts and facilitators can introduce and initiate positive school-based changes. Both teachers and principals felt this was a positive action, though there was some agreement amongst principals and teachers that using experts from their own staff to facilitate the professional learning and development was also very advantageous. Robinson et al. (2009) claim that using expertise from effective staff works well if the teacher expert and their colleagues have full knowledge of why the teacher expert was selected to share their expertise and what their role as a resource person was. However, Hattie (2009b) states that the involvement of external experts with teachers creates greater success for positive student outcomes, than just within-school initiatives. Principals seemed to be using both options in their schools depending on the improvement initiative. One principal talked about the success they had had using teacher experts in the Te Kauhua project, feeling using them had been better received by staff than using external facilitators. In contrast another principal preferred having an outside expert to come and work in the school and “get us out of our comfort zone”, while a third principal

stated they used a mixture of both teacher experts and external facilitator in their literacy improvement project.

Collaboration

The value placed on a collaborative and collegial workplace in motivating engagement came through teachers' views again and again, with 100% of teachers stating they felt a collaborative culture was a positive thing to have in their school, and 90% of them giving reasons why they felt their school had a collaborative culture.

Collaborative consultation

The main collaborative action that made a difference for teachers to feel motivated to engage was the fact that there was a process of information gathering, feedback and consultation. Research conducted by Blase and Blase (2000), and The Oregon School Boards Association (Hynds & McDonald, 2009) found that intrinsic motivators made a prime difference to teachers. The most prevalent intrinsic motivators were the effect of leaders talking with teachers to promote reflection, and to promote professional growth, self-respect, responsibility and a sense of accomplishment. It would appear that teachers felt valued through this process of collaborative consultation and feedback. One teacher gave an example: "To have your say without being criticised or ignored" which demonstrates the power this had for them. Leaders taking the time to involve their staff in collaborative consultation intrinsically motivate them. One teacher said, for example, "When we work together our school functions better." Another said, "We get to have our say on many things. We have a voice. Team meetings are reported back to management. It is a lovely school to work in because of this."

Collegial relationships

Teachers were also motivated by the relational connection they had with others involved in the learning. They appreciated "passionate people leading the staff meetings" and "that the PD facilitator is inspiring but understands the reality of the

classroom.” They were also motivated by feeling valued by others and being consulted and given the chance to have a say in the on-going direction of their school. These teachers demonstrate that “learning is primarily a social activity” (Hattie, 2009b, p. 246), it is “community-centered” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.33), in that “our intelligence is derived from our interactions with others” (Martin-Kniep, 2008, p.xiv). Having people that they connected with relationally made a positive difference to teacher motivation.

The literature speaks about the importance of gaining initial engagement from teachers. As Durrant and Holden (2006) say, “Teachers once initially engaged become committed, because as well as seeing the value in terms of school improvement, this kind of activity helps them to make meaning of their professional lives” (p. 167). One teacher said that being consulted “on what is happening and why” and having “involvement in decision making on what PD will be taking place” was most important for them to engage. This big picture understanding that Durrant and Holden refer to that helps teachers make meaning of their professional lives is reflected in the following quote from one teacher who said that what was most important for them to engage was “that I have a complete picture of the process, believe it is important to support student success and that I understand my role and how it fits in to the ‘wheel’.”

Managing change

The success of a professional learning community is directly related to members’ willingness and propensity to change (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). The authors go on to say that this willingness is influenced by teachers’ belief that the new learning will make a difference, by the perceived amount of support their leaders gave them and also by organisational and systemic issues such as timetabling, availability of resources and opportunities for planning and team teaching (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). The findings from the research support each of the points listed above.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005, p. 361) say that the adaptive innovation required to rethink key ideas, practices and even values can create high emotion, and that “the capacity to consider change without feeling threatened is an important ability.” A third of teachers identified the challenge that their own attitudes or beliefs had with regard to them adopting change. They said their beliefs and prior knowledge sometimes had them feeling like they already knew everything and so were bored or unengaged. One teacher expressed it as the difficulty of “maintaining interest when I already knew things”. Teachers were less motivated when they experienced a lack of understanding of the professional learning and development process, “not understanding how these new practices would translate into my classroom”; a reluctance to embrace change, “my own habits and the observed reluctance of other staff to embrace change”; and feeling pressure to make changes to their teaching practice, “just overcoming prior pre-conceptions or misconceptions regarding beliefs that are challenged.” One teacher said, “The difficulty is when I am expected to make changes for change sake.”

Hattie (2009b) says that people come to learning situations with already established conceptions of how the world works, and that experienced teachers in particular bring with them a rich and extensive personal theory base about how students learn. Becoming aware of the theories of action that underpin teachers’ practice helps teachers decide what should or could be changed (Timperley, et al., 2007). However, most change involves taking a risk, and many of us will resist that or find ways to avoid it (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Eraut, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994). Many of the teachers who responded to questions about challenges to adopting change recognised this saying things like, “I just wanted to focus on reading, maths and management!” (and not the new learning), or “I found at times a little resistance from some towards change”, or “I got the feeling some teachers put on ‘shows’ during observations (which was) not a true reflection of their actual practice.” One teacher’s response to the challenges of change was “avoidance at times; I just plodded on and tried not to get too stressed.” These quotes demonstrate the things teachers do or think about when facing the challenge of

change. Understanding the significance of teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and how they influence the adoption of change, is vital for leaders.

A shared sense of vision or belief

In contrast, more than a quarter of teachers (26%) said the attitude and beliefs they had that made it easy for them to manage or adopt change were feeling personal motivation and excitement about the possibilities offered and being willing to engage in their own learning. They said things like they “enjoy a challenge and thrive on new initiatives especially when they involve major changes in students' learning.” All the principals agreed that teachers' attitudes made a difference to how easy the adoption of change was. Craft (2000) believes that the key to successful change lies in the development of a culture which expects change and which is conducive to evaluating and handling it both at the whole school level and also at the individual teacher's level. Principals' opinions were that teachers who shared a sense of vision where everyone accepted the challenges ahead of them and believed that together they could achieve success were the ones who found it easiest to make the changes needed.

Timperley et al. (2007), highlight the important role school leaders' play in promoting professional learning so that substantive positive outcomes for students are sustained. They describe leaders who develop a vision for possible student outcomes that teachers believe in and engage with. One principal expressed it this way:

We are a changing school, and we know that our learners have big needs, and that is generally accepted by everybody, and we have a strategic plan, and that is outlined and everyone knows it and everyone has had input into it to some extent, including our students. (Principal)

In the literature Stoll (2000) and Leithwood and Beatty (2008) say that keeping a clear learning vision so that it permeates learning at all levels of the school organisation is one of the four imperatives at the core of leadership of and for learning that enhance capacity in an organisation. Findings from the research show

that principals worked hard to deliberately cultivate a school learning culture that everyone shared.

Teacher self-belief

Research says that if teachers believe they can make a difference there is a corresponding transfer to children's beliefs in themselves, and an increased likelihood that teachers will engage in classroom and school improvement initiatives (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Teachers in the study showed they had this self-belief when they made comments such as, "The students benefit because we are more confident and that seems to allow them to take risks and become more confident learners." Both teachers and principals believed that student success was due to improved teacher practice. "Students are benefitting from better teaching and are able to talk about their learning and next steps." This shared belief that together they could achieve success is an example of what Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), and Leithwood and Beatty (2008) refer to as finding ways to grow teachers' self-efficacy so that they have faith in their own abilities to make a difference for their students. Teachers with this faith are developing the "adaptive expertise" Timperley says produces the sustainability of "on-going learning and improvement" (2011, p. 163).

Leadership

It is a leader's challenge to find ways to grow teachers' capacity to lead and to manage change effectively (Hoban, 2002; Wagner et al., 2006). Leaders in the study used actions or strategies that were identified by both teachers and principals as helping teachers adopt change, meet challenges and grow in capacity. These strategies were the development of organisational management in order to meet the needs of teachers, the use of collaborative decision making, and the practice of sharing leadership across the school. The leadership role of the facilitator was also an agreed factor that affected the uptake of change for teachers.

Organisational management

The strategy that the highest number of teachers (24%) identified as making a positive difference in helping them overcome the challenges of change was the organisational decisions and changes leaders made to meet their needs. Examples given were things like leaders granting release time, providing further opportunities for more professional development, teachers being given time to implement change and absorb new concepts, or timetabling of staff meetings. Teachers described things leaders did such as “they tried to keep the PD meetings to a reasonable length of time and cancelled any other non-urgent staff meetings”, and “they provided us with mentors and with time to work alongside staff.” Timperley et al. (2007) credit school organisation as having “arguably the greatest influence on teachers’ practice and their motivation to engage in professional development” (p. 26). They described leaders who managed and organised their staff and their resources well by, for example, reducing competing demands and by ensuring opportunities to learn were focused and productive.

Teachers in the study described the benefits of having school-wide systems, practices and organisation. From their comments we can see that these types of organisational arrangements made a big difference to them. Running in parallel to that were the comments from teachers that said a lack of organisational resources made the adoption of change very challenging for them. Teachers mentioned things like a lack of resources, lack of time, lack of support, too much PD and too quick, increased workload and the resultant stress as being obstacles. The literature on change in schools says teachers are concerned about increased workload, the competing pressure and demand on their time and decreased autonomy (Hargreaves, 1994; Harris, 2002). The principals in the focus group described ways that they recognised and addressed the challenges of workload and time within their schools. They made decisions in order to support and facilitate teachers and meet their needs. However, issues of workload and time constraints were a negative factor for 42% of teachers, and as such should be a significant consideration by leaders when considering how to manage change well.

Collaborative decision making

There were a high number of teachers (over 60%) who agreed they had a say in the on-going direction of their school's professional learning and development. When asked, in a different question, what strategies leaders used to help overcome challenges, 17% of teachers listed leaders asking for feedback and providing opportunity for feedback to be given and shared. And furthermore, leaders listened to and acted on the feedback provided. These three collaborative actions involved teachers in the decision making of their schools. Feeling that their viewpoint was of value and made a difference to the way things ran in their schools was positive for teachers. Teachers said their leaders "allowed discussion, listened to fears and responded", and that they "had discussions with staff around how the PD could better be tailored to suit staff's needs." Leithwood and Beatty (2008) say that leaders who integrate knowledge of teachers' thoughts and feelings about reforms into their collaborative decision-making help to engender a "sense of shared purpose that, with collective efficacy, adds to motivation" (p. 83) to implement such reforms. One principal said they "meet with them and talk it out really. And I try to listen, I really do." The other principals agreed describing meeting teachers one-on-one or in small groups to elicit feedback, and also how they tried to act on the feedback they had been given. Such actions make a genuine difference to teachers.

Sharing leadership

One other strategy that made a difference to the management of change was the way leadership was shared across the school. Principals talked in the focus groups about how they were growing leaders throughout the school because of teachers' involvement with the professional learning and development and how positive they felt about this. They said things like, "We're growing leaders throughout the school because of it (teachers leading literacy development) too." One teacher's comment about this was:

I think they (leaders) have widened the spectrum of teachers involved in each initiative to spread the wisdom and work load. I think they were strategic

about their choices and have allocated a time release to some staff to help with work load issues. (Teacher)

This comment seems to reflect what Leithwood and Beatty (2008) say about building a learning culture, or becoming a learning organisation. In such a place the learning of leadership is for everyone, including the principal, and promotes “norms of respectful communication, openness to critical friendship and reciprocal learning at all levels” (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 69). Teachers responded in more depth about the value of shared leadership when answering questions about sustainability, but a small number of them mentioned that being “involved in the leadership side of things” of the professional learning and development had increased their engagement with the process, or conversely that being “on the Literacy team, but I’m not anymore” had decreased their engagement.

One other area where principals shared leadership was with the facilitator of the professional learning and development. This was usually an outside facilitator or expert, and both principals and teachers agreed that the quality of the facilitator made a difference to how teachers responded. Principals agreed that the facilitator needed to engage with the staff and work in the school with the staff. They discussed the dissonance that could arise between facilitators and staff members, when teachers especially were challenged to think about their practice more, and when the facilitators failed to engage with teachers’ existing prior knowledge at the start of the process. One principal said, “We’ve had good and bad facilitators over the years and that does alter how it (professional learning and development) is received.” A “supportive” “inspirational” facilitator who “delivered relevant PD in a way that makes it easy to implement in the classroom – lots of realistic ideas, not all theory/jargon that doesn’t work in the classroom” was well accepted and teachers were prepared to make changes. However, teachers identified “the people in charge of the PD being late or unreliable” or having “personality/belief clashes between some staff and outside facilitators” as being a challenge to them. One principal described a situation in his school where:

The facilitator came in and looked at creating a bit of dissonance with our staff so they could think about their practice more, but actually the facilitator didn’t

engage with my staff's current schema at the start so there was a bit of resistance to that. (Principal)

This principal identified that “you actually need to engage with your staff as well as creating dissonance around data or practice.” Dissonance occurs when the new learning clashes with teachers’ existing beliefs or values and is only resolved by the acceptance or rejection of the new position (Timperely et al., 2007). Cardno (2012) suggests that this dissonance, when managed successfully, provides the opportunity for leaders and teachers to become aware of the ways in which they are inclined to defensive rather than productive ways of reasoning. When productive reasoning is used one is able to take the emerging information or challenges and learn from them rather than block them. This sort of approach helps people manage change positively.

One challenge of managing change

Principals mentioned the change management challenge they face, that comes from balancing the needs of the individual against the organisation, at various times throughout the focus group interview. Eraut (1994) says that the normal response to externally initiated change is to attempt to minimise its effect, which can result in poor engagement with the change initiative. This is because introducing new knowledge can require a deconstruction and reassembling of behavioural routines, which can cause “disorientation and the threat of a temporary (and the fear of a more than temporary) inability to cope” (Eraut, 1994, p. 26).

As an example, one principal talked about the resistance they got from one experienced staff member in particular when they began the process of introducing the concept of student-led inquiry learning into the school. This principal met with the individual teacher to talk through their concerns and tried to mentor them through the change process, but didn’t feel real progress came until that teacher was confronted by the evidence of success in another teacher’s classroom. Throughout the process the expectation on that teacher was that they would find a way through

their concerns and difficulties to meet the school's goal, and were given support from their leaders and colleagues to bring this about.

Studies by Blase and Blase (2000), and The Oregon School Boards Association (Hynds & McDonald, 2009) found that the effect of leaders talking with teachers to promote reflection and to promote professional growth provided strong intrinsic motivation for teachers. The principal said about the teacher, "When I boiled it all down it was really all about, because this was a successful teacher, always regarded as a successful teacher, liking the control of a didactic system ... and found it very difficult to pass that learning, those learning opportunities on to the children." The principal later went on to say that, "I never solved that resistance, until, and I think there's a key here, until I gave her an irrefutable reason for changing – she saw what was happening in this other class, she saw the data changes." I believe this principal had found one of the keys that bridge the dilemma of meeting the needs of the individual and the needs of the organisation – the use of evidential data.

Timperley et al., (2007) and Wagner et al., (2006) say that the use of assessment information motivates teachers to engage either at the beginning or during the professional learning programme. Teachers have said that when they knew the changes made a difference for their students then they were motivated to commit to them, despite the hard work that often entailed. And considering the hard work it often took to make changes to their personal teaching practice, then being given the time to practise and fail, and try again until success was achieved, within a supportive environment made a huge difference to teachers.

Collaboration

There were two key features of a collaborative culture that teachers and principals both identified as helping make adopting change easier and that contributed to growth in capacity. One was having a collegial supportive environment in the school, and the other was engaging with the school data together as a staff.

Collegial support

The support teachers drew from one another and from their leaders was an important factor to 35% of respondents. It was important to them that they could be supported by their leaders in practical ways such as have been mentioned earlier in the organisational management section, but they also mentioned more intrinsic expressions of support such as “changes being noticed and acknowledged”, and “the positive attitude of everyone involved”. Tschannen-Moran (2001) says relational trust is built through day-by-day social exchanges and is based on respectful behaviours such as genuinely listening to others. This sort of respectful regard for one another is spoken about by Robinson et al. (2009). They say that respectful relationships between leaders and teachers are vital for a well-functioning school and form the foundation for everything else. This interdependence creates a risk and vulnerability that is worthwhile as Robinson et al. (2009, p. 183) have found a “strong statistical link between relational trust in schools and student improvement.”

Principals described the supportive environment they saw in their schools saying there was “more support for new staff as everyone could talk about the same learning and teaching focus”, that “staff felt safe to share” and that there was always someone they could talk to so concerns were not “tucked away” but dealt with.

Engaging with data together, helping each other learn

Teachers also listed supportive collaborative practices such as modelling, coaching and being involved together as a positive influence in adopting change. “Seeing what others are doing, being able to discuss with colleagues what is working and what is not working” were among examples given by teachers. Principals described how they got their staff together to engage with school data and share about school learning goals. One principal said:

The thing that I’ve noticed has been that, particularly with the moderation that we’re doing more of, and looking and sharing, it actually allays a lot of people’s fears, and allows them to progress as well. (Principal)

The various aspects that have been listed here are characteristic of what DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005, cited in Martin-Kniep, 2008) and others (Sergiovanni, 2005; Wenger, 1998, 2006) call a professional learning community. They describe groups of educators committed to working collaboratively in on-going processes of collective inquiry and action research. Martin-Kniep (2008) states that one of the benefits of an effective professional learning community is for teachers as they share in forums and find ways to observe and feedback to one another about the complex practice of teaching. This helps them develop a shared and collective expertise about teaching and learning, and gives them collegial support and a sense of personal agency (Robertson, 2005). Teachers described “working alongside colleagues and talking about progress”, “observation of others”, and having “talked to colleagues and we tried to make sense of things together”. These actions helped them overcome the challenges associated with change.

Our ability to make sense of our world and interact successfully with it, to learn from our experiences is due to our collaborative and collective problem finding and solving, and as such providing supportive, enriched and flexible settings where people can learn from one another is essential (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Martin-Kniep, 2008). One teacher described how their leaders did this as they “gained feedback and responded to concerns and issues as they arose. They communicated clearly and liaised effectively between staff and PL providers.”

Sustaining improvement

Evans-Andris (2010) suggests sustainability of change is supported through professional learning communities and collaborative structures. The findings from the research indicate that teachers and leaders agree that these features make a difference for them being able to make permanent changes to their own practice and to school-wide practice. Duke (2004) and Sergiovanni (1999) believe that what leaders do is crucial to how their organisation grows and sustains change. The quality and determination of the leadership was another factor identified through the research as helping sustainability. Sergiovanni (2000) believes that “deep change” (p. 160) in schools involves changing school cultures. The school-wide culture was

another factor that both teachers and principals identified as being beneficial to sustainability. They talked about life-long learning, a culture of success and consistency and sharing a determination and commitment to make a difference.

Challenge to sustainability

When principals first began discussing the concept of sustainability from a school perspective they focused on the tension that arose from trying to find a balance between seeking to be an innovative and forward moving organisation and the need to stabilise and consolidate learning. One principal spoke for the others when he said:

So, while we try and have sustainability I think, in effect, the facts are that we move on and we sometimes forget what we have done, and you know, we have to manage that in some way. But I don't believe really that schools can completely sustain anything. We always move on, we always slip back, we always need reminding. (Principal)

There were many challenges that principals identified relating to the sustainability of school improvement ranging from losing staff and needing to train new teachers, to the way learning was lost or forgotten as focus shifted as time progressed. In some ways principals felt sustainability was an almost impossible undertaking, but in the same breath they then talked about the ways they worked hard to build a culture that “tries to give back that consistency” they were looking for.

Fullan (1990) says that when implementing change leaders need to provide a balance between positive pressure on teachers and support for them. Too much pressure and stress will result; too much support and complacency will follow. This complex challenge of wanting to keep things moving forward versus consolidating change was exemplified by one principal. This principal's experience of time being needed for change to be embedded he describes as a “long term direction” he has for the school. Craft (2000) states that considering change takes place over time, there is a need to think in terms of continuity and sequence in professional development. This principal said that when the change in teaching practice he was

looking for, as teachers engaged with the Assessment for Learning (AfoL) contract, lacked momentum, then he was “fortunate enough to get on the Literacy Professional Development Project” where the facilitators not only grew his staff’s understanding of literacy curriculum content, but also grew their pedagogical knowledge so that the AfoL principles were practised in a different context. He said, “The professional development that we are currently undertaking is probably a culmination of I don’t know how many years now, but it has been going for a period of time... We’re using writing as the context for the next phase and it’s all around AfoL practice again.”

The other principals in the group agreed that the practice of addressing key teaching and learning principles over and over again within different curriculum contexts was a good way to give teachers time to practise their new learning. Eraut (1994) believes that too much new learning at too fast a rate may cause an emotional response in teachers that translates into resistance. An example of this was when one other principal, in acknowledging the difficulties of trying to keep his organisation moving forward, said, “You also walk that fine line that if you keep changing things too frequently you lose the faith of your staff.” To which another principal replied, “So you’ve got to address the data.” Once again, the use of evidential data was recognised as a key- this time to bridge the dilemma between moving forward and consolidating change. The action of moving forward could be interpreted as a pursuit of school goals. Robinson et al. (2009) discuss the leadership dimension of “the determined pursuit of goals” (p. 202) saying that goal driven interventions that are supported by repeated cycles of data-based inquiry have been successful in raising student achievement. Hopkins (2007) believes that a teacher’s moral purpose is in “raising the bar and closing the gap in terms of student learning and achievement” (p. 9), so being faced with data that shows the need to keep moving forward in order to achieve this can be very motivating, as teachers have testified.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs

There is literature which suggests that unless teachers also see themselves as fully involved and as genuine co-leaders in the whole professional learning community,

meaningful change will not 'scale up' to include all teachers and classrooms (Ferrier-Kerr, et al., 2008). Every teacher that responded to the questionnaire agreed that they had made permanent changes to their teaching practice, to some degree, because of the school-wide professional learning and development they were a part of. They attributed this to the feeling of support they experienced from their peers and colleagues to help them make the necessary changes, and also because the professional learning and development "worked" or was "easy to implement". Equally as strong were "the positive effects on student achievement when I applied the PD in my teaching practice." Seeing that students were benefitting because of the new learning helped teachers' commitment. Timperley et al. (2007) affirm that increases in test scores, as one aspect of improved student outcomes, can boost morale and motivate teachers to persist with the changes to their practice.

Teachers made references to the ways they felt they had grown in teacher understanding and pedagogical knowledge, which they believed to be a factor in them making permanent changes to their teaching practice. Interestingly, principals recognised the importance of teachers having strong pedagogical knowledge and strong current curriculum knowledge as being a factor that contributed to school-wide sustainability. Teachers did not make the same connection despite listing it as an important factor for sustainable changes in their own practice. This link between changed practice and student improvement can be sustained. Timperley et al. (2007) state if the professional learning experiences provided teachers with enough depth of "principled knowledge" (p. 219) that they can take the theoretical understandings acquired through the professional learning and use them to adapt their teaching practice to maximise the learning opportunities for their students. Teachers listed the process of shifting theoretical knowledge into action in their teaching practice as being one of their toughest challenges.

Leadership

Leadership factors that teachers and principals agreed affected sustainability were the quality and determination of the leadership, their commitment to growing leaders,

the school-wide culture they deliberately developed, on-going facilitation, and organisational factors including giving teachers time to practise.

Quality of leadership

Teachers recognised the role that good leadership has on sustainability of improvement. They noticed the “commitment of (the) principal to this end” and that “the school leadership and managers are dedicated, providing quality learning for staff and students.” Principals themselves commented on the need for quality leadership saying:

We need strong principals. It's good to have collaboration, it's excellent; however, we also need people who can be insightful, to look at what the gaps are in a school. (Principal)

One leadership conundrum principals grappled with was maintaining the fine line between stability and challenge. They wanted their organisations to be forward moving and innovative, involved in new learning and new ideas, but they also understood the need for consolidation and giving teachers time to practice. There was tension that resulted because of the two often opposing needs. This is because introducing new knowledge can require a deconstruction and reassembling of behavioural routines, which can cause “disorientation and the threat of a temporary (and the fear of a more than temporary) inability to cope” (Eraut, 1994, p. 26). When answering questions about what made adopting change difficult teachers had this sort of thing to say about time:

I am sometimes resistant to change if it's going to be a lot more work, on top of all the work we do already. (Teacher)

Time restraints – not having the time to reflect on/study/prepare resources etc to implement change due to existing school requirements that take up all of our time – moving onto new PD too quickly without being able to fully take in what we have covered in the last set of PD. (Teacher)

McQueen (2009, p.19) highlights the pressure that too much learning at too fast a rate brings to teachers when he says, “You can make education policy in offices in the capital, but you cannot implement it without the co-operation of teachers. They (teachers) are busy and to them change is disruptive.” In my study one factor that built confidence and motivated teachers to sustain their commitment was evidence of leaders giving time for the consolidation of new learning. Some teachers considered this the most important factor that they attributed to them sustaining changes in their practice describing “time to consolidate before moving on to the next” and being “given time to oversee implementation” as examples. Teachers need multiple opportunities to learn, with sufficient frequency and over a sufficiently long period of time for deep learning of new content and skills to take place (Timperley et al., 2007). Leaders that organised things so that teachers got the time they needed made a difference to sustainability.

One other approach principals used that bridged the tension between moving forward and consolidation of changed practice was building each successive year’s professional learning and development on the previous one’s so that there was continuity of focus even if the context shifted to a different curriculum area. Fullan (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) would say this is an example of sustainable leadership, because it is an approach that preserves the best of what has been learnt over time and across successive leaders. Principals tried to “keep a similar theme to some of the PD we’re doing, so while it’s a slight variation to what we’re doing in the curriculum area whatever, there’s a slight theme to what we’re doing.” This approach treated professional learning and development as part of the learning journey of the school, “at the core of the school’s business” (Timperley, 2011, p.182) rather than as “discrete, unconnected projects” (Fullan, 1992, p.111), and helped build sustainability of practice.

Growing leaders, sharing the load

Principals identified their strategy of spreading the leadership load as being a key factor to building sustainability across the school. It has already been mentioned that some teachers felt motivated by being involved in leadership of the professional

learning and development, and others lost engagement when they were no longer in leadership positions. Principals said they “share leadership opportunity. It’s really about sharing the load, looking at talent, involving people.”

I think growing the leaders as that second base – not doing it as just the senior team yourselves, growing the leaders in the various curriculum areas and having them lead, ‘cause that gives you more of that critical mass to help with initiatives. (Principal)

One principal appointed leaders for important initiatives in order to maintain momentum, and they all drew on outside support getting in outside facilitators or experts. Some principals were developing their curriculum leadership teams to take on the role of facilitation for when the outside expert was no longer working with them. Teachers were aware of this saying, “We had systems in place to carry on with the PD practice once the facilitators left.” These sort of collaborative practices include teachers as leaders of learning (Durrant & Holden, 2006; Robinson, et al., 2009). Much of the literature refers to this as distributed leadership, or collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2011), within communities of practice or professional learning communities. Teachers and principals both felt these practices supported sustainability. Evans-Andris (2010) believes that while external experts and facilitators can introduce and initiate positive school-based changes, sustainability of change is supported through professional learning communities and collaborative structures.

School culture

Principals talked about building a school culture of success and consistency, one that focused on life-long learning for everyone in the organisation. Pritchard and McDiarmid (2006) say that at the school level conditions need to be such that a climate of learning is generated where change and innovation can be implemented. The principals and their leadership teams were quite deliberate in the steps they took to create the learning culture they wanted. For example one approach a principal used was “to just work with the ones who are really strong to begin with. Don’t let the blockers stop the progress.” One felt they had “established a very successful

culture from having this whole learning environment in the school.” Principals used evidence of success to motivate and challenge their teachers, with an expectation that all staff would be life-long learners.

We have an expectation within every teacher as well as throughout the school that we are lifelong learners, and we don't know everything, no one does, and therefore it is in our best interest, and in the interest of our children, to go on learning ourselves and inquiring. (Principal)

Principals and the leadership team learnt alongside their staff building a learning culture, becoming a learning organisation, where the learning of leadership is for everyone, including the principal; which Leithwood and Beatty (2008) say promotes “norms of respectful communication, openness to critical friendship and reciprocal learning at all levels” (p. 69). The literature on learning organisations encourages principals to grow their schools into “strong professional learning communities (that) can foster teacher learning and instructional improvement” (Little, 2002, p. 936).

Other steps principals took were to tie into their annual curriculum review those things about learning and teaching that they were focussing on. Another provided new staff with extra PD so that they were brought up to speed with what the expectations were for the other teachers. One principal talked about making sure that the new people they hired fit their desire for a positive “glass half-full” attitude. They also discussed the need they saw to have teachers who not only knew how to teach but also what to teach, that is, that they had effective learning pedagogy as well as strong curriculum knowledge. As their school progressed through the professional learning and development principals deliberately sought to influence their staff by being encouraging, challenging, and by being positive and permission giving.

For example, one said to their staff:

I actually think you have to say yes. It's not a bad thing to critique or resist but don't do it to the detriment of development. Give it a chance and put your money where your mouth is – see if it works. (Principal)

All principals encouraged their staff to take risks, to be prepared to go through some pain as they entered “the pit” of new learning and to embrace it. They encouraged their staff to share their challenges with one another and talk things through with a colleague. Brundrett (1998) believes that collaboration and collegiality are proven ways to bring teacher professional development and curriculum change together.

It was clear that principals believed in their teachers’ ability to handle any of the challenges that might come their way saying, “And when they’re not going right, talk to someone, don’t give up, talk to someone. You’ll get through.” Tschannen-Moran (2001) describes believing in each other that colleagues have the knowledge, skills and ability to achieve what they set out to do as one aspect of relational trust. Timperley et al. (2007) say that having an iterative focus on teaching and learning, grounded in relational trust, such as has been described by principals above, provides opportunity for capacity to be developed and sustained within a school.

Collaboration

The importance of a healthy collaborative culture came through clearly when teachers and principals were asked to list factors that contributed to sustainability. Both groups placed a strong emphasis on communication, feedback and collaboration in three main areas – relational support, shared communication, and shared leadership.

Relational support

Both principals and teachers described staff looking out for each other, “being pastorally minded of each other”, of supporting “those who need support”, of interacting positively and learning to “understand and accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses”. They described an environment where it was okay to ask questions, where “people are open about their ideas – they talk openly during PD sessions and we can learn together and help one another”, where there was “good communication and they could “ask questions and discuss issues”. The level of trust appeared to be high with comments such as “honesty is always promoted”, “lively debates are viewed as a good thing”, and “we get to have our say on many things.

We have a voice.” This sort of environment demonstrates collegiality by being strong on challenge but not on criticism (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). The strength that teachers gained from each other and their leaders through collegial relationships is a feature that has been mentioned regularly and is of significance.

Shared communication

It is interesting to note how the following factors have already been mentioned by teachers and principals as helping them manage change. Both groups identified leaders asking for feedback, the sharing of ideas and planning being encouraged, and everyone learning together as factors that sustained improvement. Timperley (2011) draws the connection between collaborative cultures of the sort just described, and the presence of relational trust. Trust is critical in contexts where the success of one person’s efforts is dependent on the contribution of others (Robinson, et al. 2009). Such interdependence is evident in such comments as:

We set a school-wide goal every year. Team leaders work collaboratively, and mentoring across syndicates has supported a collaborative culture. (Teacher)

There is agreement when initiatives are brought in and when there is disagreement, teacher/student voice is heard and acknowledged but the initiative may still go ahead. (Teacher)

I’ve learnt not to say no even if I think the idea is silly, but rather sort of say, well give it a try, see what you think. (Principal)

I encourage them to take the risk of allowing somebody to give you constructive feedback. (Principal)

These comments demonstrate what Cardno (2012) calls collaboration in decision-making at the micro level, where “leaders and managers have opportunities to interact with individuals and teams in collaborative and productive ways to solve

problems of practice” (p. 111). Teachers listed such practices as being effective in promoting sustainability.

Shared leadership

Finally, teachers and school leaders finding ways to share out the leadership load helped sustain improvement. Teachers recognised each other’s strengths, took responsibility for various aspects of school life, worked in teams, mentored others, organised things like sports rotations, and shared the leading of syndicate events like athletics days and assemblies. It has already been mentioned that principals believed that spreading the leadership load was a key factor to building sustainability school-wide. All four principals were growing that “second base of leadership” from amongst the teachers. Fullan (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) agree that sustainable leadership develops leadership throughout the organisation in an increasingly distributed manner and that collaboration and networking with other schools is a strong way to build capacity and accountability.

Challenges of collaboration

Despite the positives associated with collaboration, there were definite challenges that a collaborative culture posed. One challenge teachers recognised was that it could be “perceived as an expectation but it is not a reality on staff”. One teacher describing whether their school had a collaborative culture or not said, “At times we do. Other times we don’t as SMT seems to define what is happening instead of a shared vision.” Brundrett (1998) talks about the danger of “contrived collegiality” (p. 311), where collaboration is espoused but is instead used to manipulate and control under the guise of democratic procedures. While teachers did not say that manipulation and control were the outcome of an espoused collaboration, they did make clear that being personally involved in a genuinely collegial environment was a great support to them and one that motivated and engaged them. A small number of teachers (10%) when saying why they did not agree their school was collaborative put this down to not being personally included in the decision making. As one teacher stated, “Management generally make decisions for staff – not a lot of collaboration.” It could be assumed that their experience was incongruent with their

view of what a collaborative culture should be like. Hargreaves (1994) would agree, as he believes collaboration should be able to bring together different voices in the educational and social community in an ethical way that does not induce compliance through contrived collegiality.

When principals discussed the challenges of collaboration they highlighted the difficulty some teachers had with opening up their classrooms to other teachers, and allowing others to give them constructive feedback. Some principals had sympathy for them acknowledging that it was a difficult thing to ask of teachers, and one that some of them would find difficult themselves even though they were asking it of their staff. If the process of collaboration should be “viewed as the means to achieving educational ends and not as the ends in themselves” (Cardno, 2012, p. 125), then it is important to find ways to achieve the educational goal without unnecessarily alienating staff. Principals are challenged then between meeting the needs of the organisation and the needs or concerns of the individual. Such challenges are complex.

Summary

This chapter explored three major challenges that leaders and teachers face when seeking to get the most out of school-wide improvement initiatives: motivating and engaging teachers, managing change and sustaining improvement. These were discussed through the lens of three recurring themes: teacher attitudes and beliefs, leadership and collaboration. The discussion of findings in this framework indicated that there were a number of actions that emerged in each area and across each theme. These were shared decision making, shared learning together, and shared leadership. These three actions were identified by both principals and teachers as positive contributing factors to motivation and engagement.

Shared decision making was demonstrated by leaders being inclusive in the decision-making process, consulting with staff members, seeking feedback and responding to it. Teachers believed that this was a positive factor in motivating them to engage in the professional learning and development, manage change and

commit to sustainability. Sharing in learning together was demonstrated by principals and leaders being involved in the professional learning and development side by side with their staff. There was an expectation that the learning was for every member of staff, and that the learning would be directed and strengthened by collaborative investigation of school data. Teachers believed this built relational trust across all three stages from initial engagement, through managing change to sustaining improvement. Shared leadership utilised staff expertise as principals deliberately grew a “second base” of leaders from their teachers, and utilised outside facilitators or experts to challenge and support the school. Teachers felt involved, valued and engaged as they contributed their strengths and skills in leadership opportunities, as coaches and mentors, and by the facilitator’s ability to support them on their own learning journey.

From this summary two conclusions can be drawn. One is about the nature of sustainability; that sustainability begins with effective initiation and on-going management of the change in order to secure long-term improvement. The second conclusion draws attention to the importance of actions leaders take in order to create collaborative conditions for the individual teacher to engage and be motivated, and to build sustainability across the school organisation.

The following chapter will expand these conclusions and the recommendations generated from them.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions that have implications for leaders, drawn from the discussion of findings of the investigation into teacher motivation and engagement in a West Auckland collaborative school-wide cluster initiative. Recommendations for future practice and research are made. The limitations of the research are brought into consideration.

The purpose of this study was to examine experiences of collaborative school-wide improvement initiatives from the perspective of teachers and leaders in a West Auckland school cluster initiative, to identify the challenges and successes they experienced and to explore issues of sustainability in these improvement initiatives. This was in order to determine possible solutions to the challenges of implementing improvement initiatives which included motivating and engaging teachers, helping them manage the change process and sustain improvement.

Overview of the investigation

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. Why are schools challenged when they participate in school-wide or region wide improvement initiatives?
2. What approaches are successful in implementing a West Auckland school-wide improvement initiative?
3. What challenges and successes have teachers and leaders experienced when involved in such improvement initiatives?
4. What can be learned about sustaining improvement in this context?

Conclusions

The contextual challenge

Schools are challenged when they participate in school-wide or region-wide improvement initiatives. Three of the principals in the study identified that one of the challenges they faced was that the needs of their individual school were not always met by the goals of the cluster, in this case a range of 22 primary schools, intermediate schools and high schools. Principals faced the challenge of addressing the needs of their school while still supporting the cluster, which they said they believed in and sincerely wanted to continue doing as they got a lot out of the networking, support and element of challenge from their fellow colleagues. Hopkins (2007), based on his policy work in the United Kingdom, believes that encouraging local schools to work together will build capacity for continuous improvement at local level. This model of school improvement Hopkins calls “system leadership” where school leaders “care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own” (2007, p. 152). Principals all reiterated their belief in the benefit of schools working together to make a difference for the students across the region.

However, all four principal participants identified the challenge of implementing in their own schools the learning they had gained from the cluster professional learning and development, and the challenge associated with their commitment of time, resources and personnel to achieve improvement. On the other hand they could also see the benefits in some areas that belonging to the cluster had brought to their schools. All four principals felt that they were growing a shared culture where staff were proud of their school and where they were talking about the same themes. They considered a supportive environment amongst their staff as one of their successes, and they identified teacher growth and student achievement improvement as other successes they attributed to being a part of the cluster improvement project.

Fullan (2005) believes that building a coalition of leaders at the school level helps schools develop the capacity to function in effective, autonomous ways but in a common direction. He goes on to say that the school’s capacity is heightened and

commitment to change is activated when they routinely work collectively and plan collaboratively to shape the direction of change together. It would appear that the principals in the focus group would agree with Fullan as they were committed to continuing with the WAPA 2020 cluster initiative, despite the challenges, as they could see the advantages involvement in the cluster was bringing not only to themselves but to their schools.

The findings of this study have established that there were three main challenges that leaders and teachers faced when implementing an improvement initiative – motivating and engaging teachers, managing change and sustaining improvement. In order to meet these challenges and achieve success leaders needed to take into consideration teachers' attitude and beliefs, their own leadership actions and the importance of a collaborative culture.

Conclusion One: The nature of sustainability

Sustainability begins with effective initiation and is built by on-going management of the change process in order to secure long-term improvement. In other words, sustainability of improvement can only be gained by successful initial engagement and motivation, plus the supportive on-going management of change. Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship between motivation and engagement, managing change and sustainability. In this model motivation and engagement, and managing change are subsets of sustainability. Teacher attitudes and beliefs, leadership actions and a collaborative culture are influences that affect the success of each aspect of this model.

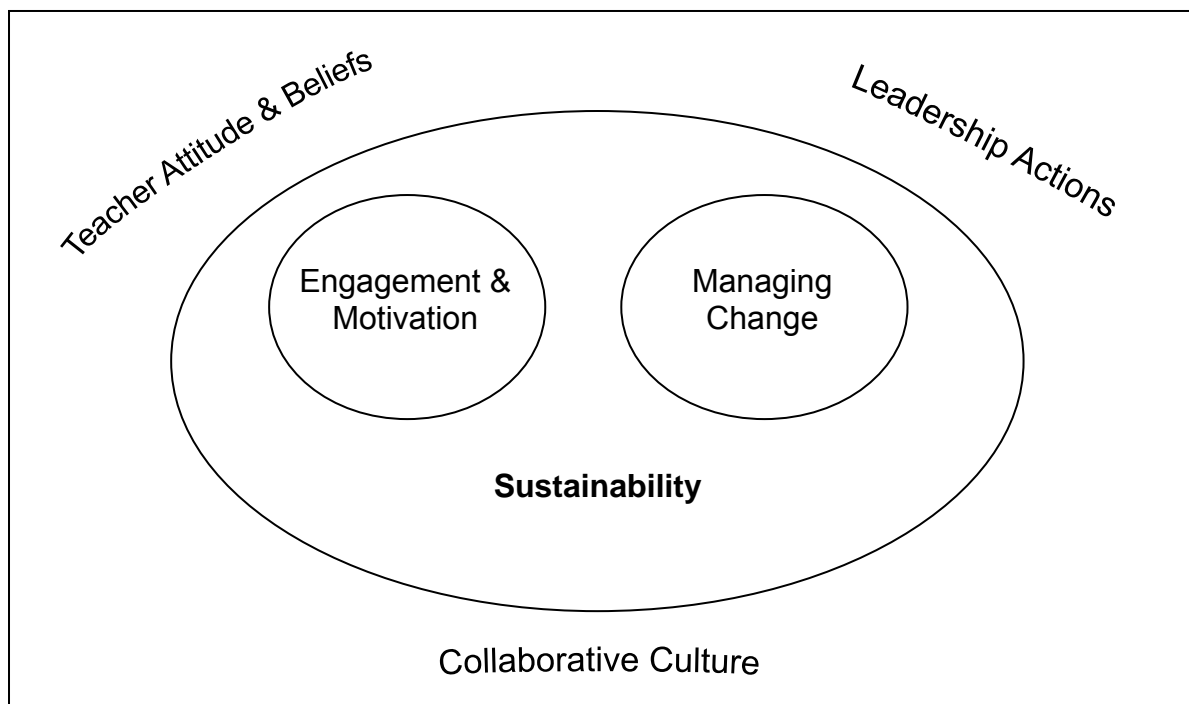


Figure 6.1: A model for sustainable improvement

Motivation and engagement

Attitudes and beliefs made a difference to teachers' motivation and engagement in professional learning and development, a finding supported by a number of authors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Key attitudes and beliefs that teachers had were the need to see the initial relevance and the on-going benefit of the proposed initiative in order to feel motivated to engage initially. Teachers needed to see the relevance of the professional learning and development to their own beliefs or needs or goals, to their students' needs, and to the needs of the school. They wanted their teaching to improve because of the professional learning and development, and they wanted that to have a direct positive impact on student outcomes. They were motivated by opportunities to see the benefits of the proposed learning through observations in classrooms of other teachers or at other schools, through professional readings or research findings. When teachers actually experienced the benefits of the new learning either for themselves or for their students, and saw that the professional learning and development worked then they became committed to sustaining the new practices or new learning.

There were a number of actions that leaders took that motivated and engaged teachers. Leaders are challenged to create the environment that enables teacher motivation and engagement to flourish (Ferrier-Kerr, et al., 2008; Timperley, 2011). These actions included an expectation that the professional learning and development was for all staff, as well as the principals and leadership team, so that principals and leaders learned alongside or were involved in the learning with their staff. Robinson et al. (2009) identified that leaders who promoted and participated in teacher professional learning and development achieved the largest positive effect on student achievement, which teachers identified as being very motivating. Another was the use of student achievement data as a justification for the professional learning and development. Teachers were engaged by the analysis of the learning needs of their students. A third motivating action was the use of an outside facilitator or expert to work in the school and facilitate the new learning.

The other motivator for teachers was being able to work in a collaborative environment of shared activity and collegial relationships. These teachers demonstrated what Hattie and other authors say - that "learning is primarily a social activity" (Hattie, 2009b, p. 246), and it is "community-centered" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.33). The main collaborative action that made a difference for teachers to feel motivated to engage was the fact that there was a process of information gathering, feedback and consultation. Teachers were also motivated by the relational connection they had with others, by feeling valued by others and being consulted, and by being given the chance to have a say in the on-going direction of their school.

Looking at all these factors it can be seen that motivation and engagement are critical to implementation (Fullan, 1990). Durrant and Holden (2006) say teachers that are motivated to engage at the implementation stage remain committed, so it appears vital for leaders to do all they can to enable and encourage the initial motivation and engagement of teachers in improvement initiatives.

Managing change

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs made adopting change a challenge to some of them. Teachers who were bored because they felt they already knew what was being taught, who did not understand the process and its application to their classrooms, who were reluctant to change their ways or who felt pressured to change by others were resistant to adopting change. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005, p. 361) say that the adaptive innovation required to rethink key ideas, practices and even values can create high emotion, and that "the capacity to consider change without feeling threatened is an important ability." Teachers who were personally motivated by the new learning were much more willing to take on the challenge of the improvement initiative. Those who shared a vision of what could be achieved and believed that together success could be reached found it easier to make changes. Having a belief in themselves, that they could make a positive difference for their students, helped teachers make changes to their practice.

Leaders in the study used strategies that helped teachers adopt change, meet challenges and grow in capacity, which Hoban, (2002) and Wagner et al., (2006) both say are important leadership functions. These strategies included the development of organisational management in order to meet the needs of teachers; the use of collaborative decision making; and the practice of sharing leadership across the school. The leadership role of the facilitator was also an agreed factor that affected the uptake of change for teachers.

Timperley et al. (2007) credit school organisation as having "arguably the greatest influence on teachers' practice and their motivation to engage in professional development" (p. 26). Organisational decisions and changes leaders made to meet teacher needs made a positive difference. A lack of organisational resources made the adoption of change very challenging for them. Issues of workload and time constraints were negative factors that interfered with the adoption of change. Teachers appreciated leaders who involved them in decision making, who asked for feedback and who listened to and acted on the feedback provided. They also felt that sharing the leadership role or being involved in the facilitation of the professional learning and development in some way helped them take on board suggested

changes. Having an effective facilitator or outside expert work with them in the school also helped teachers manage change positively.

Two collaborative features that teachers said helped them adopt change and build capacity were the collegial support they got from their leaders and peers and by engaging with the school data together as a staff. Brundrett (1998) believes that collaboration and collegiality are proven ways to bring teacher professional development and curriculum change together. Practical support was important, but so too were the intrinsic expressions of support that made them feel valued, respected and trusted. Working together collaboratively to investigate and analyse school data gave staff a shared sense of direction and purpose. Teachers also listed supportive collaborative practices such as modelling, coaching and being involved together in teaching and planning as a positive influence in adopting change.

As has been said before, teachers that were engaged became committed to see change in their teaching practice, in their school systems and in their students' achievement. They were determined to overcome the challenges they faced as they worked to manage the changes they were experiencing. Leaders who can grow teachers' adaptive expertise (Timperley, 2011) will help their staff face challenges and manage change.

Sustaining improvement

Teachers believed that the support they got from their colleagues helped them make and sustain changes to their practice. Evans-Andris (2010) suggests sustainability of change is supported through professional learning communities and collaborative structures. Teachers listed collaborative practices such as coaching, modelling, planning and reflecting together as evidence of involvement in professional learning communities. Feeling that the professional learning and development was easy to put into practice, and that it worked, was also important to teachers so that they persevered through the challenges of change. One other factor that helped teachers sustain improvement was seeing the benefit to students that the new learning had made. Teachers believed that their understanding of teaching practice and

pedagogy had improved because of the new learning, which was another factor that had helped them make permanent changes to their practice.

Duke (2004), Sergiovanni (1999) and Fullan (2011) believe that what leaders do is crucial to how their organisation grows and sustains change. Teachers recognised the determination of leaders towards ensuring improvement initiatives were sustained. Leaders that found ways to give time to teachers so that they could practise their new ideas and consolidate their new learning made a difference to sustainability. One other thing that leaders did was to build their professional learning and development on the success of previous initiatives so that from year to year there was a layering of focus or theme, and a building of cohesion (O'Connell,2011).

Principals identified their strategy of spreading the leadership load as being a key factor to building sustainability across the school. Teachers were engaged more in the learning if they had a role to play, and attributed being involved in leadership as helping them sustain improvement. These sorts of collaborative practices include teachers as leaders of learning (Durrant & Holden, 2006; Robinson et al., 2009). Much of the literature refers to this as distributed leadership, or collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). Principals and their leadership teams took quite deliberate steps to create the learning culture they wanted, using evidence of success to motivate and challenge their teachers, with an expectation that all staff would be life-long learners. Principals deliberately sought to influence their staff by being encouraging, challenging, and by being positive and permission giving.

The collaborative factors that influenced sustainability were the relational support staff gave to each other; strong, honest, reciprocal communication; and sharing the leadership load. These factors also helped teachers manage change and so are very powerful in helping move an initiative forward from initial engagement to deeper understanding and sustainability. Teachers really appreciated the warm supportive environment where it was considered okay to ask questions, to debate issues and to give and get support when it was needed. This sort of environment demonstrates

collegiality by being strong on challenge but not on criticism (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). They also considered the sharing of the leadership load to be significant in sustaining improvement. Principals were deliberately growing a “second base” of leaders from their teachers, which teachers recognised and responded to.

Sustainability is a product of effective implementation resulting in teacher engagement, and the on-going management of change. The significance of the individual teacher’s attitude and beliefs cannot be minimised. Hoban (2002) states that throughout every challenge that is faced in a school-wide improvement initiative the role of the individual teacher is crucial to success. Leaders that create an environment that provides individualised support, intellectual stimulation and modelling, build capacity for teacher effectiveness (Hattie, 2009b). The more engaged teachers were the more prepared they were to try new concepts, practise new learning and persevere despite the feelings of anxiety or lack of confidence they experienced. Teachers and principals believed that there were definite leadership actions that created collaborative conditions that influenced sustainability.

Conclusion Two: Leadership actions for creating collaborative conditions

The deliberate focus of leadership activity was one key factor that affected teacher motivation and engagement, the management of change and sustainability. The actions that leaders took in these three areas were many and varied. However, there were three principal leadership actions, identified by both principals and teachers that created collaborative conditions that had an influence on teacher attitudes and beliefs in all three areas of challenge. These actions were shared decision making, shared learning together, and shared leadership. Although there were many other contributing factors that influenced teacher motivation and engagement these three were the key ones that appeared in every aspect throughout schools’ improvement initiatives.

Shared decision making

Teachers listed being included as a part of the decision-making process as a key reason why they believed their school had a collaborative culture, which 100% of teacher respondents considered a positive thing to have in their school. While the vast majority of teachers believed that their school was collaborative, the 10% who did not think this gave as their main reason that they were not included in any decisions. Teachers and principals described shared decision making as being evidenced by leaders being inclusive in the decision making process, consulting with staff members, seeking feedback and responding to it. Leithwood and Beatty (2008) say that leaders who integrate knowledge of teachers' thoughts and feelings about reforms into their collaborative decision-making help to engender a "sense of shared purpose that, with collective efficacy, adds to motivation" (p. 83) to implement such reforms. Teachers believed that this was a positive factor in motivating them to engage in the professional learning and development, to work through the difficulties of new learning and so manage change, and to commit to sustaining changes to their practice.

It would appear that once teachers are involved in making the decisions about the learning direction of their school so that they share the vision of possible outcomes with their colleagues, then they will endure whatever challenges and difficulties that may come their way as part of the improvement initiative. They will do all they can to help each other succeed in the new learning so that students benefit from their efforts.

Shared learning together

As principals and teachers worked together to learn with each other and support each other through the learning process their actions were indicators of what many in their schools labelled professional learning communities. Martin-Kniep (2008) states that one of the benefits of an effective professional learning community is for teachers as they share in forums and find ways to observe and feedback to one another about the complex practice of teaching. This helps them develop a shared and collective expertise about teaching and learning, and gives them collegial

support and a sense of personal agency (Robertson, 2005). Sharing in learning together was demonstrated by principals and leaders being involved in the professional learning and development side by side with their staff. There was an expectation that the learning was for every member of staff, and that the learning would be directed and strengthened by collaborative investigation of school data. I believe the findings from the research study identify the collaborative analysis and use of school data to be a strategic tool to shift attitudes and beliefs. Teachers, who may feel unconfident or reluctant to make changes to their practice, when confronted with the reality of student achievement results, or other school data, are challenged to look at themselves and make decisions that will improve their own teaching effectiveness and so student outcomes.

The literature says that leaders who share in the learning are connected to their teachers and promote a strong sense of collective responsibility (Wagner et al., 2006). Leaders who promoted and participated in teacher professional learning and development achieved the largest positive effect on student achievement according to Robinson et al. (2009), and were able to provide useful advice about how to solve teaching problems (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Teachers believed this built relational trust across all three stages from initial engagement, through managing change to sustaining improvement. This shows that developing collegial relationships that are based in honest challenge combined with support, where the whole staff are helping each other learn and improve, has huge benefits for teacher motivation and engagement.

Shared leadership

Sharing the leadership load was one action that teachers and principals both did in a variety of ways. Teachers worked in teams sharing the load out by organising and leading various activities and events. They supported each other through mentorship or coaching, and were leaders of learning for school-wide initiatives or curriculum areas. Principals talked about growing a school culture of learning and felt one key way to do that was to share out the leadership opportunities. Leithwood and Beatty say that in a learning organisation the learning of leadership is for

everyone, including the principal, and promotes “norms of respectful communication, openness to critical friendship and reciprocal learning at all levels” (2008, p. 69). Principals said they deliberately grew a “second base” of leaders from their teachers, and utilised outside facilitators or experts to challenge and support the school.

Fullan (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) both say that sustainable leadership develops leadership throughout the organisation in an increasingly distributed manner and that collaboration and networking with other schools is a strong way to build capacity and accountability. Teachers felt involved, valued and engaged as they contributed their strengths and skills in leadership opportunities, as coaches and mentors, and by the facilitator’s ability to support them on their own learning journey. It could therefore be assumed that the greater the range of leadership opportunities, associated with the improvement initiative, that can be experienced by teachers the greater the depth of involvement and ownership teachers feel about the new learning and about sustaining positive outcomes.

Recommendations

Taking into consideration what the research findings from this study reveal about factors that influence motivation and engagement of teachers in school wide professional learning and development, and consequently support sustainability of improvement, there are two recommendations I suggest leaders could contemplate.

1. Develop an understanding of factors that contribute to sustainable improvement, including the dilemma between the push to keep moving forward versus the need to consolidate change, and so find ways to collaboratively solve problems arising.
2. Create collaborative conditions through deliberate leadership actions so that the individual teacher is able to engage and be motivated and to build sustainability into their practice.

Suggestions for future practice and research

It would be interesting to continue to monitor the schools involved in the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan to see if changes in teacher practice and school organisation and systems have continued to be sustained. This study has only looked at a very small aspect of the cluster project. Other researchers may find investigation into other aspects of the project valuable or of interest.

Limitations of the research

One of the possible concerns about the research data was the relatively low response rate from teachers with the online questionnaire. Although I got 66 responses, which generated a lot of information from their thoughts and comments, it was still a fairly small sample size out of the 241 teachers who could have responded. This was a 27.4% response rate from teachers. Despite a number of follow up emails and phone calls I did not quite get the minimum 30% I was hoping for. I was disappointed by the percentage, but on the other hand delighted with the depth of honesty and thought that the responses provided. On the day of the focus group interview only four out of the nine principals were able to attend. It was difficult enough to get that date sorted for them, and on the day less turned up than had committed earlier simply because of school issues that cropped up for them that they had to deal with personally. Perhaps if more teachers or principals had taken part stronger or different results may have been found.

WAPA 2020 is a unique context unlike any others in NZ due to its 'grassroots' nature. Extrapolation of findings from this research study to other contexts is therefore perhaps limited. However, any educational leader who was seeking guidance in ways to set up or initiate a cluster initiative, or any school principal seeking guidance on how to motivate and engage their teachers in school wide professional learning and development, might be able to find some transferable ideas from the findings and conclusions.

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APPENDIX A: Online teacher questionnaire

TeacherEngagement in school wide professional learning

Background information

My name is Linda Allen. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology, and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

Your principal has given permission for me to invite you to participate in this research project. The identities of all participants will be anonymous, and principals will not know who has or has not participated in the survey.

The aim of my project is to investigate collaborative school-wide learning initiatives from the perspective of teachers and leaders, to identify the challenges and successes teachers and leaders experience when involved in the mandate to explore issues of sustainability in such change initiatives.

The following questionnaire is designed to gather information about teachers' engagement with school-wide professional learning initiatives. Please consider a recent school-wide professional learning initiative, project or contract that you have been involved in and answer the questionnaire in the context of that situation.

Once you have completed and submitted this questionnaire your data cannot be withdrawn due to the anonymity of submissions. Submitting this questionnaire gives your consent for this data to be used in my research.

My research has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee. This survey

has 21 questions and should take 10-15 minutes to complete.

URE REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2012-1032

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25.5.12 to 24.5.13. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

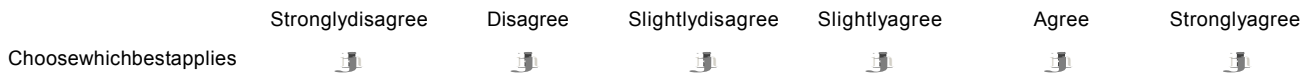
* 1. What school-wide professional learning initiative/shave you been involved in recently?

5

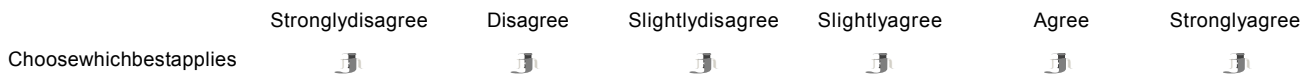
6

Setting up the initiative

2. As a teacher I am fully involved in the decision making for any school wide professional learning (PL) initiative.



3. I have a say in the ongoing direction of my school wide PL.



4. What strategies did your school leaders use to gain your initial engagement in the school wide PL you are thinking about?



Teacher Engagement in school wide professional learning

5. What is most important for you in order for you to feel motivated to engage in school wide professional learning?



Change

6. What sort of things changed for you due to your involvement in the PL initiative?



7. What factors, if any, make adopting change difficult for you?



8. What factors, if any, make adopting change positive/easy for you?



Change in engagement level

14. Due to my involvement in the schoolwide PL initiative I have experienced success in the following areas. Choose all those that apply.

Teacher capacity

School capacity

Network capacity

Student benefits

None

Give an example for any you have chosen.

5

6

Collaborative Change Management

15. I believe our school has a collaborative culture.

Strongly disagree Disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Agree Strongly agree

Choose which best applies

Please explain:

5

6

16. I believe a collaborative culture is a positive thing to have in our school.

Strongly disagree Disagree Slightly disagree Slightly agree Agree Strongly agree

Choose which best applies

Please explain:

5

6

17. What does your school do to work in a collaborative manner?

5

6

Consequences of Change

18. I have made permanent changes to my teaching practice because of the schoolwide PLI was/ a part of.

Choose which best applies

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree

19. Describe the most important factor that you attribute to this outcome.

5

6

20. This schoolwide PL change initiative is embedded in our school systems and culture.

Choose which best applies

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree

21. Describe the most important factor that you attribute to this outcome.

5

6

You are finished.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

APPENDIX B: Focus group schedule

This focus group is designed to gather information about leaders' understanding of teachers' engagement with school wide professional learning initiatives.

Introduction

1. Tell us a little bit about your school and what made you choose to become involved in the pilot project of the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan?

Setting up the initiative

1. How did you go about getting initial engagement from the teachers in your school?

Change Management

2. What factors make adopting change difficult/easy for your teachers?
3. What strategies do you as leaders use for teachers/staff to support them?

Challenges

4. What challenges did you face during the school wide PL initiative?
5. What strategies did you use to overcome them?

Successes

6. Due to the involvement of the school in school wide PL what successes, if any, have you seen?
7. What factors do you attribute to these successes?

Collaborative Cultures

8. What strategies do you employ to create a collaborative culture in PL?
9. How do you ensure your school's PL is not reinforcing bad or ineffective practice?

Sustainability of Change

10. What strategies do you employ to get sustainability of PL in your school?

Summary

11. How would you describe being a part of the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan has been to your teachers or school so far?

APPENDIX C: Information for principals

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Thesis: Engaging in sustainable collaborative professional learning: The case of a West Auckland school cluster initiative.

My name is Linda Allen. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology, and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to investigate collaborative school-wide learning initiatives from the perspective of teachers and leaders, to identify the challenges and successes teachers and leaders experience when involved in them and to explore issues of sustainability in such change initiatives.

Teachers are central to sustainable change in schools. Much of the literature identifies that enabling teacher leadership has positive effects on school and student outcomes, and that fostering and supporting collaboration between teachers enhances school effectiveness and improvement. One increasingly accepted way to create a culture of collaboration is through the development within a school of professional learning communities. However, developing successful collaborative environments within or between schools is not straightforward nor without its challenges. This research project is aimed at gathering information that will help leaders understand and surmount such challenges.

I request your participation in the following way. I will be conducting focus group interviews and would appreciate your contribution as a member of the group. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. The focus group will take approximately one hour, and will be held at Learning Network in Henderson at a date agreed to by the participants. The group will consist of West Auckland principals whose schools are a part of the WAPA 2020 Learning Plan. I anticipate having 10 principals take part.

Neither you nor your school will be identified in the Thesis. I will be audio recording the discussion and all data gathered will be kept confidential and transcribed by myself. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time up to the point of data analysis. You are able to have the opportunity to check and amend the transcript. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology.

My supervisor is Professor Carol Cardno and may be contacted by email or by phone.

Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 8406 Email: ccardno@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Linda Allen

APPENDIX D: Principals consent form

CONSENT FORM – FOCUS GROUP

THESIS TITLE: Engaging in sustainable collaborative professional learning: The case of a primary school cluster initiative.

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in any public records. I also understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to the stage when analysis of data has been completed.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____