Does That Sound Right?

An Investigation into Communication and Information Sharing Between Classroom Teachers and Reading Recovery Teachers

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<u>Abstract</u>

This project aims to provide contextual insights, through interpretation data, into the depth of information sharing, and quality of professional conversations between teachers who work with the same students. The participants are Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers of students currently on the Reading Recovery programme, as this construct illustrates a clear example of two education professionals being involved in tutoring the same students.

This small scale research project, underpinned by sociocultural theory, is situated in two New Zealand mainstream primary schools, with three teachers from each school taking part in the study. The six participants were interviewed individually, and then participated in a group interview with the other participants from their school.

National and international literature regarding professional conversations focuses on the positive impact such conversations can have on student achievement. It offers insights into possible methods of integrating professional conversations into school culture. Centred on Reading Recovery teachers and the classroom teachers of students currently on the Reading Recovery programme, this study explores the content of conversations focused on increasing the literacy acquisition of their shared students. The findings indicate that professional conversations are under-utilised, with classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers operating as individuals rather than developing a collaborative approach. This discovery led to an exploration of why this was so, reflecting on teacher beliefs, espoused theories and theories-in-use. The participants' own assessments of the level and content of their conversations are examined, and perceived barriers/enablers to professional conversations are explored.

As a Resource Teacher: Literacy, I too work with classroom teachers to increase the literacy acquisition of identified students. Indeed, the relationship between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers is evocative of many school situations where more than one education professional is involved in the learning and/or behaviour of identified students. This study explores ways of increasing the effectiveness of professional conversation between education professionals. It has a broad application and

the implications of the findings for school leaders and the wider education community are outlined. Possible areas for further research are also provided.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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Chapter One
Introduction

As a Resource Teacher: Literacy (RT:Lit), I am requested by schools to assist students who are struggling with literacy acquisition. As well as assessing and tutoring the identified students, a large part of my job is liaising with the student's teacher to ensure the student's learning needs are met. This involves lots of conversation, often supplemented with suggesting and modelling teaching strategies. Building effective working relationships can be challenging, and, through reading to increase the effectiveness of my work, I became interested in research such as Rogoff, Matusov and Whites' (1996) work with professional learning communities, and work by Annan et al. (2003), in the field of professional conversations. These bodies of work reveal that information sharing and professional discussion between teachers is beneficial to a student's learning. There are many occasions in schools which involve more than one teacher or para-professional is working with the same student(s). This may be within the school, such as Reading Recovery or cross-class grouping, or may involve an outside professional coming in to the school environment. Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RT:LB), and RT:Lit are good examples of external assistance which may be invited into a school. I decided to investigate the conversations that were taking place between education professionals working with the same student. I chose to focus on classroom teachers of students on the Reading Recovery programme, and the Reading Recovery teachers of those students, as they are an excellent model of professionals working together towards the same goal. As they are based in the same school, selecting these teachers as participants in my research, allowed an ease of access which would have proved more problematic had I included itinerant teachers.

Research Questions

My research involved the following questions:

- What are classroom teachers' espoused theories on interacting with Reading Recovery teachers to support children's learning?

- What are Reading Recovery teachers' espoused theories on interacting with classroom teachers to support children's learning?
- How do classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers talk about children and learning, and does this align with their espoused theories?
- What are some enablers or inhibitors to information sharing and professional discussion between these two professional groups?

Copies of my interview schedules are included in the Appendix.

Marie Clay, assisted by colleagues at the University of Auckland, began developing the Reading Recovery programme in 1976-77 (Reading Recovery New Zealand n.d.). Field trials were carried out in 1978-81, and in 1982 fifteen tutor teachers took part in the first National Tutor Training course. In 1983, Reading Recovery was implemented nationwide in New Zealand

Designed as a school-based intervention, Reading Recovery provides intensive, individual support for junior students identified as making slow progress in the development of their literacy skills. Students are tutored daily, out of the classroom, for sessions of thirty minutes duration. They are taught by a teacher from their school who has, or is being, trained in the Reading Recovery method. Pertinent to my study is the description of Reading Recovery as a team approach:

> The Reading Recovery teachers in a school form part of the school Reading Recovery team. This team also includes the Principal, Assistant/Deputy Principal (Junior Classes) and other members of the junior school staff and has responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of the intervention in their school (Reading Recovery New Zealand n.d.).

This team approach can be linked to the following 'partnership responsibilities' described in the *Effective Literacy Practice Handbook* (Ministry of Education, 2003). It may be important to note that this extract refers to any literacy intervention, not just Reading Recovery.

> Teachers need to know about the learning activities in the intervention and to build on these in the classroom programme during and after the intervention. Similarly,

those responsible for the intervention need to work with the classroom teacher. (p. 165)

The two quotes above set clear expectations that teamwork between the Reading Recovery teacher and the classroom teacher is required. It is the level and content of this collaboration that I have investigated..

My research was underpinned by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This theory "emphasizes social activity and cultural practice as sources of thinking, the importance of mediation in human psychological functioning, the centrality of pedagogy in development, and the inseparability of the individual from the social context" (Vygotsky, 1981, cited in Wink & Putney, 2002 p.152). This means I looked at how well the conversations the teachers participated in helped them share information and ideas in the effort of increasing their students' literacy acquisition. Did they share beliefs about how students learn? Would they use learning terminology, and if so, had they a shared understanding of what the terms meant? Socio-cultural theory emphasises the central role that language plays in human learning: "Language makes it possible to share experiences, to link our minds and produce a social intelligence far superior to that of any one individual." (Moll, 1990, p.231)

I also explored links between socio-cultural theory, and research such as that by Rogoff et al. (1996), which endorses the notion of communities of learners. The concept of communities of learners goes against the traditional image of teachers as individuals who manage their classrooms in isolation, islands within in the wider school system, with major leadership and policy decisions being handed down by a more powerful administrator. According to Rogoff et al. (1996), "a community of learners involves both active learners and a more skilled partner, who provides leadership and guidance, in a collaborative endeavour" (p. 388). Socio-cultural theory and its bearing on my study are explored in depth in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis.

Outline

The thesis comprises six chapters:

1. **<u>Chapter One:</u>** Introduction: Clearly setting out the reason for, and direction of my research.

2. **<u>Chapter 2:</u>** Theoretical Framework: The rationale for the use of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to underpin my research is explained here. Literature which defines and examines espoused theory and theories-in practice is reviewed.

3. **<u>Chapter 3:</u>** Literature Review: I have analysed and discussed current literature relating to what constitutes a learning community. I also examined the effect constructive learning conversations can have on the learning progress of students. I have presented findings from a canvas of research and literature on professional communication and learning. This includes work by Annan et al. (2003) who developed a Model of Learning Talk, and Bareta and English (2007) who highlight the requirements that must be met before conversations can be deemed successful learning conversations.

4. **<u>Chapter Four:</u>** Methodology: My research design, ethical considerations and the way I gathered my data and analysed the results is explained and justified in this chapter. Works pertaining to the use of interviews as a research tool, by researchers such as David W. Beer (1997) and Steinar Kvale (1996), are also discussed here. Effective interviewing techniques, interview formats, and the rationale behind my style of interviewing are included.

5. **<u>Chapter Five:</u>** Findings: The results of individual interviews and taped discussions with my participants are examined in this chapter.   Consistency/disparity between espoused theory and theory in action was also be considered.

6. **<u>Chapter Six:</u>** Recommendations: Barriers/Enablers to effective professional conversation will be identified. Potential ways to overcome barriers and enhance enablers are discussed with the intention of facilitating greater depth in professional discourse, thus enhancing students' literacy acquisition. Suggestions for areas of further investigation are made.

Chapter Two
Theoretical Framework

Introduction

My inquiry investigated the level of consultation and collaboration between the Reading Recovery teacher and the classroom teacher while a student is on the Reading Recovery programme. Through observation and assessment, classroom teachers become aware of students who are struggling with literacy acquisition. Once identified, some of these students are selected to be placed on the Reading Recovery programme. This intensive literacy intervention programme involves the student working daily with the Reading Recovery teacher in a one-to-one situation. The student will also be receiving literacy instruction in the classroom from their classroom teacher. In effect, each student on the Reading Recovery programme has two teachers simultaneously focussed on improving their literacy skills. As I would be exploring how my participants interacted within the culture of their schools, and hoped to observe evidence of the participants supporting and extending each other's understanding and knowledge, through information sharing and professional discussion, I decided to underpin my work with a sociocultural theoretical (Vygotsky, 1987) framework and perspective. This chapter will explore Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural theory and explain its suitability as a framework for this study.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory is derived from the work of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896 – 1934). His work emphasised the role of social and cultural processes in learning. Vygotsky proposed that a child's social, environmental and cultural interaction would have a marked effect on its capacity for learning. His theory "emphasizes social activity and cultural practice as sources of thinking, the importance of mediation in human psychological functioning, the centrality of pedagogy in development, and the inseparability of the individual from the social context" (Wink, 2002, p.152). In other words, learning occurs through the learner's interaction with his or her social and cultural

environment. Learners are active participants in their own learning, and the learning is mediated by language.

An important concept from sociocultural theory is the 'zone of proximal development', or ZPD – this is the theory that a person's level of learning can be reflected by what they can achieve with help from a more able other. Vygotsky defined the ZPD as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more able peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in MacNaughton & Williams 2004, p.332). With time, the assistance from the more able other lessens, and the new behaviour is internalised by the learner, meaning the new behaviour will continue even when the support has been removed. An example of this can be found in work by Giest (2008) who carried out an investigation involving university students learning via distance education. He found that his participants developed higher theoretical thinking through working with more able others, and being given opportunities to explore, discuss and internalise new concepts. Giest (2008) linked this to Vgotsky's concept of ZPD by stating:

> We think it is important to notice that the zone of proximal development is a concept to be used with reference not only to child development but also to the development of adult learners. And it is important also for instruction in the frame of adult education. (p. 121)

This notion of support from a more able other is called scaffolding, and Giest's (2008) linking of it to adult education and learning reinforces my selection of sociocultural theory to underpin my study into teacher practice and learning. The concepts of the ZPD and scaffolding, where meaning is constructed through interaction with others; and behaviours can be developed and modified through the influence of a more able other, are particularly relevant to my study. The Reading Recovery teachers from each school may be viewed as the more able others who, with their specialised literacy training, may scaffold classroom teachers into more effective practice.

Sociocultural concepts can be viewed as the foundations of any community. The belief that members of a community of practice can increase awareness and understanding by exploring and discussing ideas and concepts with other community members is implicit. I refer to 'learning communities' or 'communities of learners', to describe what Wenger

(2007) calls 'communities of practice'. He states "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). Wenger goes on to describe what he views as three crucial components of a learning community:

- The domain: This means the community has a shared interest or concern, and membership of this community implies a commitment to the domain

- The community: As a result of their commitment to the domain "members of the community engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information" (p. 2)

- The practice: This component is what differentiates a community of learners from more general communities. Wenger uses the example of a film club. A film club would meet the first two criteria but it is the practice of what is learnt that defines a learning community or community of practice. The members "develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems – in short a shared practice" (p. 2)

Wenger asserts that "It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community" (p. 2). My data would show how much my participants were part of a shared practice.

It is of interest that Reading Recovery training itself, although not explicitly described as such in Reading Recovery documentation, follows a sociocultural construct. At each training session, one teacher models a lesson behind a one-way screen whilst being observed by a cohort of fellow trainees. As the other trainees watch the lesson, the tutor asks them questions and elicits comments on the teacher's actions. Following the lesson, the teacher is involved in a analysing the lesson with his/her peers and the tutor. This method of teacher training clearly fits the ZPD parameters. Teachers undergoing Reading Recovery training are building on their existing skills, being led by a more experienced tutor and presented with time to question and reflect on their teaching behaviours. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that learning is not just the appropriation of knowledge. The learner needs time, practice and the opportunity to interact with others in order to internalise the new knowledge. Again Reading Recovery training exemplifies this:

Teachers ... were reminded that they were experienced teachers and were urged to draw upon their own experience when working with the children. It was considered economical to move both children and teachers gradually from their existing competencies rather than to demand at the outset new behaviours which might cause confusion and disrupt established and efficient responses. New concepts were demonstrated and discussed, and these became part of the teachers' procedures. As the course continued, it became obvious from the teachers' discussions that their views of the child's task and their own roles were changing. Our teachers at first had their own theories about the task and the characteristics of their pupil. By the end of the year and after the in-service course, they had acquired new theories about how they and their pupils performed and how they should perform. (Clay & Watson, 1982, p.194)

I have chosen to quote this rather long extract as it so clearly describes a group of learners being brought to a deeper understanding of new knowledge and practice so they can internalise the knowledge, and thus sustain changes to their practice. There is also the acknowledgment that effecting sustainable change in behaviour and practice is an on-going process which requires time. The emphasis placed on interaction between the teachers at the Reading Recovery sessions is also important to note, reflecting as it does the views of Lave and Wenger (1998), that the knowledge learned in a master/ apprentice situation does not always flow one way, but that it can also be "rather the apprentices relations to other apprentices, and even to other masters that organise opportunities to learn" (Leach & Moon, 1999, p.22). In other words, the interaction between the 'apprentices', can be just as valuable a part of the learning as the knowledge imparted by the 'masters' and that actively being part of the learning process assists in the learning itself. This model of training also fits neatly with Wenger's (2007) description of the domain, community and practice of a learning community.

The processes described above also reflect the approach of working within the parameters of a ZPD, where teachers were expected to draw on their own classroom experience while being encouraged to incorporate new techniques. Scaffolding is exemplified in the described process of Reading Recovery training by the modelling of new strategies and the support of a tutor teacher during the learning process. The participants in my study who are Reading Recovery teachers will have progressed through this training process, in the

findings chapter we consider if they reflect aspects of this teaching method when sharing information with classroom teachers.

Clay and Watson (1982) describe how, after undergoing Reading Recovery training, the cohort of teachers were "now able to question, challenge, discuss, work out courses of action, and explain their decisions in ways they could all understand because these new theories were shared and explicit" (p. 194). This links to the idea of teachers developing a shared understanding of terminology and ideas, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of language as a learning tool, believing that all learning was first accomplished through communicating with others. Language and action, for Vygotsky, were *the* most important tools of mediation for learning. He said, "the concept is not possible without the word. Thinking in concepts is not possible in the absence of verbal thinking" (Vygotsky, 1981, p.131). Within my study I will be examining the language used during professional meetings between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers. I was particularly interested to identify any use of the prompts Reading Recovery students are given. For example the student may be asked 'Does that sound right?, Does that look right?' or 'Does that make sense?' depending on the situation (see Clay, 2005). As the classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers discuss the progress of their students, their ability to make meaning, and identify future teaching direction together, will be dependent on how well they understand each other. Therefore, I endeavoured to ascertain if classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers shared an understanding of these prompts and when they should be used; and whether classroom teachers incorporated similar prompts into their classroom practice to ensure students received consistent teaching and reinforcement to develop their reading strategies. I also planned to observe classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers using analysis of the student's response to, or use of these prompts to develop next step teaching.

Barbara Rogoff (1995), whose work in sociocultural theory builds on the theories of Vygotsky, devised three planes of analysis of behaviour: personal, interpersonal and community. The individual interviews with my participants were designed to elicit their personal beliefs regarding how students learn. The subsequent focus group interviews allowed me to observe my participants operating on the interpersonal plane, interacting with each other in a purposeful situation. By comparing and contrasting the data from both the individual and focus group interviews, I believe I captured the essence of the third

plane of analysis, the community, identifying components of their school cultures which impacted on the participants' behaviour. Rogoff's (1995) model is based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory that learning occurs as a result of interaction with others who are more skilled, and she argues that when behaviours are being examined, the effect of all three planes must be taken into account. To examine individual behaviours for example, without considering the effect of the culture and community surrounding the individual would give an incomplete picture. In other words, whilst the planes represent three areas of influence on developmental processes, they must be viewed as a complete entity due to their interconnectedness. I have used these three planes of analysis to underpin the examination of my data, and they are discussed further in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

School Culture

Whilst investigating the communication between Reading Recovery teachers and the classroom teachers of children on the Reading Recovery programme. I explored if the level of interaction and the working relationships between these members of the school community are indicative of the overall culture of their schools. As can be seen from the literature review chapter of this thesis, school culture has a direct effect on teacher behaviour (Peterson 2002; Sergiovanni 1991). I will be analysing data regarding any barriers or enablers to effective communication identified by my participants to explore what this conveys about the culture of their schools. The readings and research included in the literature review chapter of this thesis, expound the idea that a positive school culture which fosters effective communication needs to incorporate several important factors. It would have an expectation that staff participate in learning conversations, having first ensured staff have an understanding of, and the ability to be active participants in such conversations. The school management would be supportive of staff and acknowledge their strengths and specialised skills where relevant. There would also be some support in recognition of the time factor involved in such communication. The research into school cultures can be seen as closely linked to the works on schools as communities of learners that is covered in the following section.

Communities of Learners

Barbara Rogoff (Rogoff, 1990, cited in Zimmermann & Schunk, 2003) suggested that many school reformers were now attempting to re-shape education practices so that teachers and students were more in the position of masters and apprentices, in the belief that over time, apprentices will, with appropriate and gradually decreasing guidance, internalise the master's skills. I believe that this premise can be extrapolated to situations where adults are in the roles of both teachers (masters) and learners (apprentices). Reading Recovery teachers receive intensive training in specialised reading/writing teaching techniques and, during the time they work as Reading Recovery teachers they attend regular professional development meetings called continuing contact sessions. They also have access to a Reading Recovery tutor who they can call in if faced with a difficult or challenging situation. For the purpose of my study I am identifying them as literacy 'masters' on the strength of the fact that they have undergone such specific training. Classroom teachers will have undergone instruction in reading/writing teaching techniques and may well have a great deal of experience in teaching literacy, however, as they may have not undertaken intensive training in such a well researched programme as Reading Recovery to help children struggling with literacy acquisition. For the purpose of my study I am identifying classroom teachers as the 'apprentice', one who may learn more specific literacy teaching techniques from the Reading Recovery teacher. (Any classroom teacher who has also completed Reading Recovery training, but is not currently working as a Reading Recovery teacher will be identified). With reference to Rogoff's (1995) planes of analysis, "the metaphor of apprenticeship provides a model in the plane of community activity [in] that participants advance their skills and understanding in culturally organised activity" (Ogus, 2007, p.9). In other words, it is by pooling personal knowledge, skills and understandings that teachers can work together to increase student achievement. I feel it is important to note, however, that while the Reading Recovery teachers spend thirty minutes a day with each student in a one-to one, highly structured situation, the classroom teacher spends a much greater amount of time with the student, and in a wider variety of situations. They are therefore in the position of knowing the child more comprehensively than the Reading Recovery teacher might, and so may well have valuable insights to bring to discussions. Lave and Wenger (1998) said: "in practice the roles of masters are surprisingly variable over time and place. A specific master–apprenticeship relation is not even ubiquitously characteristic of apprenticeship learning" (Leach & Moon, 1999, p.21).

Thus the balance of who is the master and who the apprentice may vary at times as these teachers work together towards their common goal of supporting the child towards literacy competence.

With this understanding, it is clear that the sociocultural lens is appropriate for my inquiry as I aim to examine collaborative, social interactions of teachers within the cultural environment of their schools in order to examine how they work together to raise student achievement. My small scale study will be underpinned by socio-cultural theory as I observe both classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers in the context of the culture if their schools, investigate my participants' use of the cultural tool of pertinent language, and explore ways the more able 'master' may scaffold the 'apprentice' towards the use of higher skills and techniques in the teaching of literacy. I will assume that teachers and Reading Recovery teachers have a shared domain of raising the literacy achievements of their students. My interviews and observation of group meetings will provide insight into the level of community and practice (Wenger, 2007). How do my participants interact and learn from each other? Do their words and actions indicate they have a shared practice?

In the next chapter I examine the official stance on teacher communication, illustrate what effective communication might look like, and describe environmental and cultural aspects of schools which foster professional conversations.

Chapter Three
Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review begins by identifying recommendations from the New Zealand Ministry of Education regarding communication between professional colleagues. This is followed by the standards set by the New Zealand Teachers' Council regarding professional communications, as it is important to examine the official policies that shape the context within which teachers are expected to work. The concept of schools as communities will be examined, identifying just what a school needs to be doing to operate as a learning community. I survey research which examines the effect of professional conversations on student achievement to gain understanding of the impetus behind calls for schools to operate as learning communities. I also look at factors that distinguish professional conversations and make them effective. School culture and the influence this may have on a school wishing to become a learning community will be scrutinised. Finally, I explore research which focuses on the impact of teacher beliefs on teacher practice and link this to an assessment of works that investigate teachers' espoused theories and theories-in-use.

Policy and Standards

There are several institutions that inform the literacy policy landscape for New Zealand teachers. In 2003 the New Zealand Ministry of Education launched the handbook *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4.* This publication was the culmination of several years work by the 1998 Government-appointed Literacy Taskforce and forms a key piece of current literacy policy for teachers. Seen as the seminal literacy guidebook for junior class teachers, the book stresses that teachers need to take responsibility for "networking with others in the school who are involved in their students' learning" (p. 164). It also states that when a student is receiving literacy instruction that is additional to the classroom programme, such as Reading Recovery, "it is very important to have effective networking processes in place when decisions about beginning or ending interventions are being made.

Such processes are also important during the intervention" (p.   164). A more recent literacy focussed publication from the Ministry of Education, designed to encourage teachers to reflect on their practice with a view to improving student achievement is *Learning Through Talk, Oral Language in Years 1 to 3 (2009).* This publication again stresses the importance of professional learning communities that focus on raising students' achievement. Although this work does recognise that professional conversations can range from the informal sharing of anecdotes, to groups of teachers sharing professional readings and critically reflecting on practice (p. 92), neither handbook gives guidance as to how to recognise whether the conversations are constructive, nor do they identify factors that could   promote effective professional conversations.   Both publications, however, do mention the need for professional learning communities to develop a shared language to be able to discuss, describe and analyse their practice and students' work and progress. This use and understanding of a shared terminology echoes Vygotsky, and later work by Wink and Putney (2002) that draws upon Vygotsky, which stresses that all learning is first accomplished through communicating with others. A shared understanding of terms becomes vital as language and action are viewed as the most important tools of learning: "The concept is not possible without the word. Thinking in concepts is not possible in the absence of verbal thinking" (Vygotsky, 1987, p.131). The need for a shared lexicon will be discussed later in this chapter.   My search through literacy policy continued as I endeavoured to find what level of communication was expected of teachers, and guidelines as to what effective communication between teachers would look like..

The New Zealand Teachers' Council, which is responsible for issuing the mandatory Teaching Certificate required by all New Zealand teachers, sets the criteria for quality teaching. These criteria stipulate "inter-staff communication" (p. 9) as a requirement for Experienced Teachers, the need to "support and provide assistance to colleagues in improving teaching and learning" (p. 9) for Classroom Teachers, and the need for the "sharing of information with colleagues" (p. 9) for all teachers, including Beginning Classroom Teachers. The document does not include any indication of how these criteria are recognised.

When looking for resources that would be available to a teacher wishing to delve more deeply into the nature of professional communication, I went to the Ministry of Education website. A search for 'professional communication' resulted in 880 listings, including

scholarship applications, contacts for help for students with communication difficulties and links to assistive technology sites. A search for 'professional conversations' proved more successful, eliciting 108 results. I then asked a primary school principal where they would direct a teacher who asked for readings about professional conversations and was told that the Principals' website Leadspace may be useful. This site is accessed through the Ministry of Education website. I was unable to find any relevant information on this site after a thirty minute search. I then found that the evaluation indicators provided by the Education Review Office (2011) supplied links to resources pertaining to professional learning communities, but I believe that this site would not be an obvious starting point for teachers wishing to investigate this area. Easily accessing material on learning conversations and professional learning communities may be a challenge for classroom teachers.

In the context of education in New Zealand, it is interesting to note that included in the cultural competencies for teachers of Maori learners in Tātiako (Ministry of Education, 2011) needing to be embraced by school management and leadership are Wānanga, which is defined as "participating with learners and communities in robust dialogue for the benefit of Māori learners' achievement" (p. 4); and Ako, where teachers take "responsibility for their own learning and that of Māori learners" (p. 4). These terms of Kaupapa Māori theory fit snugly with the culture of a school operating as a learning community. These competencies, while "not formal standards or criteria, (...) are linked to the Graduating Teacher Standards and Registered Teacher Criteria" (p. 4).

The policy landscape sets clear expectations that some form of professional conversation will occur between teachers. In the following section, I look at how professional conversations evolve within schools which operate as learning communities.

Schools as Communities/Learning Communities

Researchers such as Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) have describing school cultures that lead to teachers feeling isolated. Sarason (cited in Turner & Crang, 1996) suggested that "teachers are psychologically alone even though they are in a densely populated setting" (p. 10). Now, research is proving that schools are more effective when the people within them view themselves as operating within a cohesive unit or community (see Du Four,

2004; Rogoff et al., 1996; Timperley, Wiseman & Fung, 2003). The New Zealand Literacy Taskforce Report (1999) also identified the importance of schools operating as a community of learners.

The Oxford Dictionary defines community as "the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common". I am using the word community to define a group of people who share some form of social cohesion, to express the concept of a group of people who share certain attitudes and are working towards similar goals. This interpretation of community chimes with that of Rogoff et al. (2001) who state: "In our sense, 'community' involves relationships among people based on common endeavours – trying to accomplish some things together – with some stability of involvement and attention to the ways that members relate to each other." (p. 10). While schools may all be viewed as communities; the idea of schools as *learning* communities adds depth to this concept. In this section I explore professional readings in an attempt to clarify the factors that define a school as a learning community. It was important to understand what identifies a learning community because in my research I explored the interplay between teacher communication and the broader culture of the school.

Rogoff et al., (1996), and Wells and Fuen (2007) have examined analysed and written descriptions of learning communities and so, following the example of Moore (1998), I have based the following tenets of a community of learners on their work. A community of learners involves all members of the school community sharing common goals and working together to achieve them. The participants in a learning community play an active role, both in regards to their own learning, and their responsibility to others as a member of the learning community. At different times the participants may be positioned in the role of learner or leader. Skilled participants may lead or instruct others and external experts may be brought into the school when necessary. Participants work in a supportive atmosphere of collaboration, not competition. For a learning community to be effective, participants need to be confident that they are working within a culture of trust and mutual support (Annan et al., 2003; Harris, 2005). Professional conversations are usually the vehicle for sharing, learning, debating, planning and assessing. The work of Wenger (2012), who uses the term 'communities of practice', reflects the descriptions of a learning community as a place where practitioners "take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognizing that, given the proper structure they are in the best position to do this" (p. 4). This collaborative approach is in obvious contrast to the more

traditional image of teachers as individuals who manage their classrooms in isolation, islands within in the wider school system, with major leadership and policy decisions being handed down by more powerful administrators, described by Hargreaves and Dawe (1990). Du Four (2004) promotes the idea that for a school to operate as a learning community the focus must shift from teaching to learning, and poses three key questions that teachers must be able to discuss with each other to obtain this necessary change of focus: "What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when they have learned it? [and] How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?" (p. 1). Du Four (2004) explains that it is the collegial discourse concentrated on the third question that moves a school from being a 'traditional' school and identifies it as a learning community. Inger (1993) also implies that schools can become learning communities with relative ease when he states that it is organisation that marks the difference between other schools and those in which teachers actively collaborate to improve practice and student achievement. However, further investigation of professional readings such as work by Leonard and Leonard, (2003), Muir et al., (2010) and Timperley and Robinson, (1999), make it clear that simply posing questions to staff, and tweaking school organisation to provide teachers with time to talk is unlikely to result in a sustainable change towards developing the culture of a learning community. Works such as those of Annan et al., (2003), Delaney et al. (1998) and Levine and Marcus (2007) demonstrate that teachers need to develop certain abilities and understandings for learning conversations to be effective. The need for staff to recognise and understand the importance of learning conversations may need to be cultivated.

The impact of a school's culture, the level of staff collegiality and their understanding of the positive effects for both teachers and students when a school is moving towards operating as a learning community are the foci of the following sections.

School Culture

As with all diverse communities, the culture of one school may be very different to that of another. Within each school there can be many groups within the larger community: administration, heads of departments, experienced and beginning teachers, students, parents and so on. To a great extent, the culture of a school will depend on the relationships and dynamics between these groups. Sergiovanni (1991) suggests that school

culture, "is a form of organisational energy whose telling effects on the school depend on how this energy is directed" (p. 215). Peterson (2002) contrasts school cultures, describing some as 'positive', containing "elements which build commitment, forge motivation, and foster learning for staff and students" (p. 2), with those he describes as 'toxic', which "lack a clear sense of purpose, have norms that reinforce inertia, blame students for a lack of progress, discourage collaboration, and often have actively hostile relations among staff" (p. 2). It seems clear that all schools would fit somewhere on the continuum of positive to negative, or 'toxic' cultures, and that identifying how staff view their particular school culture would be an important first step when working towards establishing the culture of a learning community. This exercise in itself, may be more complex than it sounds. Inherent in effective conversation is the assumption that everyone involved understands the terminology used. This idea of a shared language dovetails with the sociocultural underpinning of my research as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis.

Researchers (Hargreaves, 2001; DuFour 2004) have noted the potential for confusion of terms used when investigating teacher beliefs. When investigating aspects of a school's culture, teachers' views of what collaboration means for them within that culture may need to be examined, yet "the meanings of collaboration, collegiality and community among teachers are also amorphous and unclear" (Little, 1990, cited Hargreaves, 2001, p.3). DuFour (2004) explains that "some staff equate the term 'collaboration' with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie" (p. 3). Ball and Cohen (1999), concur, saying teachers

> often talk past and around one another. They rarely grapple with core elements of their work, seeking to discover and use their differences in assumptions, experience and reasoning. Instead they politely reaffirm teachers' needs to do what fits them personally. (p. 19)

As Lima (2000, cited Hargreaves 2001, p. 3) puts it, "good, supportive friends can make poor colleagues, since they are reluctant to challenge each other on important ethical and professional matters where they disagree". So, asking teachers if they are working within a collegial culture is meaningless unless everyone involved possesses a clear understanding of what is meant by the word 'collegial'. Does it mean the staff talk professionally, assist each other to identify difficulties and strive together to overcome

them? Or does it mean they are friends and get along well with each other? Works such as those by Lima (2000) and Hargreaves (2001) indicate that, in fact, the notion of collegiality being about 'getting on' with each other can be detrimental to effective learning conversations, as participants may be unwilling to inquire into, or question a colleague's practice if it is seen as likely to cause upset. As Hargreaves (2001) remarked: "Personal closeness and emotional support among teachers are of little professional value, unless they ultimately promote and do not hinder professional interaction that improves the work of teaching" (p. 18). In a school culture where staff equate being collegial with being friendly, challenges to teaching practice may be upsetting and unsettling for staff, but for professional conversations to be effective, collegiality needs to be deemed first and foremost as a professional relationship.

The Effect on Student Achievement of Learning Conversations

The impetus for much research into student literacy achievement in New Zealand was the New Zealand Government's 1999 Literacy Strategy Taskforce Report (www.minedu.govt.nz). The taskforce identified factors it viewed as necessary to successful teaching and expressed the belief that better outcomes for students could be achieved when schools work as communities of learners. This idea that student achievement can be improved by teachers working, learning together and sharing expertise via effective learning conversations now appears to be so recognised by educational researchers that research is organised based on the acceptance of this positive effect. In their work on Teacher Talk, Annan et al. (2003) clarified "key *assumptions"* (emphasis added), (p. 1) that underpinned their Model of Learning Talk. One of these assumptions was that "a fundamental collective task among teachers is to reflect on and inquire into the effectiveness of their existing practices, and implement alternatives that improve student learning (p. 31).

The assumptions made by Annan et al. (2003) are supported by many other educational researchers who have investigated learning conversations and their effect on student learning. Harris (2005), cites Rosenholz's (1989) findings saying:

> teachers who felt supported in their own ongoing learning and classroom practice
> were more committed and effective than those who did not receive such

confirmation. Teacher networks, cooperation among colleagues and expanding professional roles were all found to increase teacher efficacy in meeting students' needs (p. 47).

Honowar's (2008) report on Adlai E Stevenson High School claims that instituting professional learning conversations has been responsible for transforming the school from "ordinary good school to an extraordinary one" (p. 1). A teacher from Adlai E Stevenson explains the positive effects of learning conversations more simply, "We have much better results when we speak to each other and come up with different solutions" (p. 2). Here we can see an external researcher, and a teacher from within the culture of a school, both acknowledging the effect professional learning conversations have had on student achievement. My research was therefore based on the widely accepted assumption that student achievement can be improved through teachers participating in, and learning from effective learning conversations. I examined my data for evidence of school cultures being reflective of learning communities, those which recognise the value of learning conversations, and which have implemented measures to support their staff in conducting effective conversations. To do this, it was first necessary to identify what effective professional conversations look like.

Identifying factors which make up Effective Professional Conversations

What qualities differentiate general teacher talk from effective learning conversation? Annan et al. (2003) developed a Model of Learning Talk. They identified the content of conversations teachers may have, and placed them into categories that ascend the model. They explained:

> At the bottom of the model is all talk among teachers, including talk about school or non-schooling matters, such as the weather. This is then categorised as either talk about teaching practices (talk about teaching and learning), or talk not about teaching practices (talk that does not relate to teaching and learning). Talk about teaching practices is further categorised as learning talk, or non-learning talk. (p. 1)

Learning talk was placed at the pinnacle of the Learning Talk model. Annan et al. (2003) then divided learning talk again, into three kinds of professional talk: "analytical",

"critical", and "challenging" (p. 1). Analytical talk is that which examines the effect of teaching practice on student achievement, critical talk examines the results of the analytical talk, and challenging talk is about changing teaching practices to become more effective. For teachers to have effective learning conversations, they need to be able to move from discussing general matters such as how their lessons went or the behaviour of students for example, to a more critical mode of thinking. Only when they are examining student achievement data (analytical talk), evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching practice (critical talk) and seeking ways to increase the effectiveness of their teaching (challenging talk) will they be involved in effective learning conversations. Bareta and English (2007) described similar requirements for learning conversations when, as they talked of schools that are working towards being a community of learners, they highlighted the need to for teachers to be

> identifying student learning needs, identifying teacher learning needs based on student learning need and the contribution teaching makes to the pattern of learning and achievement, and identifying the impact of changed practice and adjusting the teacher learning in response to monitoring. (Bareta & English, 2007)

The point of difference in the work of Bareta and English (2007) is that it demonstrates the cyclical nature of learning conversations. A problem is identified, teacher practice is examined and adjustments made, the effectiveness of the altered practice is then examined and refinements to practice made yet again. The monitoring of the effectiveness of practice is on-going. It is also important to note that teachers' learning needs are recognised, acknowledging that the teacher may need support to implement change. This is surely evidence of a school staff working as a community, not as teachers in isolation.

Researchers nationally, (see Annan et al. 2003; Timperley and Davis, 2007), and internationally (DuFour 2004; Wheelock , 2000), identify the importance of placing student achievement data at the heart of effective conversations. This common finding was based on investigations carried out into the effects on student achievement of improved staff communication and conversation as discussed earlier in this chapter. Picking Up the Pace (Phillips et al. 2000), an intervention implemented in an attempt to accelerate the literacy progress of students in low decile schools described the use of data as the springboard to introduce staff to learning conversations: "The course started with the teachers examining their own school's Observation Survey profiles and comparing

their own achievement with known standards" (p. 83). It is clear that the use of student achievement data is a key aspect of learning conversations.

This focus on using data to inform practice can also challenge teachers' beliefs and assumptions. The importance of gathering *relevant* data was demonstrated by Timperley and Robinson (2001) during their research in low decile schools where "the causes of the problem were externalized and focused on student and family deprivation with little attention was given to school-based factors" (p. 281). Teachers applied deficit theory, (see Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005), in assuming that their students were underachieving because they arrived at school with insufficient skills for learning. The next forty new entrant students to be enrolled at the school were then tested on twenty-five skills thought necessary for students to have mastered before school learning could begin. Teachers were also asked to predict the results of this testing. Data revealed that the students mastered a median of 84% of the skills, with seven students recorded at less than 50% and fifteen students achieving above 90%. Most teachers had predicted an average between 30% and 40%. Only one teacher had predicted a higher 70% to 80%, and further examination of school data revealed that the teacher with the highest expectation achieved the best reading outcomes for her students. Timperley and Robinson (2001) presented work which highlighted many interesting aspects of the effects of teacher beliefs and expectations on student achievement, but the most significant factor which associates this work to my study is what happened when the results of the student testing were presented to the teachers. Staff at the school attempted to reason away the data, suggesting for example, that the forty children tested were not representative of their usual new entrant group, and that the teachers' low prediction levels were based on their experience of students that usually enrolled at the school. This reaction emphasised the importance of data being gathered and analysed to identify the actual, rather than the assumed circumstances at the school, yet also accentuated the need for discussion and reflection pertaining to the data. Teacher beliefs may be so entrenched that, even when presented with evidence to the contrary they remain intact. Timperley and Robinson (2001) explained that in the case they described, capturing and discussing data was simply not enough to promote a paradigm shift in teacher beliefs as the participants searched for ways to justify and retain their personal beliefs. They described the importance of using a skilled external facilitator:

There were two points in this example where external input was needed to challenge teachers' assumptions. The first was near the beginning of the process with the suggestion that skill levels should be tested rather than assumed, and the second occurred at the time of data interpretation. (p. 288)

We can note here again the need for a skilled outsider to work alongside teachers in collating and analysing data and, perhaps more importantly in this situation, leading the interpretation of, and discussion regarding the data. The use by Timperley and Robinson (2001) of the word 'challenge' when describing the role of the facilitator in this case is a reminder, perhaps, that professional learning conversations may be difficult.

In early 2012, I became aware of an initiative being developed under the auspices of Reading Recovery called the STEAM Project (Strengthening Together: Effectively Achieving More). The project, begun in 2011 "focuses on intensifying effort, working with urgency and involving all Reading Recovery personnel, class teachers, school leadership teams and agencies" (Reading Recovery, The Steam Project, 2011, p.1). The information introducing me to this Project was made available to me by a Reading Recovery Tutor who, aware of my study recognised its relevance to my work. I was grateful for her thoughtfulness and also viewed this as a demonstration of the value of colleagues who, through professional conversations are aware of each other's work and effectively share information.

Workshops introducing the STEAM Project were held during 2011 to introduce Reading Recovery Tutors to the initiative. Two of the three expected outcomes for session three of these workshops clearly align with the concept of school staff functioning as part of a learning community as outlined by researchers such as Rogoff et al., (1996), Wells et al. (1990) and Moore (1998). They are:

- Focus Reading Recovery teachers to actively work on strengthening classroom and Reading Recovery teacher collaboration
- Assist Reading Recovery teachers in supporting classroom teachers' understanding of Literacy Processing so that more effective classroom literacy instruction results, especially for children who are not progressing as expected
  (STEAM Project, 2011, p.6)

It is of note also, that the second bullet point: "Assist Reading Recovery teachers in supporting classroom teachers' understanding of Literacy Processing" is a key feature of this project. This links to the concept of a more experienced professional being positioned as a leader, and is reflective work by Rogoff et al. (1996), where "a community of learners involves both active learners and a more skilled partner, who provides leadership and guidance, in a collaborative endeavour" (p. 388). These outcomes also illustrate Vgotsky's concepts of learning being a social construct, and learning being more likely when a more skilled partner leads someone from their place of knowledge to a higher level, a reminder that Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is a concept relevant to the development of adult learners as well as children.

The outline of the Project was of great interest to me as it seemed to dovetail with my study in several ways. One of the aims is "highlighting the importance of collaboration in a team approach to operating Reading Recovery effectively in each school" (p. 1). As illustrated in my interview results, any collaboration actually taking place between the classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers involved in my study was scant. The fact that Reading Recovery recognises the need to increase the communication level between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers supports my findings.

DuFour (2004) states simply, that "collaborative teacher conversations must quickly move beyond "What are we expected to teach?" to "How will we know when each student has learned?" (p. 2). But, as will be seen in the following sections, working towards effective learning conversations is not a simple process and may require the skilled support of outside agencies in assisting teachers to develop the skills necessary to take part in effective learning conversations.

Environmental and Cultural Aspect which foster Effective Professional Conversations

Du Four (2004) states that once a school's staff recognise the value of operating as a professional learning community they will work together to create an environment that would promote this collaborative culture. This statement makes the process of becoming a learning community seem quite straightforward. However, when recalling Peterson's (2002) description of widely differing school cultures, and the effect of teacher beliefs

about collegiality outlined by Lima (2000), and Du Four (2004), it becomes clear that the process of establishing a learning community can pose some challenges. Donato (2004), states that it is essential to "establish social relations necessary for collaboration" (p. 3). Many research articles (see Annan et al., 2003; Rogoff et al. 1996) agree that staff need to possess certain skills and understandings in order to work effectively as a learning community. They strongly suggest that expert support be brought into a school to equip teachers with the inquiry skills and discussion protocols necessary to allow them to be active participants in effective learning conversations.

These studies also described the level of professional support and training provided to schools who participated in the projects to increase student achievement through professional conversations. The teachers in Delaney's (1998) study were "provided training on collegial coaching, dialoguing, and written/oral reflection prior to the study". (p. 5). In Davis' project (2007) "Professional support was provided to enable groups of teachers to meet to identify, discuss and support learning needs and work together to consider teaching approaches and teaching strategies that teachers will use to support and extend student learning" (p. 4). These researchers believed teachers required mentoring and training in how to participate in collegial conversations.

Delaney's participants were trained to follow a systematic method of partaking in collegial conversations. Discourse, listening and responding to the oral and written comments of colleagues was carried out to in a formal, pre-determined manner:

> . . . a specific format for collegial coaching in which dialogue patterns are used to facilitate both written and oral reflection about teaching practice. This format for collegial coaching is part of a constructivist supervisory model that includes strategies for engaging in reflective conversations that both support and challenge collegial thinking, dialogue skills such as pausing, paraphrasing and probing and development of knowledge about the ways in which intraschool dialogue reflects, maintains and can be used to change school cultures (p. 5).

Teachers included in the research carried out by Delaney et al. (1995), perceived positive effects from the reflective and collegial coaching they had undertaken. One said "probing has given me the opportunity to think in more diverse ways. I am thinking about higher levels of learning and how to incorporate them into my teaching" (p. 11). Another is reported as saying:

The pausing, probing and paraphrasing does make an impact on what I think about my teaching. It really makes you think about every aspect of what happens in the lesson, how students respond, and how I respond. When you take the time to think about what took place, it gives you insight as to what could be done differently and what could be added to make the lesson even better. (p. 11)

This school, based in Illinois, also had access to a team of coaches available to schools to aid in the development of professional collaboration: "Coaches help teachers build a climate for deeper discussions among themselves by introducing teams to protocols, guidelines for discussion, that help groups develop norms of respect and trust." (p. 4). This use of a coach to guide teachers in the art of becoming effective group members chimes with work by Robinson et al. (2009) who, in *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why. Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)*, also stressed the importance of the group having a leader who is able to engage teachers in discussion. According to the *BES* report, leadership practices pertaining to promoting and participating in teacher learning and development have "a large, very educationally significant effect on student outcomes" (p. 42). I would like to finish this section with a quote from Jordan (1989, cited Leach & Moon, Eds. 1999), which says "learning to become a legitimate participant in a community involves learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of a full participant" (p. 29). It was the addition of the words 'and be silent' that resonated with me as I reviewed the literature pertaining to professional conversations. The words reminded me of the importance of not only being able to express theories, ideas and viewpoints during professional conversations, but of being an active and reflective listener. Active listening aims to promote mutual understanding, and includes strategies such as focussing attention only on the speaker and paraphrasing what a speaker has said (www.adelaideuniversity.edu.au). I believe a positive attitude to professional learning conversations, used concomitantly with active listening, is most likely to promote effective dialogue.

In the next section, I look at research which involves teachers expressing their beliefs about teaching, and the dichotomies that can occur between spoken theory and actual practice.

Teacher Beliefs and Teaching Practice/ Espoused Theory and Theories-in-Action

Teachers can say one thing about their practice, yet be observed doing another (Borg, 1999; Lee, 2009). I am using the term Espoused Theory to refer to teacher beliefs about their practice and their philosophies about how students learn. Again we can see the use of different terms having the same meaning when the BES report (Robinson, Hohepa et al. 2009), uses the term 'theories-of-action' in place of 'espoused theories'. Both terms refer to a teacher's beliefs. Theories-in-use, and therories-in-action refers to a teacher's actual practice.

"Theories of action are powerful," states the BES report, "because they explain teachers' actions and act as filters through which change messages are interpreted" (p. 44). While it may seem logical to assume that a teacher's beliefs about how students learn would shape their practice, as the studies below show, this is not always the case.

When presenting the results of a research project to an assembly of scholars from several dozen research universities Chris Argyris (2003), was asked what he thought was the most interesting finding from his research. He responded that he was impressed by how the professors valued their own research but had little or no idea what work was being carried out elsewhere, even if this other work could connect to their own. During the discussion that followed Argyris recalled

> What impressed me about the argument was that knowledge that described the existence of defensive actions was treated as natural and not to be changed. Yet, the same scholars identified defensive routines in organisations plus their counterproductive consequences and implied that changing them was necessary to enhance learning and performance. (p. 1181)

This is a clear example of espoused theory contrasting with theories-in-action. While the scholars believed that defensive behaviours were counterproductive and that increased learning could result if the situation changed, in actuality, the scholars behaved as if defensive actions were natural and made no attempt to change them. Intrigued by this dichotomy, Argyris continued investigations in this area, carrying out further research with Donald Schön (2003): "As we immersed ourselves in our observations, we differentiated between espoused theories of effective action and theories-in-use. It was the espoused theories that varied widely. But these theories did not predict accurately what we

observed" (p. 1184). Preparing to undertake a search of education databases for research into teacher beliefs I realized the importance of looking at work that includes both espoused theories and theories- in-use. Research that only studies one aspect may only be 'revealing half the story' (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002):

> when asked about their behaviour in a certain situation, most people respond with their espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory that encompasses their aims and intentions. However, theories in use actually determine their actions. These two theories may not be compatible, and the individual may or may not be aware of this. (Argyris et al., 1985, cited in Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002, p.182)

Argyris and Schön (2003), used the word 'observed' when talking about theories-in-use and this highlights the fundamental difference between the two theories. Theories-in-use are observable actions, while espoused theories are those that people say they believe and/or practice. As theories–in-use are of their nature observable they are relatively easy for a researcher to measure. Espoused theories present more difficulties. In the education field for example, teachers often use different terms to describe their beliefs: "Terms such as teacher cognition, self-reflection, knowledge and belief can each be used to refer to different phenomena. Variation in the definition of a term can range from the superficial and idiosyncratic to the profound and theoretical." (Kagan, 1990, p.456). The variety of terms used can make it difficult to identify previous research carried out in this area, and can also make undertaking work in this field more complex. The range and diversity of terms was described thus by Pajares (1992, cited in Kane et al. 2002):

> They travel in disguise and often under alias – attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in the literature. (p. 181)

Discrepancies between teachers' espoused theories and what actually happens in classrooms have been the subject of investigation by researchers endeavouring to explain why such mis-matches occur. Borg (1999) purports that often the teacher is simply oblivious to the discrepancy. In a study carried out with English Language Teachers in

Malta he reports, "Another teacher in my study was adamant that he never used the students' first language; it was only when I gave him the transcripts of his lessons that he realized how often he actually did" (p. 161). When made aware of a contradiction between belief and practice, some participants, as quoted above, were surprised by the results. Other study participants tried to justify the dichotomy. A study conducted by Lee (2009), investigated teachers giving written feedback to students. Data gathered showed that 96% of teachers participating in the study believed that students should learn to identify and correct errors in their own work. However, analysis of feedback comments showed 70% of actual feedback involved teachers indicating and correcting errors for the students. When evidence of this discrepancy was provided, most teachers appeared to blame the students. One felt that "students are unable to locate and correct errors themselves, teachers have to help them" (p. 5), and another said, "I tried to ask them to locate the errors themselves, but the result was not good ... I also asked them to correct others' work but they tended to have too many arguments" (p. 5). This error-focussed feedback led to another discrepancy when, in spite of the teachers expressing the belief that feedback should include both strengths and weaknesses, analysis showed that positive comments comprised only 3.3% of total feedback. These teachers were not aware of the rupture between their beliefs and practice until they were presented with the results of the study.

Other teachers were found to enter studies, already cognisant of such discrepancies, yet able to justify why their beliefs were not followed through in practice. Borg (1999) quotes another teacher, who bases a large part of each lesson on formal grammar instruction in spite of his belief that it is not an effective way to teach English:

> I am not entirely convinced that any focus on accuracy in the classroom has any effect on student's fluency in general ... I don't necessarily believe it is going to help them. I've done this present perfect umpteen times with a million people. I still believe that nothing I've ever done in a classroom consciously with students, language focus, has actually helped them to acquire the present perfect, for example. (p. 158)

This teacher justifies his clash of belief and practice by explaining that students expect formal grammar to be taught and not to teach it would cause them concern, that students like to be made aware of their errors, and grammar teaching creates this awareness, and grammar practice can also provide the teacher with diagnostic information. In effect this

teacher went along with what he perceived the adult class members wanted, despite the fact that it did not mesh with his philosophy of teaching and learning.

There was yet another category of response to studies carried out in this area; that of teachers who were well aware of the difference between their philosophy about teaching and what occurred in their classrooms, and were not happy about the situation but, because of school doctrine felt they had no choice but to follow administrative schemes. For example, "Mary and Catherine were forced to adopt the school mandated Accelerated Reader program against their philosophy of effective literacy instruction and teaching beliefs" (Powers et al., 2006, p.142). Teachers who believe that literacy teaching should be targeted to fit students' needs may well be uneasy with the introduction of structured programmes schools purchase, which are then 'worked through' with teachers following the script and students working through the programme regardless of individual learning need. Instead of the lesson being targeted to fit the child, set programmes require the student fit the programme. Powers et al. go further when explaining their findings regarding the effect of the introduction of structured programmes,

> Unfortunately, in reality teachers are usually strong armed into accepting and upholding new ways of thinking about teaching and learning by a visiting "expert", who typically begins a professional development session with a crowd warming sentiment akin to 'Everything you knew previously is wrong. I am here to show you the right way to do things in your classroom.' (p. 125)

They maintain that "this devaluing of teachers' experiences and beliefs is in direct conflict with the principal tenets of constructivism and is certainly not conducive to progress" (p. 125). Indeed the imposition of such programmes, which usually involves teachers being introduced to the programme and follow up meetings held a few times throughout the first year, goes against best practice of sustainable change coming about through ongoing teacher reflection on beliefs and practice, and professional conversations leading to a wider change to school culture, as asserted earlier in this chapter. With regards to schools nurturing a culture where learning conversations are valued, it would appear that implementing a one size fits all programme would remove the opportunity for staff to reflect, discuss and analyse the effects of their practice and that of their colleagues. My interview schedule invited participants to describe professional development they had

undertaken, this included any involvement with prescribed literacy programmes implemented in their schools.

The Need for Shared Language

The importance of a shared understanding of language is a key aspect of socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). It is imperative that all participants in a learning conversation have the same understanding of terminology used: "Language makes it possible to share experiences, to link our minds and produce a social intelligence far superior to that of any one individual" (Moll, 1990, p.231). In other words, when all parties involved in conversation share the understanding and nuance of the language used, a common focus is more probable. The importance of this, underpins the Reading Recovery training process.

Clay and Watson (1982) describe how, after undergoing Reading Recovery training, the cohort of teachers were "now able to question, challenge, discuss, work out courses of action, and explain their decisions in ways they could all understand because these new theories were shared and explicit" (p. 194). Speaking reorganises our thinking, and our language comes to us as a cultural heritage through our interactions with others. Because we actively use language, it changes our thinking, and our thinking and actions change language (Wink & Putney, 2002). The point made in the section above about teachers using different terms for their beliefs highlights the importance of participants in an effective learning conversation having a shared understanding, and knowledge of the language used.

One example of varying terms describing the same thing can be seen in a paper by Viviane Robinson (2009) where she uses the term 'open-to-learning conversations'. Other terms found for these discussions are 'learning conversations' and 'professional conversations'. For my study I am using the term 'learning conversations'. Confusion caused by a lack of shared understanding of language used can also arise when the same term is used but people interpret its meaning differently. One example, this time from the classroom, are the terms 'seen' and 'unseen' text. Both classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers monitor a student's reading progress, and decide the next teaching step, by administering and analysing running records. The student reads a text and the teacher annotates their reading behaviours. It is important to note if the child has seen the text

before or not as this will of course affect the results. I have observed however, that there is a wide disparity in the interpretation of the terms 'seen' and 'unseen'. Some teachers believe an unseen text is a new text that is given to the student, with the expectation that it will be read immediately. Others introduce the book, giving the student the names of the characters and a brief, or sometimes more in depth outline of the story. Some teachers let the student read through the text silently before reading aloud; others ask the student to read aloud straight away. Likewise, seen text is interpreted in different ways. Some believe it should be the text used for the reading lesson the previous day, which hopefully has been read again at home, others may use a text the child has had repeated access to over a longer period of time. The publication Reading and Writing Standards (2009) actually contains a section called Glossary: Using a shared language. According to the glossary, unseen text is "text the student has not seen, or has seen but has not attempted to read" (p. 16), and seen text is "text the student has already seen and read in an instructional setting, such as guided reading" (p. 16). Whilst there is a certain latitude in these definitions, especially for unseen text, which still leaves room for a range of interpretation, the inclusion of a glossary appears to be an acknowledgment by the Ministry of Education of the importance of education professionals having a united understanding of language.

Conclusion

New Zealand Ministry of Education policy makes clear that some level of communication is expected between teachers (2003; 2009: 2011). Research (Wells, 1994; Rogoff, 2001: Wenger, 2012) showed that schools which operate as learning communities have structures that facilitate effective learning conversations, leading to improved student achievement. Factors, such as use of data, which contribute to effective learning conversations, have been identified (Timperley & Robinson, 2001). Implementing change to foster more effective communication between teachers can be difficult, and may require external, expert assistance (Delaney et al. 1995; Annan et al., 2003).

I was drawn to investigate the level of conversation between education professionals who work with the same student as this is an integral part of my work as an RT:Lit. In the next chapter, as part of explaining the design of my research, I examine how my personal interest and involvement in literacy teaching may impact on my interviews with my participants.

Chapter Four

Methodology

This chapter outlines the design of my inquiry. I explore the use of the interview as a data gathering technique, both with individual participants and the participants from each school in a group setting. I explain the choice made to place my participants in focus groups. I discuss the method of analysing the collated data. I will also discuss how my theoretical framework underpins the research design. I outline the ethical consent procedures and concerns. I also discuss how I attended to reflexivity, including establishing relationships during the research process. The chapter concludes by introducing the participants.

Research Design

I wanted to discover how classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers were sharing information about the reading progress and literacy needs of children currently on the Reading Recovery programme. I wanted to establish if both sets of teachers were satisfied with the amount of information sharing that was occurring. I hoped that careful analysis of the data collected would allow me to identify practices that enable effective communication between these literacy educators, and/or identify any barriers that may hinder effective communication and as such, may impact on a child's learning.

Interviewing

I used semi-structured research interviews as one of my data gathering tools as I believed this would be the most effective way to investigate, clarify and analyse the interviewees' personal beliefs and experiences (See Appendices 1 and 2 for interview schedules). I wanted to explore the everyday experiences of my participants or, as Kvale (1996) put it, "the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it" (p. 29). My interview questions were focussed on gaining information about aspects of the interviewees' professional beliefs and practices. According to Kvale (1996): "The qualitative research interview is theme oriented. Two persons talk together about a theme that is of interest to both." (p. 29). As a Resource Teacher of Literacy I am passionate

about developing literacy skills in children, particularly those that are struggling with literacy acquisition. My interviewees were teachers of junior school children, and teachers of Reading Recovery. Implicit in these roles is the belief that they too are dedicated to furthering the literacy skills of their pupils.

My interview questions were designed to illuminate the focus of my study: the level of communication between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers and I wanted the interviewees to tell me their own stories, in their own words. The interview questions I devised were to be used a guide only, and were designed to encourage the interviewees to talk about their views on, and experiences of, a particular aspect of their professional world. I used the interview schedule as the foundation for a conversational approach, rather than simply carrying out a question and answer interview. This meant that I, the interviewer, was involved to some extent in the conversation, and needed to be careful not to reveal my own beliefs and opinions as these may have affected the participants' responses. This was more apparent during the individual interviews, as the focus groups seemed to take on a life of their own, with both groups of teachers seeming to enjoy the opportunity to discuss their views with their colleagues. I became more of an observer during these sessions, needing only to gently direct the conversation to maintain my research focus. In attempting this, I needed to be vigilant about keeping to the focus of the interview while not curtailing dialogue that may have ultimately lead to important data. When participants expressed more general school comments, or appeared to digress from the intended focus, I endeavoured to refine and refocus the interview to obtain the essential data. My conversational approach to interviewing echoes that of Burgess (1988) who said, "the conversations that I establish are therefore designed to provide an opportunity for teachers to talk about their work in their own words, using their own concepts rather than in an abstract way or in response to a set of staccato questions" (p. 144). In other words, by using the interview schedule as the 'skeleton' I wanted the participants to add flesh to the discussion by feeling comfortable enough to tell their own stories.

The individual interviews and focus group sessions at both schools were carried out in classrooms, after school hours. This was familiar territory for all participants. The presence of a digital voice recorder introduced an air of artificiality to the proceedings, and during individual sessions, all participants exhibited some degree of nervousness and apprehension to begin with. The focus group interviews had a different atmosphere and it appeared that the participants enjoyed having time to talk amongst themselves. As we will

see in the Findings Chapter of this thesis, this act of making time to get together to discuss a given topic is not something my study participants often do. I was appreciative of the fact that my participants appeared to speak openly and frankly, despite the simulated situation. One participant (Sheila, Rosewood School) displayed discomfort and hesitancy on one occasion and took time to choose her words very carefully when describing incidents with colleagues; this has been noted and discussed in the Findings Chapter of this thesis.

By carrying out all interviews and focus group discussions myself, I was able to minimise the sensitivity issue described by Kvale (1996): "Interviews obtained by different interviewers, using the same interview guide, may be different due to varying levels of sensitivity towards, and knowledge about, the topic of the interview" (p. 35). It remained vital, however, that I continued to be mindful that my knowledge about the topic under discussion did not interfere with the necessity of my remaining impartial during the interview process. At the same time I recognised that, as I hoped to run each individual interview as a conversation, I would be talking and interacting with the participants. It would have been naive to think that my position, both as a researcher and a literacy teacher would not shape to some extent what my participants choose to share.

The interview may be seen as a period of self reflection, and, as research such as that carried out by Kvale (1996) demonstrates, it is not uncommon for interview participants to challenge their own views, and perhaps see a different outlook during the interview. In other words, "it may happen in the course of an interview that subjects change their descriptions of, and meanings about, a theme. The subjects may themselves have discovered new aspects of the themes they are describing, and suddenly see relations that they had not been conscious of earlier" (Kvale, 1996, p.34). I had provided the participants with the interview schedule prior to the interview taking place. It was possible that in thinking about the questions contained in the actual interview schedule and the focus group interview schedule, participants may have come to reflect on their practice, resulting in a shift in perspective.

When all individual interviews were completed, the study participants from each school were invited to take part in a focus group interview. Wilson (1997) expresses the view that data from an individual interview cannot be any seen as any more valid or authentic than that obtained through focus group interviews, and vice versa. Obviously though, the

number of interviewees present would vary from an interview individual interview involving one participant and the researcher, to focus group interviews that involved three participants and the researcher, as was the case at both my focus schools.

In conjunction with individual interviews with research participants I had initially planned to observe and record professional meetings held between the classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers at each school. However, when I outlined the proposed format of my research to the participants, I was informed that neither of my focus schools held formal meetings specifically for my participants to discuss Reading Recovery students, utilising instead more informal methods of information sharing. In an effort to collect data on the level of information sharing, I then decided to invite the participants to come together and explain their methods of sharing information regarding the children on the Reading Recovery Programme, and to describe the nature of information they shared.

Focus group interviews have a different dynamic to individual interviews (Lederman, 1990; Wilson, 1997). While the focus group discussion centred on the same common theme, the participants of each focus group knew each other and the collegial relationships between the participants may have affected the data collected. If one of the participants held a more senior position in the school hierarchy to others, this may have made it difficult for anyone who wished to challenge the status quo. Any beginning teachers may likewise have been hesitant to voice views which disagreed with that of more experienced teachers. If a participant's views during an individual interview diverged from those they expressed in the focus group I decided I would attempt to clarify the situation in a follow up individual interview, not during the focus group where, for any number of reasons the participant have felt constrained in some way. I believe Wilson (1997) identified the fundamental difference between individual and focus group interviews when he posed the questions:

> Is an individual in-depth interview a 'private' space inhabited by interviewer and respondent in which the latter may talk about private thoughts and behaviour? And in contrast must a focus group necessarily be construed as 'public' in which responses will be guarded, responses circumspect and voices less authentic? (p. 218)

I did not observe my participants as being 'guarded' during the focus group session. On the contrary, the atmosphere, particularly at Sagebrush School seemed to take on a

convivial air, with lots of laughing and reminiscing included in the discussion. The incident referred to earlier in this chapter, where Sheila (Rosewood School) appeared to be considering her words very carefully in order to be circumspect took place during her individual interview. The atmosphere of group interviews, which in my experience became one of camaraderie between the participants, has been explored by researchers (see Kvale, 1996; Lederman, 1990), and may be seen as the result of participants feeling more secure in a group situation, and multiple interactions being possible among the participants as well as the interviewer. Lederman (1990) says "It is, in fact, occasionally argued that focus groups ought to be better conceptualized as 'focus group discussions' rather than interviews" (p. 120). My two focus group interviews were certainly more reminiscent of conversations than interviews.

By complementing the focus group data with individual interview data I hoped to be able to gather as rich a portrayal as possible of the level of communication between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers.

Data Analysis

As described in chapter two, analysis of my data was underpinned by the Three Planes of Analysis (Rogoff, 1995, 1998). This model depicts a Personal Plane which highlights the individual, an Interpersonal Plane which highlights interaction, and a Community Plane which highlights wider community factors. While these three planes each have an identified focus, it is imperative to note that they are interwoven, and that while data might be analysed through the lens of one plane, the pervading influences of the other two planes cannot be ignored.

I felt that the individual interviews were likely to provide data which could be analysed in relation to the personal plane, including each participant's personal beliefs of literacy learning and teaching, their perceptions of the roles of others and their views on the level of communication they took part in. The shadow of the wider cultural or community plane would hover over this analysis however, as, for example, it is likely that the participants have developed their ideas and beliefs to some extent through being located in their particular school.

The focus group interview gave me an opportunity to obtain data able to be analysed mainly through the interpersonal plane. My original plan to observe participants during a formal meeting focussed on their work with identified students would have permitted me to observe the participants "communicating and coordinating their involvement as they participate in a socioculturally structured collective activity" (Rogoff, 1995, p.146). The socio-cultural reference here is to the belief that learning takes place within meaningful interaction with others, especially when there is a common purpose. However, the data gathered during the more artificial setting of focus group interviews served to provide insight into the level of communication my participants shared and also illustrated the wider view, or what could be seen as the third plane of analysis; that of my participant's functioning within the culture of their schools.

With reference to the interweaving of these Planes of Analysis, my data was analysed, and written up in a similar interlinked manner. Individual interview data, and data obtained from different schools via the focus group interviews is not discussed independently, but is analysed collectively, with connections and contrasts in participants' views interlaced. While the identification of data as having arisen in an individual or group interview may locate one particular plane as the foreground of focus, awareness of the other planes is always present. This blending of all three planes serves to create a cohesiveness, which embraces the multiple components of individual beliefs, shared understandings and interpersonal relationships evident within the school cultures.

By comparing and contrasting the individual and focus group data I hoped to be able to identify instances of espoused theories being confirmed as theories-in action. It was also possible that I would discover a divergence between what teachers said or believed they did, and their actual practice (Argyris, 2003; Borg, 1999).

Links to Theory

I gathered data through individual and focus group interviews with classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers. The focus group interviews also provided an opportunity to observe the participants sharing their knowledge of particular students, and to gain some understanding of the ways they may use this shared knowledge to inform their teaching practice.

I also wished to observe if the Reading Recovery teacher's role in the discussions was at any time that of a leader. Their intensive training in Reading Recovery procedures could lead to them being viewed as leaders in literacy by the classroom teachers. I examined data to identify situations where classroom teachers were scaffolded by Reading Recovery teachers into refining or adapting their teaching practice. Likewise, classroom teachers may, with their extensive knowledge of the students in their class, share information with the Reading Recovery teacher who, as a result of the structure of the programme, works with each student for thirty minutes each day. Classroom teachers, who are with their students much longer than thirty minutes a day could be viewed as having a more in-depth knowledge of the students which could be shared with the Reading Recovery teacher. These concepts of information sharing, and of experts scaffolding others, are direct reflections of sociocultural theory underpinning learning and action.

Reflecting on the emphasis placed on the importance of shared understanding of relevant pedagogy described by Wink (2002), I hoped that the focus group interviews would enable me to observe participants use of Reading Recovery terminology when consulting each other regarding children on the Reading Recovery programme. This importance of having an understanding of shared language flows directly from Vygotsky's work (Oguz, 2007; Wink, 2002) and I analysed the data to identify use of shared pedagogy, which in the case of my study means 'shared educational language', during both focus group interviews.

Ethical Consent Process

In applying for ethical consent from the University of Otago's ethics committee I was particularly mindful of three specific aspects: my participants must want to be part of my study, the (possible) vulnerability of my participants, and the importance and difficulty of ensuring my participants remained anonymous.

In her article about research ethics, Susan Malone (2003) wrote a mock letter to research participants. After advising them that they could withdraw from the study at any time she inserted the words:

> In reality, you are very unlikely to withdraw from this study once you've begun – you would be too concerned with what others, particularly your professor, would think and the repercussions of such a decision. You are probably not even free to

volunteer – you have been drafted, coerced by your professor's decision to work with me." (p. 799)

My first contact with regards to my research at each school was the Principal, I was aware that, as their school Principal had approved my study, teachers may have felt under some form of obligation to take part. My potential participants received information and consent forms (Appendix A and B), I drew their attention to the section that advised they could decline to take part, or withdraw from the study at any time, with no disadvantage to themselves. I also clarified that I was undertaking this research in my capacity as a postgraduate student, not as an educational professional and that any data gathered would be used for the purposes of my study only.

I was aware that during discussions and interviews participants may have revealed information that showed them in a less than flattering light, for example I may be made privy to views and ideas that go against accepted best teaching practice. While data of this nature may be extremely relevant and important for research purposes, the interpretation and reporting of such data would require skill and sensitivity. The fact that participants were expressing personal views and describing their professional practice emphasised the need for participating schools and teachers to retain complete anonymity. Participants were given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms, and no details were included in my report which could possibly lead to individual schools being identified.

Participants were also told before the interviewing commenced that interviews would be recorded on tape, transcribed and form part of my M.A. thesis, and possibly parts of a journal article and/or conference presentation. Only myself, my supervisor Dr Susan Sandretto, and a transcriptionist would have access to the recorded interviews. Participants were assured that these people have a professional responsibility to maintain confidentiality. Upon agreeing to participate, participants read and signed the consent form which states the thesis may be made available in the University Library.

Data was collected directly from the participants (audiotaped with permission) in both the individual interviews and group discussions. Each participant was encouraged to supply information honestly and accurately. Once the interviews were transcribed, each participant was able to read their own, amending and/or editing if they wished. Only when participants had approved their transcripts did I begin to analyse the data.

Participants were able to request a copy of the final results of the project and were made aware of this verbally, and in the information sheet for participants.

I submitted my application for Ethics Approval to the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee For Ethical Approval Of A Research Or Teaching Proposal Involving Human Participants. This application included information sheets and consent sheets for participants (Appendix A and B), together with my Research Proposal. The Ethics Committee of the University of Otago granted approval on 21 October 2008. The project reference code is 08/151.

Reflexivity/Relationships

Reflexivity, according to Guillemin and Gillam (2004) is "not a single or universal entity but a process – an active, ongoing process that saturates every stage of the research" (p. 274) and involves examining the positioning of the researcher in the research. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) further asserted that what the researcher chose to research, how they carried out the research and interpreted the data would all reveal something about the researcher. I chose to investigate communication between classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers because it is an area of interest to me and I work with both groups in my professional role. Previously I have been a classroom teacher of children on the Reading Recovery programme and I have been trained, and worked as a Reading Recovery teacher. Mu current position as an RT:Lit, involves working with students who are struggling with literacy acquisition, and their classroom teachers. Many of the students I work with have been through the Reading Recovery programme. Indeed, students referred directly from Reading Recovery to the RT:Lit service for further intensive tuition, are classed as "priority enrolments" for the service by the Ministry of Education (Professional Practice Manual, 2011, p. 4), with the expectation that the RT:Lit. will begin tutoring these 'priority enrolment' students within 20 days of their referral.

I had anticipated that there would be differences for me as a researcher when interviewing in the different schools. This was partly because no two schools are the same, but primarily because a change in my personal circumstances meant I became a researcher in two schools with which I had very different relationships. Rosewood School was a school I had been involved with in my role as an RT:Lit.. I was familiar with the staff and wider

school community. To some extent I was on home ground. Sagebrush School was selected after I had moved to a different city. I was unfamiliar with the area, knew no one on the staff, and the first contact I had with the school was when I approached the Principal to introduce myself, and to request a meeting to discuss the possibility of basing part of my research in the school. The first time I met the teachers was to have an introductory meeting in order to explain my study, present them with the written information and ask if they were prepared to participate. I had to quickly establish a rapport with these teachers and this contrasted to the rapport I had built up over time at Rosewood. These differing relationships may have had an effect on the way I carried out the interviews and thus affect the data collected.

It is possible that the teachers at Rosewood School may have felt more relaxed and open with me as we were already on a friend/colleague basis, and in the focus group interviews I was possibly established as 'one of them'. On the other hand, at the time the research interviews at Rosewood School were carried out, no one knew that I would shortly be taking up a new position, so they may have felt some reticence as they would have to continue working with me after the study. They may have been concerned that if they said anything controversial, it may have had an affect our future working relationship.

I entered Sagebrush School as a stranger. The participants were aware that I am also a teacher, but I had to work at establishing some kind of rapport at our initial meeting. These teachers may have felt more able to talk freely to me, as we shared no history. Sagebrush School was not a school I would be working in the future, so there was no on-going working relationship to be considered. The converse of this may have happened of course, and they may have viewed me as an outsider, and not wished or felt able to express their views and beliefs in detail.

I believe I carried out my research in the role of what Sherif (2001) called a "partial insider" (p. 438), that is, I had certain common experiences with my participants in the area being researched. I shared important professional aspects with the interviewees. I am a teacher, I have taught junior children, I am Reading Recovery trained and taught the programme for several years. In effect, we shared aspects of the education culture. As a researcher I was aware that this shared culture could be a two edged sword. On the one hand, I understood the language and phraseology of the classroom and Reading Recovery programme, I knew the demands placed on primary school teachers and the expectations

placed upon teachers by parents, the school communities and the education system. However, the risk was that I may forget that my awareness of these things has been formed by my experiences, the interviewees will have had different experiences and will have constructed their own beliefs and philosophical viewpoints. Recalling Rogoff's (2001) definition of schools as communities, I had to remain aware of the fact that I was not fully an 'insider' as my participants would have worked in different school communities and have established working relationships with each other. At Rosewood, where I had an established a role as a visiting colleague, I was still not fully an 'insider'; I was even less so at Sagebrush. Drawing on their own understanding and practice, participants from both schools may express views that differ markedly from my own, in spite of our shared experiences. Beer (1997) raises this issue and concludes:

> The researcher's culture, however, does not leave him or her alone; this awareness it turns out, is limited to those things that the researcher has either experienced or logically worked out as an extension of experience. (p. 124)

So it was likely that interviewees may have expressed views and beliefs that diverged, and were at variance to my personal views and beliefs yet I had to remain open to their professed ideas. Yes, we shared some important aspects of the school/literacy/education culture, but the interviewees and I had arrived at the meeting point of the interviews via different paths.

Kvale (1996) reminded us that the interview is about not just about data gathering, it is also about people: "the research interview is an inter view, an interaction between two people. The interviewer and the subject act in relation to each other and reciprocally influence each other" (p. 35). For the participants and myself, the interview experience could be a positive professional one, alternatively it may provoke feelings of defensiveness and/or anxiety in either party. As the interviewer I needed to be aware of the interpersonal dynamics and note them in the analysis if necessary; "Rather than seeking to reduce the importance of this interaction, what matters in the research interview is to recognize and apply the knowledge gained from the interpersonal interaction." (Kvale, 1996, p.36). This aspect of interviewing reminded me of Beer's (1997) comment that interview participants cannot be viewed as passive subjects, but are indeed motivated, thinking human beings who are volunteering their thoughts and experiences. Teaching is a pressured occupation. Scheduling time to participate in research, in addition to the regular demands on a teacher's

time was difficult. However, I am hopeful that my study participants left the interview situation knowing that I had appreciated their willingness to be part of my research study and feeling that the interview process has been a positive experience.

Research Participants

I invited two primary schools to be included in my study. They were schools which provided the Reading Recovery programme to students struggling with literacy acquisition. To meet my selection criteria, the teacher/s of children currently on the Reading Recovery Programme and the Reading Recovery teacher all needed to agree to participate. For logistical reasons these schools were going to be in the South Island and I decided to select schools of differing size, setting, and decile rating. However, during my study I moved to a new position in a different city, with the result that I carried out research in one school in the South Island, and one in the North Island.

Sagebrush School is a Decile 1 school with a roll of approximately 350 students. Three teachers from this school participated in my research.

Kate is the Reading Recovery teacher at Sagebrush School. She undertook her teacher training in New Zealand and has 25 years teaching experience. In that time she has taught at all class levels of the primary school except for new entrants. She works at Sagebrush School part time, being responsible for teaching the Reading Recovery programme, and does not have a class of her own. The research took place during Kate's fourth year of teaching the Reading Recovery Programme.

Mary undertook her teacher training in New Zealand and currently teaches a Year One and Two class. The research took place during her second year of teaching.

Cat undertook her teacher training in Australia and has been teaching in New Zealand since 1989. She has taught all levels of the primary school, and also taught at secondary schools. At the time of the research she taught a Year Three and Four class.

Rosewood School is a Decile 8 school, with a roll of approximately 200 students. Three teachers from this school participated in my research.

Sheila is the Reading Recovery Teacher at Rosewood School. She undertook her teacher training in New Zealand and has over 20 years teaching experience. In that time Sheila has taught New Entrant to Year Four classes, and she teaches a Year 3 class in addition to teaching Reading Recovery. The research took place during Sheila's second year of teaching the Reading Recovery Programme,

Chantal undertook her teacher training in New Zealand and has been teaching for almost 20 years. She has taught all levels of the junior school. She was teaching a Year One and Two class at the time the research took place. Chantal has had Reading Recovery training and worked as the Reading Recovery teacher at Rosewood School for two years before Sheila took over the position.

Tracy undertook her teacher training in New Zealand and has been teaching for 24 years. She has taught at all levels of the primary school, except New Entrants. For the past 14 years Tracy has worked in the junior department of the school and she was teaching a Year Two class at the time the research took place. Rosewood School management have planned for Tracy to undertake Reading Recovery training next year, she will then replace Sheila in the role of Reading Recovery teacher.

In the next chapter, the results of the individual and focus group interviews conducted with my participants are presented and analysed.

Chapter Five

Findings

Introduction

When analysing my interview data I confess to feeling dismayed by what appeared at first glance to be scant results and the lack of depth captured in the data. However, I came to the realisation that the quantity and quality of the data actually spoke volumes, reflecting as it does, a snapshot of the participating teachers' views and attitudes at the time of their participation in the project.

In the following sections I discuss my participants' beliefs about teaching literacy, look at how classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers view each other's roles and examine the content of conversations between the two groups. Following this analysis, I explore factors the participants identify as helping or hindering effective communication, and examine any suggestions they make as to how their schools could support them in the pursuit of successful, professional communication.

"Getting to the right level": Participants' beliefs on the subject of literacy teaching

During the individual interviews participants were asked to describe their philosophy on the teaching of literacy, (see Appendix for Interview Guide). All of the participants found it difficult to articulate their philosophy. They spoke in terms of desired outcomes: To have children enjoy reading, to get them to the expected level, to have parental support and a positive learning environment were all common themes. To use descriptors from work by McAlpine, Weston, Berthiaume and Fairbanks-Roch (2006), the participants spoke in terms of teaching goals and knowledge goals. Teaching goals express expectations and what is to be achieved. For example, one teacher stated: "My philosophy is to get the children going. Get them reading at their own level" (Mary, II, SS[1]). The teachers also referred to having a positive learning environment and the importance of children enjoying reading. Knowledge goals, which, according to McAlpine et al., (2006) demonstrate what teachers know about teaching and learning, including subject content, pedagogy and knowledge of the learner were not so evident. One teacher spoke of the link between

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[1] II - Individual Interview,   GI – Group Interview,   SS – Sagebrush School,   RS – Rosewood School.

reading and writing and the importance of the child having good oral language (Chantal, II, RS), but there was no mention of theories of how students learn, any process of identifying needs, or methods of teaching to enable students to meet these desired outcomes. I was reminded of Flynn's (2007) work in identifying the practices of effective teachers of literacy where she concluded that "knowledge of research related to how children develop their skills in literacy and knowledge of how to nurture the learning of these skills in a motivating classroom context" (p. 145), is a vital difference between a good teacher and a "satisfactory classroom technician" (p. 145). This means that a sound understanding of the theory of how children learn literacy skills will adds depth and direction to the teaching process.

In light of these interview responses, two things struck me. Firstly, I wondered why teachers found it so difficult to articulate the philosophies that underpin their teaching practice. Secondly, I wondered what support could be provided to assist in both developing an awareness of the importance of being able to articulate their beliefs and philosophy, and building the skills necessary to do so.

In their 1999 study, Leach and Moon also found teachers had difficulty articulating what they called "understanding goals," which demonstrate what teachers know about teaching and learning, similar to the "knowledge goals" of McAlpine et al. (2006), and proposed possible reasons why this may be so. As in my study, Leach and Moon (1999), found some teachers "confuse understanding goals with overly narrow behavioural objectives" (p. 234). They also theorised that some teachers do not have a deep understanding of the subject they are teaching, and that the knowledge and ideas they do possess are based on text books and/or programmes that the teachers are accustomed to using. They posit the "goals derived from such materials tend to focus on remembering information or correctly following stipulated procedures (p. 234). This may go some way to explaining why participants in my study spoke of "getting the children to the correct level", and "getting them actually reading at their own level and developing them step by step" (Sheila, II, RS). All of the participants in my study expressed their teaching beliefs in terms of desired outcomes, with little or no reference to understanding or knowledge goals. This resonates with research by Powers et al. (2006) relating to schools using commercial programmes. When teachers are expected to adhere to a programme, which may even run contra to their

personal ideals, it can lead to a "devaluing of teachers' experiences and beliefs" (p. 125). I am not suggesting here that classroom teachers do not believe in the value of Reading Recovery, but of the participants in my study who were classroom teachers, most did not demonstrate a deep understanding of the theory and practice that underpins their literacy teaching practice. With the growing use of commercial programmes such as Jolly Phonics (www.jollylearning.co.uk), Bannatyne (www.bannatynereadingprogram.com), etc., where teachers have to implement and follow the programmes endorsed by their schools, the importance of evaluating and questioning personal belief systems about how students learn can be devalued.

Five of the six teachers in my study are all experienced teachers, each having taught for twenty or more years. I suggest that it is possible these teachers' beliefs and practices are so embedded that it was difficult for them to break them down into words. Leach and Moon (1999) spoke of the challenge of articulating ideas that are usually unspoken:

> teachers have difficulty articulating understanding goals because their most fundamental aspirations for their students are deeply rooted in assumptions and values that usually remain tacit. Surfacing such tacit knowledge is intellectually difficult and often personally revealing. To articulate goals one must put into words ideas which may be inchoate and private partly because they are so heartfelt. (p. 234)

This echoes Brookfield's (1988) thinking: "Becoming aware of assumptions that are so internalized that they are perceived as second nature or common sense is problematic precisely because of the familiarity of these ideas" (p. 90).

If I can draw a parallel, when I decided to teach my son to drive I had been a driver with an unblemished licence for over 20 years. On the day of my son's first lesson, I got behind the wheel and started to explain step by step how to start the car, engage gears, prepare to pull out into traffic etc., and found it extremely difficult. My driving behaviour was so entrenched that I could automatically perform the process; having to analyse the details and articulate them to a novice driver was not easy. The same state of affairs could explain the difficulties these experienced teachers had in articulating their own philosophies. Although they had all received a guide of the interview questions in order to give them time to reflect and order their thoughts before we met, it appeared that my participants could not easily turn their thinking into explicit statements.

Mary is in her second year of teaching and I did expect a more theoretical basis for her literacy teaching, as she is a recent graduate. However, she may still be refining her philosophy now that she is working in the "real world" of the classroom. She did say that as none of her teacher education practicum had been in junior classes, now she is teaching junior students "it is beneficial to see where they come from and how they start reading"(II, SS). Mary did say that it was important to her to teach in a way "so that they love reading" (II, SS). Her reason for this was that she did not enjoy reading herself when she was growing up and felt that if her teachers had been more enthusiastic she would "have liked it more"(II, SS). Identifying a value she wishes to impart, and having a valid reason for this belief demonstrates that Mary has done some reflecting on her literacy ideals, and this could inform her personal philosophy. Mary seemed very thoughtful during this part of the interview and appeared to recognise that there was more reflecting to be done when she finished by saying "I don't know if I answered that question or not". As discussed in the methodology chapter of this thesis, Kvale (1996) indicated that the act of taking part in an interview could lead to participants challenging their own views, perhaps leading to more reflection and a possible change in thinking. I suspect this may be the case with Mary.

It is clear from these interviews that merely providing the interview guide beforehand is not sufficient to dislodge tacit knowledge. Leach and Moon (1999) state "unless teachers have opportunities to develop their own understanding of the richly webbed core concepts and modes of enquiry in the fields they teach, they are not likely to perceive their goals in such terms," and go on to lament "few schools make such opportunities a priority for their in-service teacher development activities" (p. 234). The difficulty my participants had when expressing their beliefs about literacy learning and teaching, is reflective of the cultures of their schools, as discussed in the literature review chapter (Sergiovanni, 1991; Peterson, 2002).

The desirability of schools becoming communities where teachers are given opportunities to continue developing their personal beliefs and understandings of how students learn links to work by Barbara Rogoff (1995) as described in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis. Communities of teachers who become accustomed to participating in professional conversations will become more able to articulate their beliefs, comparing and contrasting them with those of colleagues, which in turn will lead to reflection on and enhancement of these beliefs. The learning and developing of ideas through talking

reflects the sociocultural theory that underpins my study: "The concept is not possible without the word. Thinking in concepts is not possible in the absence of verbal thinking" (Vygotsky, 1987, p.131). In other words, it is by reflecting on, talking about, explaining and possibly even arguing about beliefs, biases and assumptions with other professionals that allows a teacher to develop a firm foundation for the philosophy that underpins his/her teaching practice. School leaders that designate time for professional reading and discussion provide opportunities for these beliefs to remain open to revision and refinement. The need for more in-depth conversation between colleagues became more apparent when the participants in my study demonstrated little understanding of the roles of their colleagues, even though they are working with the same students, towards the same goal.

"Just carry on" How participants viewed their own, and each other's roles

When asked to define what they perceived the role of the Reading Recovery teacher to be, only one of the classroom teachers among my participants talked about the one-to-one teaching involved in Reading Recovery. Tracy described her view of the role:

> I suppose it is the one-to-one teacher driven work, where they are working on skills. To hone in directly on those skills they need for reading and writing. Also they push the children a lot harder, because it is a one-to-one situation, than you can in the classroom, and so they can get them moving faster than you can in a group situation. (II, RS)

I was surprised that only one participant mentioned this, as it is a major point of difference between classroom teaching and Reading Recovery and I had assumed most classroom teachers would see one-to-one teaching as the main role of the Reading Recovery teacher. Cat's statement that she perceived the role as being "to support the child and to support the teacher, and to just encourage the child to increase their reading" (II, SS), does I think demonstrate her lack of understanding of the purpose and focus of a Reading Recovery teacher. Reading Recovery teachers undergo rigorous training and provide structured and explicit literacy lessons to accelerate each student's literacy acquisition. Expressing their brief as "to just encourage the child to increase their reading" seems to skate rapidly over the surface of this role, and is a strong indicator that Cat is not conversant with the explicit

focus and agenda of the Reading Recovery programme. This lack of understanding of the role of a Reading Recovery teacher highlights the need for greater communication between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers. Students receiving Reading Recovery instruction also work on their literacy skills with the classroom teacher. *The Reading Recovery Handbook: Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals, Part One* (Clay, 2005) states "this guidebook is designed for teachers who are learning to deliver instruction to young children, individually, and supplementary to ongoing classroom instruction" (p. 5). It later states that of the things taken for granted throughout the programme "the first is that the child will be part of an ongoing classroom programme while he receives this extra tuition" (p. 30). It seems unlikely these students are receiving clear, consistent instruction if either teacher does not understand the teaching method being implemented by the other. Indeed, it is possible that students are receiving different prompts and conflicting messages which may confuse and hinder their progress.

Three of the four classroom teachers interviewed used the word "support" in their individual interviews when talking about their own role in working with the Reading Recovery students. For instance, "I support what happens in Reading Recovery [back] in the classroom" said Chantal (II, RS). Cat "supports things in the classroom" (II, SS). When asked how they supported the work of the Reading Recovery teachers Tracy said she used flash cards to reinforce words the Reading Recovery teacher identified as ones the student was having difficulty with. Cat's support took the form of reminding the student to "make sure their book is in their bag, 'cause they often forget to take them home" (II, SS). Mary supported her Reading Recovery teacher's work by having the student read the book he was working on to another student during class literacy time. We can see here that the participating teachers viewed the ways in which they provided 'support' quite differently, from Cat's non-interventionist role, to Tracy's use of flashcards, provided by the Reading Recovery teacher and specifically targeted at the student's needs (although, as will be seen later in this chapter, the reality of this 'support' is nebulous), through to Mary who actively sought out the Reading Recovery teacher to increase her knowledge of Reading Recovery and to determine methods to 'support' Reading Recovery in her classroom. However, all these procedures – reminders to take books home, revising words and ensuring books are re-read to a buddy, involve what may be viewed as a superficial support of Reading Recovery. No reference was made to

classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers working together to ensure key teaching points are presented to students in a consistent manner.

Classroom teacher Chantal had once been a Reading Recovery teacher, and, as would be expected, was able to be clear in her support of the current Reading Recovery teacher. She explained "It is good because I know the sorts of prompts, and you sort of speak the same language which is good, so that is quite positive" (II, RS). On a continuum showing levels of support, Chantal would be placed much higher than other participants. She is familiar with the specific verbal prompts given to Reading Recovery students and acknowledges the importance of the student being given consistent instruction. When a student encounters a problem, Chantal is able to reinforce the literacy strategies the student is being taught during Reading Recovery sessions. For the purpose of my study it is important to note, however, that Chantal's use of specific Reading Recovery vocabulary and strategies is the result of her having been trained in Reading Recovery, not the result of close communication and shared information between Chantal and Sheila.

During her individual interview, Tracy (RS) expressed the trepidation she felt upon being told the school had put her name forward for the following year's Reading Recovery training programme. She was not looking forward to becoming a Reading Recovery teacher as "that is the unknown to me, I don't like being in the unknown, no teacher likes not knowing something". Both Tracy and Cat had been sending students from their classrooms to Reading Recovery teachers over many years, yet neither of them demonstrated familiarity with what the programme entails. I believe this could be interpreted in several ways. It may be that their school cultures do not encourage professional conversations, neither giving time for professional colleagues to meet and discuss issues or having the expectation that teachers working with the same students will find time themselves to do so. It is possible that the classroom teachers see their classwork as separate from, and not connected to Reading Recovery. It could be that classroom teachers see Reading Recovery as someone else's domain, and as such, none of their responsibility. This may also be true of the Reading Recovery teachers. For example, when Sheila was asked what she expected of classroom teachers said, "I just get them to carry on with their programme" (II, RS). I was struck by the lack of curiosity demonstrated by Cat and Tracy; students from their classrooms were going to Reading Recovery for half an hour each day – did they not wonder what they were doing?

The two Reading Recovery teachers were asked their perception of the classroom teachers' role when working in class with students on Reading Recovery. As mentioned earlier, Sheila felt they should "just carry on with their programme", although she would sometimes say to them "look, this is what I am really trying to get them (the student) to do at the moment, can you support that with what you are doing?" An example of this is where she asked Tracy to reinforce words a student was having difficulty with by using flashcards, as mentioned earlier in this section. This request from Sheila, its reception by Tracy and the outcome is explored in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

Kate, the Reading Recovery teacher from Sagebrush, expected the classroom teachers to "just carry on reading in groups", but when asked about perceptions of others' roles she took the opportunity to express her concerns regarding what she believed to be a distinct lack of understanding of the Reading Recovery programme by some classroom teachers. "I get worried that there are some teachers who don't have a clue what I'm doing and they sort of think '"hmmm what's going on here?"'. She continued:

> some of these teachers are not too sure what's going on. When they see progress they think there is something happening, but it is when you get children that are not moving that the teachers are seeing the child leave their class every day and are wondering what's going on. (II, SS)

This certainly appears to correspond with the pronouncements of Tracy and Cat who demonstrated little comprehension of what the Reading Recovery programme entails. As we saw earlier, it appears from the latter statement that some teachers Kate has encountered are quite happy to let the students leave the room for tuition each day, no questions asked, as long as they can see student progress reflected in classroom work. It is also suggested that if the student does not show evidence of progress the teachers begin to wonder "what's going on?" However, no classroom teacher or Reading Recovery teacher in this study referred to any occasion where any participant had approached another to query the progress of a struggling student.

In the next section, the content of the conversations between my participants is explored.

"Well, it is really important": The content of the participants' professional conversations

Most of the content of the communication between the two groups of teachers appeared superficial. Chantal said she may talk to the Reading Recovery teacher "every week" or "when [the students] move to new levels" (II, RS). Others indicated that they spoke when there was a problem of some kind, though this tended to mean a behavioural rather than a learning problem. Chantal from Rosewood School explained,

> We have had issues with one of them ... behaviour issues which made it very difficult. It was hard to get him to Reading Recovery. He saw it as time out of the classroom and it was almost like he didn't want to be missing what we were doing and so we had to work really closely, one on either side of him, [persuading him to leave the classroom]. So that is quite a link (II).

A similar situation occurred at Sagebrush School where a student had become unwilling to go his daily Reading Recovery lesson. During the group interview Cat started to explain that she and Kate started "just talking about his problems really. How we could motivate him, his home life, bringing out what's going on at home. All those sort of things really". When Kate cut in with "And what kind of mood he's in" They then began to talk over each other, talking about the student and their realisation that "often Cat is doing something so exciting [in the classroom] that he doesn't want to be at Reading Recovery" (GI, SS). Both participants were obviously pleased with the recollection of how they had worked together to come to a satisfactory solution to this problem. The predicament was solved with Cat, and Kate, agreeing to each being more flexible so as to vary the time the student would be out of the classroom. These are examples of the teachers working together to problem solve. In the first instance, Chantal says she and the Reading Recovery teacher had to work together to encourage the student to enter the Reading Recovery room. Cat and Kate, however, took part in a discussion to try and identify and rectify the problem at Sagebrush. Their discussion was focussed on the student's needs, possible barriers to his learning from his home environment and how they could motivate him at school. Cat concluded this part of the group interview by saying "I think the best discussion we really ever had was around time". The conversation between Cat and Kate involved a teaching goal: their expectation that the student would come willingly to Reading Recovery sessions, and their basing parts of this conversation on their familiarity of the student home life, fits the knowledge statements as described by McAlpine et al. (2006), demonstrating their knowledge of the learner.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sheila had presented Tracy with words on flashcards and suggested that if she and the student were able to go through these words daily, it would assist in his recall of the basic words. Tracy herself used this as an example of how she "supported" Reading Recovery in the classroom. A closer examination of this support is warranted here. During her interview, Tracy confirmed that the Reading Recovery teacher told her if students were struggling, and gave ideas of how to support their learning in the classroom: "A couple of my boys were having trouble with sight words, so she gave me some sight words. Every now and then I just flash these sight words up in front of them". In her interview, Tracy went on to say Sheila gave her things like the flash cards "just one to one things like that. Not a whole list [of suggested activities], if you gave me a whole list, as a teacher I'd forget anyway." These comments can be viewed as quite dismissive and seem to imply that Tracy viewed Sheila's suggestions as relatively unimportant and reacted to them quite casually. It may also indicate that Sheila meets resistance from Tracy when attempting to input teaching ideas into the classroom.

In her interview, Sheila said she occasionally talked to Tracy about how to reinforce Reading Recovery work in the classroom, but went on to say that in a classroom the student is in a group so it would be very hard for the teacher to focus on just one student. Here, Sheila seemed to be justifying Tracy's lack of response to her teaching suggestions, as if reluctant to imply that classroom teachers may be unwilling to listen. "Well, not that this is the case, but if the classroom teacher wasn't listening to you, I think that would be difficult. It would be hard to keep communicating if nothing was being done about it" (II, RS). When asked if such a situation had ever arisen she replied, "No, it hasn't, but I have heard other (pause), I suppose in a way it hasn't really happened, but in a way perhaps one teacher may have thought 'No I can't do that so won't fit it into my programme' and I just say, well it is really important" (II, RS). It is intriguing to reflect on this vignette. Sheila (Reading Recovery) has asked Tracy to practice a set of words on cards with a student in her class who is struggling with literacy acquisition. Tracy has divulged that while she would not remember to do a whole list of activities she could do "just one-to-one things like that" (II, RS). It gives the impression that Tracy does not attach much importance or value to a suggestion from a colleague who has had intensive literacy training, and who has identified a learning need in a student from Tracy's class. To undertake a task that would take a few minutes per day at most does not seem an outrageous request yet Tracy seems to be resistant. Perhaps she believes the Reading Recovery teacher should be doing

this task in Reading Recovery time, possibly she does not think the flash cards will be of use to the student, maybe she thinks her classroom literacy programme suits the student's needs without input from Sheila or she may view any suggestions to alter or add to her programme as a criticism. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Sheila has attempted to make teaching suggestions and they have not been acted upon.

Sheila's rather plaintive "I just say, well, it is really important" (II, RS), also reminded me that in a school's hierarchy, classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers are on equal footing. Even after intensive literacy training, a Reading Recovery teacher has no authority to ensure classroom teachers act in accordance with any proposed literacy teaching strategies they may make. Sheila spoke fluently throughout her interviews except for this section where she spoke hesitantly, taking great care in phrasing her responses . I am convinced that she was being professional, not wanting to disparage her colleague. Translating her words without this sensitivity and professionalism, they may well read: "I have identified a student need that could easily be worked on in the classroom. This would benefit the student. I have talked to the class teacher about it but she will not follow through". This section of interview data reminded me of work such as that of Argyris and Schön (2003), and Borg (1999), as it contrasted Tracy's espoused theory of supporting Reading Recovery in the classroom, with her actual theory-in-use, which was that she did not reveal any commitment to employing teaching suggestions from the Reading Recovery teacher.

This interview data also links to the work by Rogoff (1990, cited in Zimmermann & Schunk 2003) which expounds that the person with less expertise will, with appropriate guidance be able to acquire and internalise the more experienced person's skills and knowledge. Tracy's dismissive attitude towards Sheila's suggestions shows no evidence that she attributes any value to the intensive literacy instruction Sheila received as part of her Reading Recovery training.

I was particularly interested to examine the communication level between Reading Recovery teacher Sheila and Chantal, as Chantal is a classroom teacher who has also experienced Reading Recovery training. She worked as a Reading Recovery teacher at Rosewood School for four years, finishing three years ago. Now, students from her class go to Sheila for daily Reading Recovery tuition. Reading Recovery teachers are trained to give specifically worded cues to students when they are reading aloud, writing lessons

involve a progressive learning sequence and each lesson adheres to a predetermined schedule. In essence, all Reading Recovery lessons, in any school in New Zealand, or even overseas should reflect the same teaching conventions. Chantal and Sheila are both familiar with these protocols, with Chantal still involved with Reading Recovery students at Rosewood to some extent. When a student has received their quota of lessons, or Sheila determines their progress sufficient to warrant their being discharged from the programme, it is Chantal who carries out the final testing procedures. I wondered if the fact that Chantal and Sheila have both been trained in the language, structure and conventions of Reading Recovery would make any difference in their level of communication compared to that between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers with no experience of Reading Recovery. As with the other participants in this study, the chief item of data shared was the reading level of students on the programme. Chantal said "Every week she [Sheila] will let me know, or when they move to a new level… I know when they are moving, which is really good" (II,RS) She outlined another example of her and Sheila working together by recounting the situation described earlier in this section where a student did not want to go to Reading Recovery. She and Sheila "had to work really closely, one on either side of him, so that is quite a link" (II,RS). When asked if they discussed the focus of the Reading Recovery lessons as well as the reading level of the students, Chantal talked about Sheila giving her flashcards of words one student was having difficulty with. Chantal reinforced the teaching of these words with the student in class. Chantal then related another instance where Sheila informed her of a student who "struggled with certain letters, so we focus on those at printing time, the links are pretty good" (II,RS). Here are two examples of Chantal and Sheila taking part in discussions about a student they both teach, Sheila made suggestions about activities Chantal could implement in class to reinforce the work she was doing with the student in Reading Recovery. While these conversations did not involve the use of the shared language of Reading Recovery, they did involve both teachers in identifying and providing support for the student.

My assumption that their common experience would lead to Chantal and Sheila having more in-depth conversations than the other participants was erroneous, and ironically it appears to be *because* they share the same Reading Recovery background that they do not have professional conversations. They seemed to assume that the other is working in a similar way to teach students who were struggling with literacy acquisition because they

have been Reading Recovery trained. In fact, when asked if she showed classroom teachers how to support Reading Recovery students in the classroom Sheila replied, "Not so much with Chantal because she is Reading Recovery trained". The participants from Sagebrush School also appeared to make assumptions, as demonstrated during the focus group interview with Cat, Mary and Kate. I had asked Kate if she used Reading Recovery terminology when talking to classroom teachers. "Not really," she said, and asked, "Like explaining 'does that sound right?' when they're reading with the kids?" When I confirmed this was what I meant she said, "But I would expect them to know that anyway if they're teaching reading." Cat cut in with "Yes. I say 'go back and re-read, how does it sound?'" Kate went on, "Perhaps I would ask how they [the students] were in a group, how they're coping and are they confident and do they talk a lot or not say anything. And it's a problem when they are on their own and don't fit into a group". This talk is again focussed student behaviour which while obviously important, does not lead these teachers on to discuss their own behaviours and practices. The fact that the participants in this study made assumptions regarding other teachers' practice reinforced the evidence that they do not participate in many conversations about their beliefs, actions or practices.

Again Mary, as the least experienced teacher, appeared to go against the trend of the more experienced teachers and engage in more meaningful interactions with the Reading Recovery teacher. Earlier in the term, Mary had enquired into what took place during a Reading Recovery lesson and, when Kate told her she found it helpful if classroom teachers observed a lesson, Mary arranged to do so. Both of them felt this was time well spent. Mary said she has discussed with her tutor teacher the possibility of undertaking Reading Recovery training herself sometime in the future: "to give me that perspective". Kate welcomes any teacher who wishes to observe:

> I think they need to know what I am doing. Sometimes I get worried that there are some teachers who don't have clue what I am doing, so I am all for any teacher to come and observe me because it makes them understand what is going on, (II, SS)

Mary and Kate have discussed ways to integrate the Reading Recovery lessons and the literacy instruction the student receives in the classroom. This has resulted in a system where the Reading Recovery student re-reads the book they have at their Reading Recovery lesson to another student in the class at reading time. However, Mary has not

altered her teaching techniques to include in her guided reading lessons with the student any strategies she may have observed during her Reading Recovery observation and discussions with Kate. Neither have they discussed the possibility and/or benefits of using the same language in the classroom with the students are taught in Reading Recovery. Mary works with the Reading Recovery students the same way she works with everyone else in the class and says "There is that link there [reading the book to a buddy], I guess there isn't much else" (II, SS).

There could be many reasons for Mary having a closer relationship with the Reading Recovery teacher. It may be as simple as the fact that they seem to have become friends. The older and more experienced Reading Recovery teacher (Kate) also seems to have become something of a mentor for younger, beginning teacher Mary. Mary says they talk about a variety of things: "I often talk about the children as well as other stuff, because Kate has a lot of knowledge on other things, not just Reading Recovery". However, while Mary has introduced a form of support for the Reading Recovery student to foster a link between her classroom and the student's Reading Recovery sessions, there is no evidence that Mary herself has reconsidered or refined her teaching strategies following her observation and discussions with Kate.

Both Reading Recovery teachers spoke of letting the teachers know what level the student was working at with them, and one said she also told teachers that the student should be working two levels below that level in the classroom. Whilst informing teachers of the level the student is on can be seen as a sharing of student data, in the cases I researched this does not lead to conversations such as those described by Davis (2007), and Wheelock (2000). To fit the parameters of such conversations, the data pertaining to the student's reading level would need to be the starting point for further discussion and professional conversation, including reviewing progress, identifying student needs and formulating the next steps in the teaching sequence, including the role both teachers will play in the student's instruction.

Interestingly, Kate (Reading Recovery) said the teacher she talked to most about the students was the Deputy Principal at her school as this was the person responsible for literacy school-wide: "We communicate a lot, after school on the phone ... or she pops in [if Kate is at school, she works part-time] and we have a quick meeting if we have to". All of this communication is oral and Kate assumed that information is passed onto the

classroom teachers. When asked if the Deputy Principal shared their discussion results with the teachers, Kate replied "I would say so". This implied that no teachers have ever raised any issues with Kate arising from her discussions with the Deputy Principal. This could mean two things, the Deputy Principal is working directly with the classroom teachers to address any issues, leaving Kate out of the problem solving, or the information is not making its way to the teachers. If the Deputy Principal is not acting as a go-between and passing information to the teachers, this method of communication is not effective. Important issues may be discussed between Kate and the Deputy Principal, but if the classroom teachers are not receiving the information, they are obviously unable to act on it. Communication may be more effective if the Deputy Principal is relaying Kate's information to the class teachers. However, involving Kate in the discussion would ensure correct information is being given, questions could be posed and full discussion regarding next steps teaching could ensue. If the classroom teacher, the Reading Recovery teacher and the Deputy Principal were all to be involved in these discussions the situation would be even better. Three professionals, engaging in professional conversation with the shared aim of increasing a student's literacy achievement would certainly go some way to meeting the criteria for effective communication as described by Davis (2007) and would be very different to the brief chats that are currently being undertaken by the study participants.

"On the Run": The shape of the participants' professional conversations

It is of interest to note that the teachers involved in my study were well aware that the communication they had with each other was cursory. Sheila explained that their interaction was "fairly casual, we don't have a formal meeting and I don't write notes" (II,RS), while Chantal said, "I might pop into her room and tell her someone's away today, and then we might have a quick chat. It's usually on the run" (II, RS). I think Tracy summed up the approach to information sharing expressed by participants during my study when she said "Well, meetings aren't very long, it's not like we know we are having a meeting, we are just talking"(II, RS). In The Model of Learning Talk espoused by Annan, et al. (2003), the communication between teachers is categorised into different levels, ranging from "all talk about schooling and non-schooling matters… [to] talk about teaching which analyses, evaluates, and/or challenges the impact of teaching practices on

student learning outcomes, and/or creates more effective practices" (p. 31). The level of teacher talk demonstrated by the participants in this study would be depicted as the second level of the model "school talk". This level is then divided into two categories "talk about teaching practices (talk about teaching and learning), or talk not about teaching practices (talk that does not relate to teaching and learning)." (p. 31). The latter category, describing talk that does not focus on teaching and learning, seems the best fit for the talk between the participants in this study. To move further up the model's four categories, the talk between the study participants would have to broaden to include analysis and evaluation of the teaching the student is receiving.

Whilst being aware that their level of communication was cursory, most of the study participants appeared content with the degree and content of the communication. Cat: "I am quite happy with how it is at the moment". She mentioned that Kate was the first Reading Recovery teacher she had worked with that went out of her way to build a good relationship, someone she could "have a chuckle" with. Mary too commented on the relationship she had with Kate, "I know if we need to talk to each other we are able to do that, and I'm not intimidated by her". Kate herself felt that rather than talking to teachers of students currently on the programme, it was more important to talk about the students once they had completed their Reading Recovery programme and were back in the classroom fulltime. She admits that any follow up of this kind she does is informal, and usually involves her looking at the school's computerised records to see how the students she had tutored in past years were progressing: "For my self-satisfaction I want to see if they are still O.K." When asked if she talked to any of the teachers of these older students, especially if the student was seen to be not making progress she replied that it's "not really my role". While this statement contrasted with her suggestion that it was important to talk about these students, it did raise an interesting issue. When students are discontinued from Reading Recovery, Clay (2005) recommends that "perhaps the school monitors progress in some regular way that allows the Reading Recovery teacher to check the progress of her students." (p. 59). It is my experience that most schools do have some system of tracking ex-Reading Recovery students as they progress through the school year levels. It would appear, at least in Kate's situation, that her involvement with these students ends when the Reading Recovery sessions conclude and the student is settled back in the classroom. This may be the expectation at Sagebrush School, and Kate's comment "it's not really my role", indicates that she herself sees a boundary between Reading Recovery sessions and on-

going progress of the student as they move through the school. It seems unfortunate that a teacher who has received specialised literacy training, worked individually with the student, observed them closely to identify and focus on overcoming the student's difficulties with literacy acquisition is not viewed as a valuable resource if the student does not continue to make expected progress in later years. This could be a case of the school not valuing or recognising Kate's specialised knowledge so teachers do not take her expertise into account, or may represent the view that once a student has completed the Reading Recovery programme there is no need for further input.

"We just need to know if they move up a level": Study participants' perceptions regarding the content and shape of their professional conversations

The teachers from Rosewood School also appeared satisfied with the content of communication they shared, or at least they did not think they could find the time to discuss students in more depth. When asked if she thought the level of communication they shared was satisfactory, Tracy replied,

> Well, probably not. But, I mean, you are so busy you don't have time to think about that really, you know. So it probably would be good to have a bit more time, but Sheila talked to me and let me know you need to have this child at such and such a level. (GI)

When asked if she thought she and Sheila exchanged enough information Tracy replied "I don't know, I honestly don't know." During the group interview at Rosewood School involving the two classroom teachers and the Reading Recovery teacher, Chantal mentioned that she had once worked at a school where the Reading Recovery teacher filled out a form each week showing what the teaching focus of each students' week had been and what level the student was working on, along with any other comments she felt were important. These forms were placed in the relevant classroom teacher's pigeonhole each Friday. Chantal felt that this system "was quite good. We knew where we were at". Tracy disagreed. "I think a quick chat works better cause it goes in here (pointed to her head), If someone sticks a bit of paper in my pigeonhole on Friday, I might not take it out till Tuesday, and then I've got to read it and then it's got to go in. It takes longer". The group meeting concluded with them all agreeing that the 'brief chats' they shared at

present were sufficient. Chantal: "We just need to know if they move up a level, cause you need to keep up in the classroom". The others nodded and agreed.

I reflected on these comments, attempting to view how and why these teachers were so accepting of the measure of communication they undertook. Research into the positive impact effective teacher talk can have on student learning has been available for many years. For example, the results of investigations by Timperley and Robinson (1997) and Phillips, McNaughton et al. (2000) demonstrated links between teacher talk and improved student outcomes. This situation at Rosewood and Sagebrush Schools, where people appeared to be content with the status quo could be an illustration of the adage 'you don't know what you don't know'. If teachers are not actively keeping up with readings, professional development and changing trends, it is highly likely they will be unaware of studies and research carried out in relevant fields. Teachers positioned within a school culture that does not expose them to current trends and research findings are unlikely to be challenged by different ways of thinking, or encouraged to try new strategies. Likewise, a school culture that defines collegiality only as teachers getting along well with each other will not be conducive to healthy debate and fresh ideas. Annan et al. (2003) quote Ball and Cohen (1999), who stated, "Talking to improve practice via analysis, critique and challenge goes against the typical school culture, where teachers do not create conflict, inquire into the beliefs of their peers, or challenge them" (p. 34). This could well be the case at both Rosewood and Sagebrush Schools. Sheila's response of "And I just say, well it is really important" when faced with Tracy's apparent dismissive attitude of her teaching suggestions shows she is prepared to accept Tracy's attitude rather than question or challenge it. Cat's evaluation of Kate as the first Reading Recovery teacher "I have come across that talked and built a good relationship; we have had a bit of a chuckle", may signify her view that a good professional relationship is aligned with friendship. However, the studies quoted above indicate that to be effective, a professional relationship requires different criteria to that of compatibility. For this tacit approval of colleagues' practices to become more allied to effective learning talk, a significant paradigm shift by all school staff would be required. The investment of time and effort needed to bring about such change has been highlighted in research by Timperley and Robinson (1997), and has been discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis. This work, alongside that of Annan et al. (2003), demonstrates the potential advantages of bringing about such a paradigm shift, whilst illustrating some of the challenges inherent in doing so.

Factors viewed as assisting or impeding effective communication

In this section I focus on factors identified by the study participants as features they believe assist them in communicating with each other, as well as factors they viewed as hindrances to effective communication.

"I can just pop in": Can the proximity of teachers' workspaces influence communication levels?

During her interview, Reading Recovery teacher Kate spoke of her experiences of working in two different locales in the school, and how she felt the location of her working space had affected the amount of communication she had with classroom teachers of the students she was tutoring. Her former Reading Recovery room was situated at the opposite end of the school to the junior classrooms. Kate would send for the students and wait for them to come to her. However, Kate now has a new purpose-built workspace which is located in the centre of the junior block. This change in locale means she now goes into the students' classrooms each day to collect them for their Reading Recovery session. As well as giving her the opportunity to see what the students are working on in class, Kate also felt this opportunity to go into each classroom daily strengthened her relationship with the teachers as they would often have a conversation as she collected the children.

> I never saw the teachers [when in her former room] because time is such a big deal in Reading Recovery ... Now I can pop in if I need to quickly have a chat about something. They are busy teaching often, but they seem to be happy enough to listen to a few comments, and it's always consistent.

In addition, she felt more able to foster stronger relationships with the students, as their classroom teachers now allowed them to visit her room to show her their work, and she often called in to their rooms to see them during their literacy lessons. It is clear that Kate sees the new location of her workspace as having several positive outcomes. The most obvious of these is that she is now more aware of what her students are working on in class and, when they visit her office to show her their work, links may be being strengthened in the students' minds between the work they do in the classroom and the work they do in

Reading Recovery. It would be interesting to study the possible influences of these links on student progress. However, if we analyse the effect this proximity has on the level of communication between Kate and the classroom teachers we see that it corresponds to her being able to "pop in" to the classroom and exchange a few sentences with a teacher who is usually "busy teaching". It is difficult to ascertain how that these conversations, which last a few minutes and occur in a busy classroom, fit the criteria for professional learning conversations as outlined in this study. So, while the new location of Kate's workspace has increased the number of times she interacts with classroom teachers, this higher incidence of encounter does not necessarily equate to enriched conversations. The issue of location may be relevant when examining the level of communication between professionals who are based at the same school; school staff, classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers, senior teachers and syndicate members, beginning teachers and their tutor teachers. Where one of the professionals is an itinerant specialist such as an RT:Lit., RT:LB or a Speech Language Therapist it is likely that the location of their workspace would be less relevant. Itinerant teachers work across several schools and so their teacher/student contact is dictated by timetabling. In this situation, the chance to have the casual contact opportunity of "popping in" to a classroom is much reduced.

"You're just treated differently really": Can the amount of time a part-time or itinerant teacher spends at a school affect the level of professional conversation?

During the group interview at Sagebrush School, Kat made the observation that she thought Reading Recovery teachers "don't feel part of the school". Reading Recovery teacher Kate responded rapidly with "You can feel like that!" She went on to say,

> You're right, cause you don't go to any staff meetings. Well, what I'm doing [part-time] you don't go to meetings, and you just sort of (pause), because you don't have a classroom you are (pause), well, you're just treated differently really. They [other teachers] just wonder what we do.

The suggestion from Kat that Reading Recovery teachers could feel isolated obviously resonated with Kate, and she felt her position as a part-time teacher in the school exacerbated this situation. This theme may well be familiar to other professionals who go into schools to work alongside classroom teachers. In my position as a RT:Lit., I am

aware of the necessity of building effective working relationships with teachers and students, and of the difficulties of doing this with inevitable time and access constraints. Being able to focus on one aspect of the curriculum is a luxury, however, not being able to be involved in the wider aspects of the school life can lead to feelings of isolation. I am reminded here, of Hargreaves' (2001) work on the emotional aspects of relating to colleagues. He described

> *physical geographies* of time and space which can bring and keep people in proximity over long periods so that relationships might develop, or which can reduce these relationships to strings of episodic interactions. (p. 8)

This acknowledgment that whether or not you are situated in the same physical space as your colleagues impacts on the relationships that can develop, resonates with me as an itinerant RT: Lit. It appears that Kate feels her position as a part-time teacher also, to some extent, affects the way she is perceived by her colleagues.

"You don't have time to think about that really": The difficulties participants perceived in scheduling time for professional conversations

Teaching is a demanding profession and it came as no surprise that the participants in my study identified a lack of time as a factor in communication opportunities. When asked if she was satisfied with the information sharing that she and Sheila took part in, Tracy said "Well, probably not. But I mean, you are so busy you don't have time to think about that". Sheila herself expressed her desire for just a small amount of time each week to devote to writing records to give to classroom teachers: "I would like to see that there was half an hour, and I know it's only money, but half an hour allowed per three children for paperwork". Chantal spoke of the difficulty of finding time to speak to the Reading Recovery teacher, noting that in Rosewood School, Sheila needed to be back teaching in her classroom when she has finished tutoring Reading Recovery students. "It would be nice to have time, to sit down properly . . . Because she sort of finishes and then it's off to her room." The teachers at Sagebrush School also raised the issue of time. In her individual interview Kate had expressed a belief that she could talk more to classroom teachers now that her office was more centrally located, but later, in the group interview

with the participants from Sagebrush, she did acknowledge that talking to teachers while they were teaching was not ideal:

> It's hard to find time because you've got this whole class, and I feel like oh no, I shouldn't be talking to poor Mary because she's obviously aware, and it's the same with Kat, they're aware of their class. So they can't listen to me and have a class.

During the two group interviews I asked the participants if their school could support them in any way, possibly by organising some time for them to have a more formal meeting arrangement. As the issue of a lack of time had been raised by the participants in their individual interviews, I anticipated a positive reaction to this idea. In the following section, I will describe and discuss each group's response to this proposition

"You have to realise how hard it is": The logistical difficulties of making time for professional conversations

While the teachers at Rosewood School had talked about the difficulties of finding time to talk with their colleagues, the suggestion that the school could make time for them to meet was seen as problematical. Tracy said: "You don't have teacher time. You also have to realise how hard it is to get a meeting with teachers. The best time for a meeting would actually be before school, but that's a busy time for teachers already". When asked if some release time out of the classroom would be valuable Chantal said they did not like to lose time out of the classroom, but perhaps "once, during the week" could be managed. Tracy pointed out that if one classroom teacher got time out to talk to the Reading Recovery teacher, then the other classroom teacher "has to get time as well". Sheila did not want to take time out from the Reading Recovery sessions, so felt the release time would have to be scheduled to fit with her timetable. Tracy agreed with this,

> It can't be in your Reading Recovery time and it can't be during your CRT [Classroom Release Time], 'cause the other teacher would need release time too, so I don't know. I mean, for us all to have a meeting, we come from three different rooms.

Chantal stated "For it to really work you would need to formalise it, you know, like on certain days, and I don't know that we need that time. It's just little things." and Sheila cut

in with "You just need to know if they move up a level." Chantal agreed, "Yeah, it's all those little things". Tracy was concerned about workload and said "As long as it doesn't put teachers in the position of having to do more work." Sheila said "If someone [classroom teacher] tells me they're [the student] not doing this, then when I'm taking them that's what I'll be thinking about". Tracy stated "I think a quick chat works better" and Sheila and Chantal both nodded and agreed with her.

In this conversation, the participants seemed to focus on the logistical difficulties of organising a time that would suit everyone, before agreeing that it would be too difficult and the 'quick chats' they currently have are sufficient. This conversation took me in a circle back to the 'you don't know what you don't know' adage, and I do not think that simply allocating time for the Rosewood teachers to have longer conversations would be useful. They do not seem to be aware of what a constructive professional conversation should involve, let alone the positive impact such conversations have been shown to have on student achievement. This reminded me of the work by Wheelock (2000), Davis (2007) and Delaney (1998) which included descriptions of structures which can be used by schools to maintain focus and purpose in their teacher meetings, and the use of coaches to help teachers "build a climate for deeper discussions among themselves by introducing teams to protocols, guidelines for discussion" (Wheelock, 2000, p. 4).

The same topic of conversation unfolded differently during the group interview at Sagebrush School. Kate the Reading Recovery teacher made the suggestion:

> I know what the school could do. Perhaps they could let Reading Recovery teachers have, even once a term, or twice a term have a little time out. Out of class time so you [classroom teachers] would have to be released or something, to just sit down and have a quick chat about the children you've got and where you are going with them.

Mary agreed and said they could talk about "where to next" for the student. "And what their needs are" added Kate, "That would be quite useful. But then again, a teacher would have to come in and take your class". Kat suggested that possibly Classroom Release Time could be used and this suggestion could be put to the school's management team. Interestingly, when Mary remarked that she had used her Classroom Release Time to observe a Reading Recovery lesson, Kat said that was because Mary wanted to do that, "whereas a lot of teachers, they've got more important things to do". This reiterates the

lack of understanding or interest in the Reading Recovery processes shown earlier by Kat when she discussed the role of the Reading Recovery teacher. From this interview excerpt, it would appear that while Mary and Kate would be interested in having some time allocated to discuss students in depth, Kat may need a more raised awareness of the value of doing so. Kat's apparent unawareness of Kate's specialised knowledge of literacy development, and the opportunity for her to make use of and learn from the Reading Recovery teacher mirrored Tracy's attitude at Rosewood School.

Tracy's statement "As long as it doesn't put teachers in the position of having to do more work", raised the valid concern of teachers being asked to fit yet more meetings into what are undeniably busy schedules. Researchers such as LeBlanc (1994) have explored the time demands on teachers and the contribution these can make to teacher burn out levels. Works such as that by Honowar (2008), have explored how school leaders can assist with collaborative systems that can lead to their teachers "working smarter by working together" (p. 25). These works have been investigated in the literature review chapter of this thesis, and the significant concerns regarding the pressure of extra time demands on teachers will also be addressed in the following conclusions/recommendations chapter.

Summary

I began this chapter by confessing my dismay at the scant results and lack of depth captured in the interview data, but came to the realisation that this small-scale study had actually elicited insightful comments in terms of what the participants valued in exchanges of information relating to their students. In effect, they expected brief, oral exchanges of facts regarding the students' current reading level, and a possible reference to any behaviour issues. This is reminiscent of the earlier discussion of the work of Leach and Moon (1990), where they described the difficulties teachers has describing "understanding goals" as opposed to "knowledge goals", and the exchange of such information rarely led to more in-depth analyses of the information by the participants. When further discussion did ensue, it was likely to focus on student behavioural issues, as opposed to the academic achievement of the student.

Reviewing the data through the lens of Vygotsky's theory (1978) it was difficult to determine examples where the interaction between study participants demonstrated in-depth and effective examples of teachers working as part of a sociocultural context, in

keeping with the understanding that learning is largely accomplished through communicating with others:

> Sociocultural theory reframes learning as an open-ended process where new and different ways of thinking, feeling and acting can arise from new and different forms of individuals-in-interaction, interpersonal relationships, social practices, and collective action. (Levan & Renshaw, 2001, p.14)

When investigating the level of teacher talk revealed by my study, it became clear that the participants did not interact sufficiently to lead to further learning and development when discussing the students on the Reading Recovery programme.

With possibly Mary and Kate as exceptions, there was little or no evidence that the study participants operated as a community of learners. It appears the Reading Recovery teachers were not viewed as people who possessed specialised knowledge, and who could help scaffold other teachers towards more effective literacy teaching. While there was some evidence that classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers did try to talk through problems they encountered with students, this was focussed on behaviour problems rather than academic achievement.

Vygotsky saw language and action as the most important tools of mediation for learning and the use of a shared language and understanding of terminology is an important facet of Sociocultural Theory, but again there was little to no evidence of the use of such language in the data. As discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis, Reading Recovery has specific prompts and key phrases to use with students. Concomitant use of these prompts in the classroom situation leads to more consistent teaching strategies being applied in the attempt to consolidate the students' reading and writing behaviours. As the study results demonstrated, not only had the Reading Recovery teachers not talked about these prompts with classroom teachers, the lack of communication between teachers was made even more evident when Reading Recovery teachers made assumptions about their colleagues' teaching practices. When asked if she had explained any Reading Recovery prompts to Mary or Kat, Kate replied, "I would expect them to know that anyway, if they're teaching reading". This assumption makes it clear that these teachers have not talked about their classroom practice with each other. Sheila said that she does not talk about specific prompts with Chantal "because she is Reading Recovery trained". Again an assumption is being made as Sheila had not discussed with Chantal how she was teaching

reading in the classroom. Neither Sagebrush nor Rosewood Schools appeared to be operating as learning communities such as described by Wheelock (2000), and Rogoff et al. (1996), and little or no evidence was found of teachers being placed in a master or apprentice role as described by Rogoff (1990). Reading Recovery teachers were not viewed as literacy experts who could share their knowledge with others, nor was the classroom teachers' familiarity of the student acknowledged.

I had also set out to investigate the participants' espoused theories and their theories-in-use, in line with works such as those by Argyris (2003), and Borg (1999), which have been discussed in the Literature Review section of this thesis. Tracy in particular evinced a disconnect between her espoused theories and theories-in-use when proclaiming her support for the Reading Recovery teacher, when the reality was she failed to follow through on teaching suggestions that Sheila made, and was quite dismissive in her attitude to Sheila's ideas. Kate's statement that one result of her new workspace being close to the students' classrooms was an increase in levels of conversation with teachers conflicted with her later statements that classroom teachers were "aware of their class. So they can't listen to me and have a class". Kate exhibited no awareness of the discrepancy between the statement given in her individual interview regarding the increased amount of communication now her office was more centrally located, and the statement made during the group interview that, as it was difficult to talk when the classroom teacher was busy with their class, improved communication was not actually taking place. With reference to Borg (1999), as discussed in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis, I believe that Tracy and Kate were oblivious to the discrepancy between their tacit and explicit theories. It is possible that, like the participants in Borg's study, they would be surprised by the results of the research.

In the face of evidence (see Davis 2007, Delaney et al. 1998, Du Four 2004), demonstrating the positive achievement outcomes for students when schools are run as learning communities versus the revelation that my participants indulged in few, if any, professional conversations l reflected on how this situation could be improved. In the following chapter I will outline how schools can begin to develop the culture of a learning community, leading to more intensive and effective learning conversations between staff which, in turn, should have a positive effect on school-wide student achievement.

When implementing and analysing this small-scale study I became aware of questions and issues that may be worthy of further investigation. These matters will also be highlighted in the following chapter.

Chapter Six

Conclusions/Recommendations

Introduction

The data obtained from the interviews I carried out for this thesis necessitated a directional shift to the course of my research. Intending to analyse the content of professional conversations between teachers who work with the same students, I instead became aware that, in the case of my small scale investigation, professional conversations around students being jointly instructed by the participants were not actually taking place. My focus then transferred to exploring why this might be the case. Evidence provided by research such as Parr, Timperley, Reddish, Jesson and Adams (2007), and Wheelock (2000), clearly demonstrates the advantages for both teachers and students of collaborative action and professional conversation. I was left wondering why my participants were satisfied with a superficial exchange of information which could be summed up by Chantal's comment: "We just need to know if they move up a level"? During analysis of the interview data I came to the conclusion that the cultures of Sagebrush and Rosewood Schools were not conducive to professional conversations and collaborative efforts of teachers, at least in the area of literacy. The school culture of my participants' schools, as reflected in my data, seemed a good fit for the description of some schools by Inger (1993):

> By and large, however, teacher collaboration is a departure from existing norms, and, in most schools, teachers are colleagues in name only. They work out of sight and sound of one another, plan and prepare their lessons and materials alone, and struggle on their own to solve their instructional, curricular and management problems. (p. 1)

This working in relative isolation contrasts with the sociocultural construct of a learning community. Levine & Marcus (2007) when applying Vygotsky's work to teacher development, stressed the importance of teachers being given the opportunity to talk and

interact with each other in order to question and refine their teaching practice. They argued that this joint inquiry and discussion style led to new approaches being more readily understood and internalised. Reflections of Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolding, in that teachers who have undergone guidance, linked with discussion and skill development are more able to sustain the new approaches when the scaffold of support is withdrawn, can also be seen here.

So, having come to the realisation that for a school to develop and operate within the culture of a learning community, the management and staff of the school have to be able to embrace the values and attitudes required of the culture, I was then faced with the question: How can support for such a paradigm shift in school culture be achieved? Inger (1993) makes the point that any school can become a learning community. He asserts that the size, setting or economic status of a school has no effect on its ability to operate as a learning community. The only disparity Inger (1993) identified between schools operating as learning communities and those that were not, was in the way they were organised.

What appears to be a simple statement by Inger (1993), that the difference between schools that are run as learning communities and those that are not, is in their organisation, is tempered by his conclusion that:

> Serious collaboration – teachers engaging in the rigorous mutual examination of teaching and learning – is rare, and where it exists, it is fragile. Yet it can and does occur, and the enthusiasm of teachers about their collaborations is persuasive. When schools are organised to support it, the advantages of collegial action are varied and substantial. (p. 6)

The commitment and input of all staff will be necessary when a decision has been made to create a school culture which reflects a collaborative, learning community. It is of course important to acknowledge that a school's culture cannot be changed overnight, in fact Levine and Marcus (2007) suggest "this process might best be viewed as requiring years" (p. 123). Communication, and this may include the willingness, or otherwise, of teachers to participate, and the depth and content of conversations; along with time and logistical issues are recurring themes when researchers examine the processes involved in establishing and sustaining learning communities (see Harris, 2005; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Turner & Crang, 1996). Annan et al. (2003) also refer to difficulties with

communication which may arise when trying to change a school's culture, and the need to identify, problem-solve and overcome these problems:

> School culture, a historical lack of focus on evidence and standards, and focussing on peripheral issues all make it difficult for teachers to engage in learning talk. While we acknowledge these difficulties, we must transcend them in order to create more effective practices that improve teaching and learning. (p. 34)

In order to develop a learning community reflective of sociocultural principles, I argue that it will be necessary to employ a sociocultural philosophy to initiate, build up and sustain the desired shift in values and practices. Key aspects of sociocultural theory such as learning occurring through social interaction and discussion, and the idea of experienced practitioners scaffolding others towards desired outcomes will be required. Levine and Marcus (2007) state "Added to Vygotsky's notion is our belief that teachers who are engaged in such joint meaning-making and shared practice are more likely to value shared practices and to invest greater energy in developing and sustaining them" (p. 119). In other words, teachers who are involved in the process, and who come to understand and believe in the worth of the proposed culture shift, are much more likely to put energy into driving and sustaining the endeavour than teachers who are simply told by management that they have to change the way they operate.

In this chapter I outline steps schools can implement when beginning to develop the culture of a learning community focussed on literacy. I will also identify some of the inherent difficulties of changing a school's culture, because in spite of the challenges, the potential positive outcomes for student achievements identified in work such as that by Timperley and Robinson (1997), and Wheelock, (2000), appear to make the effort of establishing a learning community worthwhile. Indeed, Sergiovanni (2000, cited in Harris, 2005) explains, "building a community of practice may be the single best most important way to improve a school" (p. 49). Here too, is an example of differing language being used to express the same idea, with the term communities of practice being synonymous with learning communities.

In the following sections I determine the importance of supportive leadership to the initiation and sustainability of a learning community and suggest actions which may begin the required shift in school culture. I also explain the differences between conversations which may lead teachers to acclimatise to the mind-set of a learning community, and

learning conversations which focus on raising student achievement. I rationalise the time commitment required to begin changing the culture of the school, explore ways of managing teacher time efficiently, and present ideas on recognising the value of existing staff experience and expertise.

My data was gathered during interviews with Reading Recovery teachers and the classroom teachers of students currently on the Reading Recovery programme. However, I believe my research has a much more generalised application. My findings are likely to be representative of many other situations where students have more than one educational professional working with them, including itinerant professionals such as Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, Resource Teachers of Literacy, or teachers within the same school. As such, this work should not be viewed as a critique of Reading Recovery systems, but rather as a broader representation of the operational systems and culture present in some of our schools. My recommendations on shifting school culture are relevant for any school wishing to become more representative of a learning community.

What can be done to establish an effective learning community?

The Role of the Principal

The importance of the role of the principal in establishing and maintaining the culture of a school was highlighted by the work of Turner and Crang (1996), who investigated teacher beliefs regarding school culture. Among the many findings from their research was the evidence that while a few teachers had a wider view of school management, with the principal being only one of the leaders that influenced school culture. The majority of teachers saw the principal as the sole person responsible for the culture of a school. They believed that the tenor and character of a school was determined by the principal. When this view is aligned with work by Levine and Marcus (2007), which demonstrated the importance of organisation in a learning community, the significance of principals being aware of the magnitude of their role as leaders and supporters of their staff in establishing their schools as learning communities must be stressed. To begin the move towards establishing their school as a learning community, the principal must become familiar with relevant research, comprehend its value and commit to the endeavour of accomplishing the

required shift in the culture of their school. Principals then need to provide opportunities for their staff to explore, discuss and (hopefully) recognise the potential for the increased student achievement such research demonstrates.

The role of the Principal throughout the process of developing the school as a learning community must be on-going. His/her visibility as a supporter and participant in the process is illustrated by Freke (2010), when he declares that while the principal may not be able to lead in establishing meeting protocols and guiding teachers through the learning process, his/her involvement is still essential:

> Having the principal attend the conversations signals to teachers that the topic under discussion is a priority and enhances the sense of urgency. Though I am not an expert on junior reading programmes, I have contributed by asking reflective questions and challenging the teachers to reflect on their practice. (p. 2)

This statement links to the work of Turner and Crang (1996), which illustrated the importance teachers placed on the role of the principal in setting the tone of the school. It may also be viewed alongside Leonard's (2002) work detailing how teachers believed that their school administration neither prioritised nor adequately supported collaboration. These three works, viewed in conjunction, make it clear that for teachers to recognise the value of, and be engaged in the necessary work involved in establishing a learning community, the principal must play a pivotal role and maintain a high profile during all phases of the process. Their role may encompass recognising the necessity of importing expert assistance into the school. The potential role of an external facilitator is examined in the following section.

The role of the facilitator

Many researchers in the area of establishing learning communities (see Annan et al., 2003; Muir, Beswick & Williamson, 2010; and Wheelock, 2000), stress the benefits of making use of a coach or consultant to facilitate the development of professional conversations, partly because, as referred to earlier, the prospect of laying out personal beliefs about teaching may be a daunting task for many staff:

> many teachers find the combination of collegial learning talk and expert support difficult. Teachers are likely to experience a range of uncomfortable emotions, such as inadequacy, as they learn to talk analytically and honestly about their

practices, receive critical feedback, and make changes. Expert support agents need to help teachers deal with these emotional demands. (Annan et al., 2003, p. 34)

The individual reactions of staff to the proposed changes are yet another reason for school leadership to bring in a skilled facilitator to pilot and scaffold the challenging process. This view can be aligned with that of Hargreaves (2001), which explored the impact of friendship, friendliness and collegiality on staff in fifteen schools in Ontario, Canada. In this research he found that the greatest negative emotion was caused by the occurrence of conflict, and that staff would use norms of politeness to avoid conversation or interaction that may lead to disagreement. This avoidance of issues where teachers may hold divergent views would, of course, be impossible in a school which operates as a learning community. This is because "differences in purpose and practice that can normally be tolerated through avoidance, lack of knowledge or politeness, give rise to overt conflict when knowledge of others practices' become public (p. 22). This is a reminder of how important it is that staff believe they are working in an atmosphere of trust, with support and guidance available when conflict arises (Rogoff, 2001; Wenger, 2012).

Hargreaves's (2001) exploration of what he called the "emotional geographies" of the collegial relationships between teachers also reminded me of the different school cultures described by Peterson (2002), in which he defined schools as reflecting either "positive" or "toxic" (p. 1) atmospheres. This can be coupled with the descriptions of differing responses from staff regarding the initiation of a culture change: there may be the 'anti' brigade, who see the proposed actions as a direct criticism of their current teaching practice; the compliant teachers who will agree only because they view the changes as a direction from authority, and those teachers who have been inspired by the impact on student achievement demonstrated in the research and are willing to be part of the required paradigm shift (Leonard 2002; Leonard & Leonard 2003). Taking into account the possible challenges school management may encounter when initiating a culture change, it becomes obvious that there can be no set timeframe for this process. It also makes clear that a facilitator or coach would need to be highly skilled, not only in education issues and best teacher practice, but in conflict resolution, team building, interpersonal skills and communication. The facilitator's initial role is to develop and nurture professional collaboration within a school, in order to generate movement towards the goal of being able to operate as a learning community. This use of an expert facilitator is reflective of sociocultural theory in that it is using an 'expert' to scaffold people in the protocols of

effective communication and professional collaboration and ties in neatly with research such as that by Davis (2007), Delaney (1998), and Timperley and Robinson (2001).

Possible Content of Initial Meetings

It is likely that initial meetings run by the facilitator will involve discussion of personal beliefs and examination of current personal practices, before moving on to scrutinise current school-wide protocols such as data collection and communication channels. The engagement of staff in these procedures may take various forms including brainstorming, surveys, small-group and whole-school meetings. As described by Sergiovanni (1991), and discussed in the theoretical framework chapter of this thesis, it may be useful to begin by identifying the present culture of the school, and then comparing this to current research vis-à-vis best practice, and to the philosophies, expectations and aspirations of staff.

The importance of linking the development of a learning community to the visions of the staff is vital. Honawar (2008) notes that there is not a one-size-fits-all recipe for developing a learning community as all schools are different, and "proponents say one of the most important goals for any school planning to establish learning communities is to tailor them to the school's specific needs, rather than copying an existing model" (p. 3). As my research exposed the difficulties participants from Sagebrush and Rosewood Schools experienced in expressing their philosophies and practices. I believe a facilitator in these schools would identify this as an area of need and that my participants would require a great deal of time to reflect on the beliefs that underpin their practice, and to become skilled at discussing and debating these beliefs with their colleagues. To be able to play a full part in learning conversations, teachers should be able to answer questions such as 'What knowledge underpins my teaching practice?' and 'Why do I believe my practice is effective?'. Parr et al. (2007) suggest it is important that teachers are able to articulate their personal beliefs because new learning is dependent on discussing and sometimes challenging or defending these beliefs. They write about the principle of

> engaging teachers' existing theories about students and how to teach them effectively. This principle is important in the activation of prior learning so that new learning can build upon prior learning. In some situations, change may

depend upon challenging existing theories and creating dissonance with particular positions. (p. 3)

Parr et al. (2007) then go on to outline how teachers who are not encouraged to review and revise their own beliefs often adapt new practices to their current practice without a secure understanding of why they are doing so, and this often leads to a superficial and generally unsustainable adjustment to their practice. It is the much deeper understanding of why practices work that leads to a more sustainable change in practice.

This belief that one aspect of being a successful teacher is the ability to demonstrate a theoretical underpinning to classroom practice was also highlighted in work by Flynn (2007), when she examined the qualities of effective literacy teachers and described how these effective teachers enhanced their teaching "with practical classroom examples that include reference to the more subtle and intuitive skills that good literacy teachers have that reflect an understanding of theoretical principles" (p. 145). The debate and examination of personal beliefs and practices may be a daunting process and, because it may lead to what Leonard and Leonard (2003) describe as "teacher personality conflicts" (p. 6), this reinforces the rationale of researchers (Annan et al., 2003; Wheelock, 2000) when they draw attention to the importance of including an experienced facilitator or coach when setting out to establish a learning community.

The need for a large degree of teacher reflection and discussion when beginning the process of moving towards becoming a learning community makes it clear that changing a school's culture will require a time commitment from all school staff. My participants all spoke of the logistical difficulties of finding time in their busy schedules to add in yet more meetings: "I've always wanted to do that, just have a proper sit down and a quick chat ... Again, that's a school-wide thing; they could do it but again, its release time. How are you going to get time out?" (Kate, GI, SS). Chantal from Rosewood said, "There could be time put aside, to help the children. It wouldn't be such a big deal then to have a little meeting. You don't have time, teacher time is valuable time." The issue of time was also a recurring theme throughout the literature on changing school culture.

Time Management

It is undeniable that initiating a change in school culture will require a lot of input from, and involvement of staff. It is also undeniable that teaching is a time consuming

profession and teachers are busy people. Research in the field of changing school culture reflects my findings regarding teachers' understandable reluctance to add to their workload, but makes it clear that the necessary time must be found:

> Participants saw a lack of time and communication as barriers that work against any positive school culture growth. When time is allocated for stakeholders to meet and share decision making and the channels of communication are open so that everyone has a voice, school culture can evolve. (Turner & Crang, 1996, p.9)

For teachers to have the opportunity to collaborate, the need for specifically allocated time must be recognised by the leadership of the school. Leonard's research (2002) found that "although there appears to be a general sense among teachers as to what is desirable in terms of sustaining schools as collaborative communities, conditions in their own schools continue to impede such realization" (p. 1). One of the impediments identified by a majority of participants in his study was a lack of time available for collaboration. It was interesting to note that the participants translated this lack of time as an indication of the low value placed on collaboration by their school administrations. This reiterates the importance of the principal preserving a visible and supportive presence throughout the process of shifting school culture and establishing a learning community as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Principals being present and involved in meetings will also affirm for teachers that time devoted to these meetings has value. As LeBlanc (1994) remarked,

> Everyone must begin to think of teacher time as a precious resource, limited and inelastic. If a teacher is asked, for example, to attend a special meeting . . . it should be recognised that time spent there cannot be also spent marking, planning or sponsoring a student activity. (p. 13)

So, management may have to make some trade-offs regarding teacher workload since it is crucial that all staff must be able to view initial meetings and sustained collaboration as a worthy contribution to school life, not just another meeting to suffer through before they can get back to other activities.

In the group interview at Rosewood School, Tracy suggested that more in-depth conversations about students could be useful "as long as it doesn't put teachers in the position of having more work." I fear in the short term she would be disappointed. The

initial introduction and implementation of a learning community would involve many meetings although, with good leadership and expert facilitation, she and other teachers would hopefully begin see the value of the exercise. It is further along in the process that teachers may come to realise that one of the outcomes of working as a learning community may be a lightening of workload. This has been described as "working smarter by working together" (Honawar, 2008, p.1). It refers to the fact that the collaborative and collegial planning and problem solving undertaken in a school organised as a professional learning community becomes a team effort which means that no individual is dealing with any aspect of school procedures alone: "Many teachers don't want to work in isolation [said one staff member]. They want to be part of something bigger. They realize that collaboration is good not just for the children, but for the teachers themselves" (Honawar, 2008, p.3). If, with the support of strong leadership and the scaffolding of a skilled facilitator, teachers can begin to see the benefits, for their students and themselves, of their school acting within the culture of a learning community, the process may become more entrenched, with success motivating teachers to take ownership of the new systems and procedures:

> When school and district leaders provide teachers with time, training, and supportive structures authentic questions and tensions emerging from teachers' work provide one source of energy to push a trajectory of learning. (Levine & Marcus, 2007, p.7)

Interestingly, one principal involved in Honawar's report (2008) did not start developing his school into a professional learning community by working through the processes described above: "Schools can begin by organizing teachers into collaborative teams and have them ask the question: What do we do when students don't learn?" he said. "It will slowly but surely change the culture of the school" (p. 3). I believe this approach would have to be made based on the knowledge a principal has of how collegial and professional his staff could be in this situation. Could they be involved in potentially conflict causing discussions without having learned the necessary skills through the scaffolding of a skilled facilitator? And, as my participants demonstrated, some teachers do not know what the elements of a professional learning conversation are. As seen in the following section, professional learning conversations have a different shape and intent to those conversations used to initiate a change to school culture.

Professional Learning Conversations

Professional learning conversations may involve whole staff, teams or pairs of school staff. They may include parents and/or community members. They may involve other educational professionals, or teachers from other schools. Whatever the composition of a particular group, the major focus of a professional learning conversation is on raising student achievement (Davis 2007; Timperley & Robinson, 2001; Wheelock, 2000).

A strong body of research has shown that effective professional conversations are based on data (Davis 2007; Timperley & Robinson, 2001; Wheelock, 2000). Teachers are able to gather student achievement data in many ways, formally through the use of testing and examination, and more informally through observation and analysis of students' daily work. Learning conversations place this data at the heart of any decision regarding future action of the teacher. It is important to note that while the presentation of data forms the touchstone of a learning conversation, it is the analysis and discussion of the data which informs teaching practice. Data on its own presents a picture of what the student could achieve when the assessment was carried out, but as Davis (2007) remarked in her presentation:

> Through sustained professional learning opportunities, teachers learned that just having data was not enough to improve student performance. They were learning that what teachers do with their assessment information, how teachers think about the information – what it might mean for them, their teaching and for the learning needs of their students, and how they might share this information with their students was what made the data both useful and usable for both teachers and students. (Davis, p.3)

The participants in my study who were satisfied with knowing what reading level the student was on, reflect the belief that data is simply gathered as a means of recording what the student achieved at the time the test was administered. This belief contrasts with the idea presented by Davis (2007) that data can and should be used as springboard for discussion, inquiry and evaluation of next teaching steps. What Davis (2007) reinforces, as do researchers such as Guskey (2003), and Timperley and Robinson (2001), is that what the data is used for once it has been gathered is what really affects student achievement.

In Davis's (2007) quote above, we can see reference to the teachers in her study having received on-going professional development. This professional development helped the teachers cultivate an understanding of various assessment tools, meaning that once a decision had been made as to what data needed to be gathered, they were more able to judge which assessment tool was the best fit for capturing the requisite data. Here again, we see an aspect of sociocultural theory, that of scaffolding, where teachers are in the role of learners, being supported in developing their understanding and knowledge of data gathering tools by specialists in the relevant field.

Timperley and Robinson (2001) take the use of external support further, however, in saying that alongside the challenges of data analysis, the staff were supported by a professional development contract "which not only encouraged the teachers to challenge their beliefs, but showed them how to do so" (Timperley & Robinson, 2001, p.290). This is yet another indication of a sociocultural theory in action, that of learners being scaffolded through a process. This also links to work by Rogoff (1990, cited in Zimmermann, Schunk Eds. 2003), where teachers are positioned as apprentices, and learn from a more skilled practitioner. Timperley and Robinson (2001) explain how one of the participants in their study came to value the support received from the external contract. The participant first expressed how intimidating the process had first appeared, and that staff, being unable to identify effective next-step teaching had felt defensive, but "when we got into the [professional development] contract, there were the answers ... We couldn't have done it on our own" (Timperley & Robinson, 2001, p.291). This acknowledgment that a particular improvement in teaching practice had been possible only with scaffolding and collaboration could indicate that this teacher, at least, was becoming aware of the positive outcomes of professional learning conversations and effective collaboration.

The Ministry of Education's (2011) directives to the RT:Lit. service appear to indicate recognition and support of these positive outcomes of professional learning conversations and effective collaboration. Recent past practice has been for these professionals to go into schools and work with students who are struggling with literacy acquisition, the purpose of their role being "to provide itinerant, specialised literacy support for Year 0 – 8 students who are at risk of failing to learn to read and write and for their teachers" (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 23). Such instruction frequently took place outside of the classroom, with the emphasis being on tutoring the student identified as having difficulties with literacy learning. The Ministry of Education has now introduced a Professional

Practice Manual (2011) for RT:Lits. which places emphasis on instruction being carried out within the classroom:

> Working in a collaborative inquiry method with the teacher in the classroom has the advantage of a transfer of expertise related not only to the student or group of students, but also for other students in the future. This is the key function of the RT:Lit role. (Ministry of Education, 2011, p.7)

The RT:Lit. role is now more focussed on working alongside the classroom teacher, rather than with individual students. We can see here the reflection of work in a learning community (Annan et al. 2003; Davis 2007; and Wheelock, 2006), with the idea that sustainable, long term gains can be achieved if education professionals are positioned where they are able to work with/learn alongside each other. The tenets of sociocultural theory can be observed with the transfer of expertise, via modelling and dialogue, from the specialised literacy teacher to the classroom teacher, and collaborative inquiry involving both the RT:Lit. and the classroom teacher in the discussion and examination of practice to focus on raising the student's literacy abilities. The aim of this collaborative method is that the classroom teacher may refine her/his practice, leading to more effective teaching being provided for many students in the future, rather than only one student at a time benefitting from individual tutoring from the RT:Lit. The Professional Practice Manual (2011) states clearly that "During the period of RT:Lit support the student has two teachers supporting literacy" (p. 7), and the drive to promote collaboration between these teachers should lead to them working in a way which is in stark contrast to my research data, which clearly indicated that the classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers, by and large, worked quite independently of each other. While these new directives undoubtedly reflect understanding of, and support for best practice, some disquiet has been expressed by RT:Lit, as to whether the time needed to develop an effective collaborative relationship has also been considered by the Ministry. The timeframe presented by the Ministry allows forty-five, thirty minute sessions for the Resource Teacher to focus on moving the student's literacy skills towards the age appropriate standard, while collaboratively working with the classroom teacher to examine and refine practice. Yet, "for most students referred, the upper limit can be set at 45 units of time" (Professional Practice Manual, 2011, p. 14). Given the evidence of research (Harris, 2005; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Turner & Crang, 1996) regarding the need for time to establish environments of trust, and develop the skills necessary for effective communication, it appears uncertain if

a time limit such as that allocated by the Ministry will be adequate for Resource Teachers of Literacy to generate a durable shift in classroom practice, especially when factoring in possible resistance from classroom teachers, and the lack of training classroom teachers may have had in the protocols of professional conversations. The Professional Practice Manual states "The instruction provided by the RT Lit needs to be time bound to ensure more students have access to the service and fewer students remain on the waiting lists" (p. 13). While this acknowledges an understandable desire on behalf of the Ministry to improve student access to the RT:Lit. service, it remains to be seen if the limited time allowed for building working relationships, raising the student's literacy abilities to that of his/her peers and instilling sustainable change to the teacher's literacy teaching practice will be sufficient. Through research literature I have come to realise that, especially in the beginning, learning conversations can be difficult for teachers, and that the skills of an expert, external facilitator are invaluable when data is being gathered and discussed. Under these new directives, the RT:Lit. will be taking on the role of a facilitator, or 'expert', modelling the codes of behaviour for professional conversations while scaffolding the classroom teacher to examine and refine teaching practice, and use data collection and analysis as the springboard for planning lessons.

I have thus far explored the importance of the principal's role in the process of moving a school towards being a learning community, combined with the need for an accomplished facilitator. I have also rationalised the time commitment that will be placed on all school staff as meetings aimed at instituting a shift in school culture, as well as meetings for learning conversations would need to be attended. In the following section I will discuss possible ways of using meeting times efficiently.

Efficient use of Meeting Time

The vexing issue of finding time for teachers to engage in professional conversations has been acknowledged by researchers (see Delaney, 1998; Donato, 2004; LeBlanc, 1994). Statements from my study interviews, such as that made by Tracy who acknowledged that meetings with the Reading Recovery teacher might be useful "but you have to realise how hard it is to get a meeting with teachers", (GI, RS), and Kat who talked of teachers as "in a rush, because they've always got to be somewhere else" (GI, SS) highlighted the concern of time demands perceived by my participants. Annan et al. (2003) suggest that many teacher meetings are taken up with discussion and organisation of "issues peripheral to

their core task of teaching" (p. 34). While factors that impact on school life such as programmes, school events and student behaviour will need to be dealt with, Annan et al. (2003) indicate that these peripheral issues often thwart effective learning conversations:

> The school-based decision-making focuses on programmes, products and associated management processes, and not on teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Consequently, school-wide learning is diverted from creating more effective teaching practices. Teachers are caught up in discussions that do not focus on analysing, evaluating and challenging teaching practices, the core business of schools and the key components of learning talk. (p. 34)

While placing student data at the centre of conversations should reduce the amount of peripheral talk and keep the focus on student achievement, Wheelock (2000) described further structures schools may wish to implement in their efforts to promote quality learning conversations which are both efficient and effective. The first suggestion was to have different meetings for specific purposes. For example, she described one school which, in Monday's meeting "talked about logistical details involved in field trips, guest speakers, or classroom activities" (p. 3), while separate meeting times on different days were allocated to learning conversations. I believe that this is a sensible suggestion, as a teacher I, and I am sure many others, have attended staff meetings where more general school topics, such as sports day organisation, are discussed first, and time runs out very quickly, leaving other issues to be delayed until the next meeting. It would make sense to have one meeting to address general issues, and other meetings devoted to data-based learning conversations. As the constituency of the learning conversation would vary depending on the focus of the group, this system would allow more leeway for teachers to arrange learning conversations at times which suit those needing to attend.

Wheelock (2000) identified another time management device that participants in his work believed operated successfully in their school. This was the use of an agenda for learning conversation meetings. Staff felt this helped them focus and added momentum to the meeting; thereby avoiding time spent on general teacher talk:

> Before, we'd often just want to commiserate with each other, but once we assigned ourselves an agenda, we no longer had that temptation. That was when we started to function at a higher level and really talk about what kids were learning. (p. 4)

This reference to teachers commiserating with each other is an example of the teacher talk which is described by Annan et al. (2003) as peripheral. Using their Model of Learning Talk, (Annan et al. 2003, p.1), this commiseration would be viewed as 'non-teaching practices talk', as it is talk related to school, but not about teaching and learning. Having attended meetings held both with and without agendas, I can attest to the focus an agenda brings. As an added benefit, I believe that an agenda, circulated to meeting participants in advance, helps to ensure participants bring the required data and information to the meeting which means less time is wasted, and the meeting can get underway promptly. Minutes kept at these meetings also ensure that meeting participants know their responsibilities and actions following the meeting.

In July 2013, I attended the International Reading Recovery Conference in Sydney. One of the workshops I attended was Building Stronger Partnerships through Collaborative Conversations (Golding, Bremner et al, 2013). This workshop, presented by a group of Reading Recovery Tutors from Melbourne, presented results of a study they had undertaken to improve the nature of communication between Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers. The work was a direct result of the STEAM Project. The study, involving ten schools, had as its rationale "to trial support structures and processes for establishing and sustaining collaborative relationships" (p. 10). For schools wanting to begin the process of initiating learning conversations, but with teacher concerns regarding the pressures of the time involved, the most important aspect of this study was that it was based on Reading Recovery teachers meeting with the classroom teachers of students on the programme for 10 minutes, usually once a fortnight. A simple form was designed to concentrate the discussion on relevant issues, record the meeting and to be referred to as a springboard for the subsequent meeting. This process shadows work by Wheelock (2004) recommending the use of an agenda to keep meetings focussed and time effective. At each meeting, goals were set and agreement reached as to how both Reading Recovery teachers and classroom teachers would work towards these goals in their respective settings. At the next meeting, both teachers would bring data such as running records and lesson plans to review in relation to the set targets. This data was the basis of decisions for the next teaching steps. This placement of data at the hub of the conversation echoes studies of effective conversations such as that by Timperley and Davis (2007). The cyclical pattern these learning conversations follow reflect the desired model described by Bareta and English (2007).

The purpose of the study by Golding et al. (2013) was to trial a way to stimulate effective communication and, as such, the impact of this increased team work on student learning was not measured, and is clearly an area for further inquiry. It is however, clear from quotes from the study participants that they were positive about the increased level and intensity of their professional conversations. One classroom teacher explained:

> Communicating with the Reading Recovery Teacher helped me work out strategies and Learning Intentions for explicit teaching in the classroom. I found areas for improvement, and some strategies discussed could also be used with other students in my class who had similar needs. (Golding et al., 2013 p.34)

A Reading Recovery teacher also expressed an awareness of the value of the enhanced communication level, mentioning too, the perceived flow on effect such a process may have on students other than the target child.

> As a result of liaising and touching base more with my students' classroom teachers, I really feel that I am not only a Reading Recovery teacher but also a literacy resource and support teacher for all the students in their grade. It has been a very positive and important initiative towards making the links more obvious, for both students and their teachers, between Reading Recovery sessions and their class work. I feel that student outcomes were also improved as a result. (Golding et al., 2013, p.29)

We see here, a Reading Recovery teacher appreciating her role as a 'master', and acknowledging the positive flow-on effects for both teachers and students of the sharing of her knowledge and skills.

If we accept, as do Annan et al. (2003), the assumption that engaging in effective professional conversation has a positive effect on student achievement, it is clear that introducing a schedule for constructive conversation such as that outlined above would be a positive step towards improving student academic success.

As we can see, it can be argued that a general meeting, prolonged by discussion of peripheral issues, and what Annan et al. (2003), described as "conversations [which] may not necessarily impact on learning and teaching, and cannot be assumed to do so" (p. 1), will not be as efficient/effective, both in time and result, as one held for a specific reason, where participants are aware of the purpose of the meeting and data is presented as the

base for discussion. One school, described by Hargreaves (2001), streamlined its general business communication by eliminating general staff meetings entirely. Instead, taking advantage of technology, all staff were provided with laptops, and all organisational information was disseminated via daily e mails. While staff at this school do attend meetings, they are those which one teacher described as being:

> sessions where we discuss teaching, systems, issues, what is it about this school that's working? What is it about this school that's not working? How can we continue this? How can we fix this? Very important because you are constantly looking at the big picture and being brought back to this, 'why are we here?' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.20)

This approach obviously does away with time at meetings being spent on general non-teaching teacher talk, and has the side effect of ensuring staff all receive the same communications regarding general school organisation. It can also be seen from the teacher's outline of the nature of the questions this staff asks of themselves and their colleagues, that this school has an embedded understanding of what it means to operate as a learning community.

Some researchers suggest that timetabled meetings should not be the only opportunity for teachers to collaborate professionally, and that professional conversations can in fact become an organic part of school life, occurring throughout the day, without being scheduled (Inger, 1993; Honowar, 2008). These suggestions will be explored in the following section.

Unscheduled Conversations

During both her individual and group interviews, Reading Recovery teacher Kate talked of her perceived improved level of communication with classroom teachers, which she attributed to her work-space being relocated to a site which offered closer proximity to the teachers' classrooms. Inger (1993) has also suggested that collaboration can be improved if classrooms are moved so teachers "have more ready access to one another" (p.   5), although in his study he was exploring ways to break down barriers and improve collaboration between vocational and academic teachers in high schools. However, analysis of my interview data showed that, at least in the case of Kate at Sagebrush School, this proximity of workspace did not lead to more *effective* communication. This idea of

closeness of workspace having a positive effect on teacher communication does, however, have a faint echo of work by Honawar (2008), when describing a school viewed as having "perfected the concept" (p. 1) of a professional learning community. At this school, the idea of proximity is taken a step further as:

> Instead of the isolation of their classrooms, they [teachers] spend their time between classes and before and after school in open office areas where their desks abut those of their course peers. The arrangement ensures that the give-and take-between teacher teams is almost constant. (Honawar, 2008, p.1)

While I am fully supportive of the belief that professional learning conversations have a positive outcome on student achievement, I am slightly dubious of the effect on staff of the expectation that they would carry out their work in a state of forced togetherness. While this may work if all staff members are able to focus on their required task in a communal area, I see potential for distraction and disruption to staff attempting to work in this contrived environment. The distractions could be staff entering or leaving the shared space while others are working, or asking questions or wishing to discuss something with a colleague who is trying to work on something else at the time. Other disruptions could include teachers who see the common workspace as an opportunity for indulging in social conversation and non-school based talk, thus disturbing others who are working. In spite of my viewpoint, one participant of Honawar's (2008) study is quoted as saying, "many of the best things we do don't happen in team meetings . . .The real collaboration happens outside" (p. 1). The school involved in this study, Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Illionois, has been recognised as a flagship of a school learning community, and indeed 3,000 people visit this school each year to observe the operational procedures of its teacher collaboration model (Honawar, 2008). It is important to note, however, that this school began working towards becoming a learning community in 1983 and I believe that it is the time and training these teachers have received, along with the supportive structures and managerial support now embedded in the school that allows its teachers to work effectively in the close proximity of a common work space. For a school newly embarking on the process of changing their culture to fit with a learning community philosophy, I believe a common workspace should, if identified by the staff, be an aim rather than something to institute immediately. Until staff have received training in the protocols of professional conversations from an experienced facilitator, and recognise the purpose and value of a common workspace, and until these behaviours and structures have become

embedded within the school culture, I believe common workspaces could become the setting for many of the "teacher personality conflicts" (Leonard & Leonard, 2003, p. 6) referred to earlier in this chapter. This forced togetherness reminded me of a conversation I had with a colleague who worked in a different education sector. She told me that their management team insisted that whenever possible the staff should car pool to meetings, conferences etc. as this would provide additional time for them to talk. My colleague confessed to the irritation she felt at having to endure listening to seemingly endless conversations about her workmates' problems with in-laws, partners and their social lives. The directive from the management team did not lead to more frequent professional conversations, but rather had an inadvertent, rather destructive effect on collegiality, possibly because some staff neither understood or possessed the skills to fulfil its intended purpose, or possibly because some staff members chose to ignore the full meaning of the instruction. I think this is indicative of what can happen when people who are unaware of the expectations and protocols of learning conversations are thrust into communal spaces. As a school moves further along the process of becoming a learning community, it is likely that teachers will avail themselves of the opportunity to have learning conversations outside of set meeting times, however, I believe they will make their own arrangements of when and where to meet, rather than it being enforced. Relying on unscheduled meetings being organised by relevant staff would I believe only be effective once the school had an entrenched culture of a learning community. The participants in my study believed they held unscheduled conversations about the students they shared, but as we have seen, these amounted to little more than superficial exchanges of data, limited to what reading level the student had attained. For unscheduled conversations to be an effective method of communication, all participants in such conversations would need to understand the philosophy of, and protocols involved in such conversations.

In effect, the participants in my study were working in the model of teachers in isolation; the classroom teachers and the Reading Recovery teachers were working with the same students but, apart from brief, superficial exchanges of comments regarding the students' behaviour and level they were working at, there was no evidence that the study participants worked as a team in attempting to increase student achievement. I argue that raising the profile of teachers within the school who possess specialised knowledge may encourage other teachers to see these colleagues as guides or mentors. The issue of teacher time may also be eased somewhat if teachers are aware of, and able to access the collective skills

already present in their schools, rather than always working in isolation. This dovetails neatly with Honowar's (2008) description of teachers "working smarter by working together" (p.1), and reflects aspects of sociocultural theory in that it involves teachers supporting each other as they work to support student achievement. This support of each other would come about through the discussion and sharing of ideas and the development of better practice through accessing the knowledge and skills of an 'expert'. I examine the benefits of overcoming what appears to be a missed opportunity for collective skill sharing in the following section.

Recognising Staff Expertise

I was particularly struck by the fact that both of the Reading Recovery teachers in my study were of the opinion that in general, classroom teachers did not evince any particular interest in what actually took place in Reading Recovery sessions. The exception was Mary, who had arranged to observe Kate teaching a Reading Recovery student during her classroom release time. I have discussed this data in the findings chapter of this thesis, using it as an indicator of the lack of collaboration and information sharing evident at Sagebrush and Rosewood Schools. In this section however, I wish to focus on this data through the lens of scaffolding, and the roles of master and apprentice as described by Rogoff (1990). As discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter of this thesis, Reading Recovery teachers receive intensive training in specialised reading/writing teaching techniques and, during the time they work as Reading Recovery teachers they attend regular professional development meetings called continuing contact sessions. In short, Reading Recovery teachers are specialised in working with young students who struggle with literacy acquisition, yet nowhere in my data was there evidence that classroom teachers viewed the Reading Recovery teacher as a valuable resource. In fact, the dismissive attitude of Tracy towards teaching suggestions from the Reading Recovery teacher, and Kat's comment that while Mary may have observed a Reading Recovery lesson, "a lot of teachers, they've got better things to do" (GI, SS), seem to indicate that the skills of Reading Recovery teachers were given no weight at all. No evidence was found that Reading Recovery teachers were asked for guidance in regards to their Reading Recovery students, let alone other students who may be having difficulties in the classrooms; which would have provided an opportunity for these 'experts' to scaffold

classroom teachers towards improved practice. In addition, I did not gather any evidence that the Reading Recovery teachers were viewed as people with specialised skills that 'apprentices' could learn new approaches from. Even Mary implemented an 'add on' activity to her Reading Recovery student after observing and talking with Kate, setting up a time for him to read his reading book to another student in the classroom, rather than reflecting on or discussing data or teaching practice. I feel this detached attitude is representative of the expectation of many teachers, and it is one I have encountered in my role as a Resource Teacher of Literacy, where teachers who have a student they are struggling to teach, want someone to take the student out of the classroom, work with them and return them to the classroom with the 'problem' fixed. Meanwhile the teacher continues with their current teaching practice and when the student returns to the classroom, they are expected to fit the same classroom programme they were struggling with prior to the intervention. Kate, the Reading Recovery teacher from Sagebrush School, talked of how she looked at school records to see how her ex-students were progressing as they moved through the school. As Kate has worked intensively with these students, and knows them well, it would make sense for her to be involved with the teachers of these students both during and after their time on the Reading Recovery programme. I believe that teachers such as those who have had Reading Recovery training, and those who have specialised knowledge in other curriculum fields should have their abilities acknowledged by school leaders.

One way of beginning to combat this situation would be to raise the profile of 'experts' in the school. In the case of my participants, I would suggest school management should make it possible for all teachers to have the opportunity to observe the Reading Recovery teacher at work. While this would be especially valuable for the classroom teachers of students on the programme, I believe that even teachers of older students would benefit, as they will often have students in their rooms who are working at low reading levels. Following this, I would suggest that Reading Recovery teachers are granted time to observe the classroom teachers of students on the Reading Recovery programme, and that both sets of professionals are then given the opportunity to reflect on and discuss together what they have observed. Three recurring themes that have surfaced during my study arise again with this proposal. This approach will obviously need time, will require the guidance and support of school management, and is more liable to succeed if all the people involved understand the purpose of, and conduct themselves within, the protocols of

effective communication. As my study participants demonstrated, many teachers are unaware of the features which constitute an effective professional learning conversation and as such would be unable to fully participate in them without being scaffolded through the process by an experienced facilitator.

Future Research

Through engaging in research literature I have gained an understanding of the importance of all teachers being able to participate in professional learning conversations. Most research has been done in schools that are introducing the protocols of effective conversation, and so have brought in facilitators and professional development specialists to coach school staff in the desired practice. Research into how universities and teacher education institutions are educating student teachers about the philosophy of schools as learning communities may be useful. For example, when in schools on practicum, are students observing best practice? Are beginning teachers entering schools with the expectation that learning conversations will take place? Have they the understanding of the protocols of an effective learning conversation? When reading about the school Hargreaves (2001) described, I was struck by the fact that the staff accessed technology to streamline communication, and in doing so had eliminated the need for a regular meeting to discuss and arrange general school business and arrangements. Further research into the use of technology such as blogs, wikis and Skype, may be useful in determining their effectiveness as communication tools teachers, perhaps especially itinerant teachers, could utilise. Whilst these methods of communication could not substitute for face-to-face professional conversations based on inquiry, and grounded in data, they may be effective as a means of exchanging information and viewpoints, questions and answers. The content of blogs, wikis or Skype meetings could be used to determine the agenda for scheduled meetings.

It may be timely, with the new Ministry directives for Resource Teachers: Literacy, to initiate some long term research into the effectiveness of the directives. The research focus may be the effect on student achievement of the time constraints of the new directives. Another particular field of study could be to investigate any change to teacher practice resulting from the collaborative work done by the RT:Lit. and the classroom teacher during the time they work together to benefit the identified student. Whether any changes are sustained would also be of interest. There are 109 Resource Teachers:

Literacy in New Zealand (Ministry of Education 2011), working in clusters of schools that reflect very different geographical areas and span a wide range of distances. Further research could explore whether all Resource Teachers: Literacy, or indeed any group of Itinerant Teachers, can be effective working to a one size fits all remit. Perhaps acknowledging the challenges implicit in these differing work geographies may be a more effective and efficient way forward for the service. Long-term research in these areas could prove useful in informing future policy and strategic planning.

Conclusion

I had set out to investigate the level of conversation between education professionals who both teach the same student. What information did they share? How did they ensure unity of instruction? What evidence did they base their teaching practice on? In short, I wanted to understand the shape of their conversations and meetings. During the interview process, it rapidly became clear that professional conversations and collaboration did not feature in the two schools that were at the centre of my research. My work took on a different slant as I began to investigate why this was so.

After analysing my data and presenting my findings, I reached the conclusion that the culture of the schools my participants worked in was not conducive to collaboration and professional conversation. My participants were effectively working in a culture of isolation. They worked alongside their colleagues in organisational matters, but there was no evidence that they recognised the importance of working together to examine data and identify next step teaching. For all school staff, including management, teachers, teacher aides and visiting professional support staff to become aware of, and value the effect professional conversations can have on student achievement; they need to be immersed in an environment that embraces the philosophy of schools as learning communities.

The quest to shift a school's culture and focus to one which reflects the ethos of a professional learning community requires comprehensive planning and needs to be viewed as a long term process. Teachers need to be informed, they need training and guidance, and they need the commitment and support of the principal and school management team if a successful change in school culture is to be accomplished.

I would like to finish by repeating Tracy's comment as she described her interaction with the Reading Recovery teacher: "it's not like we are having a meeting, we are just talking,"

(GI, RS). This statement encapsulates the level of communication I observed in my small-scale study. With time, effort, guidance and the strong support of the principal and school management team, it is possible to raise awareness of the need for focussed, meaningful communication between teachers. Teachers need to be equipped with the theoretical understandings and communication skills necessary to do more than 'just talk'. If a school can begin the move towards operating as a learning community, both staff and students should benefit.

Appendix

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