Building Bridges
into the Adolescents' World
and their Learning Community:

Exploring issues of diversity,
special education and the role of
Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour
in secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

The increasing diversity of our student population, advances in technology, socio-economic changes and increasing awareness of human rights have resulted in the need for a change in the way secondary schools respond to diversity. This would necessitate a reframing of the current deficit paradigm of special education. This thesis investigates the validity of the notion that the concept of learning community could provide a means to bringing about this change.

A small learning group of four Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) and two Ministry of Education: Special Education (GSE) fieldworkers was the vehicle for exploring this concept. One of the features of this learning group was the capacity the group had for providing a context for multi-dimensional learning. Analysis of the findings resulted in three strands of learning.

The first strand of learning focused on the features and processes of effective groups. The impact of the power of the group and how participants experienced that power provided the basis for the second strand of learning. The third strand of learning resulted from themes arising out of the analysis of the group's discourses. These themes not only revealed the complexities of the work of RTLB in secondary schools but also informed and reinforced all three strands of learning.

In addition to the influence that participating in the group had on the personal and professional life of each participant, the work of the group provided an insight into, and affirmed a number of, possibilities for the development of learning communities. The values, attitudes and beliefs inherent in a culture of learning community have the potential to set the stage for reframing the current deficit paradigm of special education. This change in paradigm and the findings in evidence-based research relating to what constitutes quality teaching more than imply – they necessitate - reforms that include changes to funding mechanisms, school and community cultures, school systems and teaching and learning methods. A powerful way to achieve this change is to develop whole-school learning communities where all students are valued and provided with opportunities to be contributing members.

There is potential for RTLB to have a significant role in fostering, learning communities within schools. Recognition of, and advocating for, the role that RTLB could have in further development of both these aspects would contribute considerably to increasing the effectiveness of RTLB support - particularly in secondary schools. This could also assist, both directly and indirectly, with clarifying the role and expectations of the RTLB.

This investigation demonstrated the potential for a small learning group to become a vehicle for growing a wider culture of learning community in education contexts. It also confirmed that a culture of genuine learning community, in which diversity is celebrated and effective teaching and learning strategies are practised, would build bridges into the adolescents' world and their learning community and enable all members to participate in an inclusive context.

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INTRODUCTION

At the heart of this thesis is a concern about the need to find a way to increase the capacity for secondary schools to be both inclusive and effective by meaningfully engaging all students, regardless of ability, in the learning and social life of the school. The increasing diversity of our student population, socio-economic and political changes, advances in technology and increasing awareness of human rights have resulted in the need for a change in the way secondary schools respond to diversity.

One vehicle for such change could be the notion of learning community. Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) are in an ideal position to support this change. There is potential for RTLB to have a role in initiating and facilitating professional learning groups in the schools. This thesis explores the validity of this notion. This chapter defines the questions underpinning the thesis, provides an introduction to each of the four contexts and outlines the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A belief that the concept of learning community could provide a means to bringing about change and that Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour have a key role in the change process, underpins these research questions:

Is the concept of learning community one answer to the dilemmas inherent in responding to diversity in secondary schools?
and
Might a small learning group become the catalyst for growing more learning communities?

The participants for this study, a small learning group of four Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) and two Ministry of Education, Special Education (GSE) fieldworkers became the vehicle for exploring these questions. One of these (GSE) participants is also the researcher of this thesis[1]. This group was formed in

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[1] An overview of the researcher's background is provided in Appendix 1

response to needs and concerns arising primarily from experiences of these six women working in secondary schools. Because each of these women is a mother, has worked in secondary schools and is now working in a special education context, they view their concerns from the perspectives of students, parents, teachers and special educators.

To ensure the participants were free from pre-conceptions related to the hunch behind this research, the investigation was approached from the perspective of answering the question:

How does participation in a small learning community impact on the personal and professional lives of RTLB working in secondary schools?

In the process of observing the group and gathering data about the group activities, it quickly became apparent that the predominant outcome of the twenty fortnightly meetings during 2004 was the insight they provided into both the complexities associated with the role of RTLB and the issues and constraints related to working in secondary schools. The integrated nature of these outcomes and the impact for the RTLB created a three dimensional study that involved:

1. Identifying the key factors that contribute to the features and functioning of a successful learning group.
2. Discovering the impact of power in a learning group and the implications for learning communities in the way participants can experience power in a group.
3. Revealing the complexities related to working in a special education context in secondary schools.

The findings arising from each of these strands of learning highlighted the potential for further development of the role of the RTLB in secondary schools.

THE CONTEXTS OF THIS INVESTIGATION

The following four sections describe each of four interrelated contexts in which this investigation is situated: secondary education, special education, the work of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour and learning communities.

Secondary education – a balancing act

Newspapers are frequently signalling that all is not well in the secondary education system. Statistics recorded in the Ministry of Education Stand-down and Suspension database (MOE, 2005a) reflect the reality of these concerns and the challenges schools are experiencing in attempting to provide meaningful learning contexts for

their students. Between January 1 and December 31, 2004, stand-downs in the Auckland region, totalled 4,677 students. This equates to 24 stand-downs per 1,000 students. While stand-downs result in students being absent for no more than five days in a term or ten days in any one year, the suspension numbers are equally as alarming with 1,181 students (from the Auckland region) suspended during the same year. It is important to realise that one of the reasons the stand down figures are so much higher is that students must be 16 or over to be suspended. Therefore it is highly likely the suspension numbers would be greater and stand-downs less if students younger than 16 years of age could be suspended.

Literature and research projects focussing on secondary education are increasingly recognising the problems underpinning the high rates of suspension. They are identifying a need for whole school reform in order to further develop secondary schools' capacity to respond to diversity. A number of aspects related to this have been put under the research microscope, both locally and internationally. They have included topics like school organization, leadership, teacher development and learning, transition from contributing primary and intermediate schools and effective teaching strategies.

A number of texts have identified the dilemmas created by what many term the 'paradox of globalisation' as contributing, if not causing, these challenges (Hargreaves, 2003; Hough & Paine, 1997). These books focus on the challenges for schools inherent in keeping pace with reforms resulting from the technological advances, while at the same time remaining effective with the increasing focus on recognising and responding to individual needs. The limitless horizons created by advances in technology that provide worldwide access to knowledge, together with societal, global, economical, and political changes have forced reviews of curricula, teaching practices, school culture and leadership skills. The traditional "one size fits all" subject focus of secondary schools that locates the power in the learning process with the teacher is being challenged as more and more evidence proves the efficacy of a focus on a range of teaching strategies that include all the students participating in the knowledge making. (Mulford, Salins & Leithwood, support this, claiming that: *"The information age has caused those in schools to lose their privileged access to knowledge and its dissemination"* (2004, p.1).

This loss of control along with political reforms and the tightening of centralized control mechanisms have increased accountability pressures on schools to demonstrate their effectiveness in a number of ways. This has been particularly

noticeable in New Zealand since the 1989 Education Act and the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools that placed responsibility for governance and management of schools with local Boards of Trustees. A significant determinant of effectiveness is the organisational culture of a school (Parr & Fitzgerald, 2001). While schools need to adopt new behaviours and learning adaptations in response to the global pressures they also need to retain old *tribal / local* organisational behaviours that not only demonstrate and facilitate their effectiveness but also provide local identity, belonging and security for the people associated with the school (Hough & Paine, 1997).

Increasingly there is a focus on achievement rates in standardised testing and with this an increased focus on individual teachers' and students' performances. This focus is not confined to comparison within New Zealand contexts.

> *The globalisation of education is already having major consequences on education in New Zealand. League tables for example, are increasingly comparing Auckland learning opportunities with those in the United Kingdom or even Tokyo, rather than using comparisons between schools in the North and South Islands as the sole or main indicators of quality.*
>
> (Heald, 2005, no page number provided)

Added to these challenges are those of increasing curricula and assessment demands, MOE teacher training initiatives and strategies and skills associated with the rapidly changing and expanding repertoire of technological resources. Teachers are required to incorporate all of these into their teaching and administration tasks.

During the last five years New Zealand schools have been encouraged to participate in as many as twenty different professional learning contracts. Among these are: The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), The Special Education 20000 Professional Development Programme, the Art Coordinators Project, Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle), Literacy and ICT contracts. All these pressures and the stresses result in a challenge that can be daunting for even the most adept teachers.

Nowhere is the conundrum, created by increasing pressures of standardisation and individualisation that have arisen from the growth of global economy trends and the move to develop organizations, more evident than in our low decile, multi cultural urban secondary schools. More than any other organization these schools need to develop the capacity to become more flexible and responsive and to "create the

human skills and capacities that will enable individuals and organisations to survive in today's knowledge society" (Hargreaves, 2003, p.1).

Diversity

In addition to the challenges created by globalisation, the structure of most secondary school timetables results in teachers facing as many as a hundred and eighty different students in the course of one week. Further complicating the task of getting to know and establishing positive relationships with these students is the fact that it is not uncommon for urban schools to have as many as, or in some cases more than, seventy different ethnicities represented among their students. The fact that English is not the first or preferred language for many of these students frequently creates additional barriers in an already complex situation.

The introduction of the 1989 Education Act, the 1999 revision of the Education Act and the 2001 New Zealand Disability Strategy, giving all students, regardless of their disability, the right to be educated in mainstream schools further increased the complexity of this challenge by widening the range of abilities, interests and needs of students within any one class. Teachers in secondary schools can now find themselves responsible for meeting the learning needs of students formerly catered for by experienced special educators in activity centres, experience units and special schools. "Confronted with marked differences between students in prior language, knowledge and experience, teachers and schools have to reconsider their educational practices" (Westera, 2002, p.2)

Special education
A broad overview of the history of special education in New Zealand
Prior to 1989 it was unusual to find students with significant disabilities in mainstream schools in New Zealand. For many years students with mild to moderate (and primarily intellectual or behavioural) disabilities had been catered for in special classes in primary schools and experience units in secondary schools. Students with more significant disabilities had either attended special schools since their inception in the early 1960s or been catered for in psychopaedic hospitals. Prior to the 1960's the young people who were not hospitalised were 'catered for' in places like day care facilities and sheltered workshops.

The Report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration (1988), often referred to as the Picot report, and the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child heralded the coming of Tomorrow's Schools and a range of

fundamental changes to the New Zealand education system, many of which were contained within the 1989 Education Act. The 1989 Education Act it made it illegal for schools to turn students away on the basis of disability, no matter how significant their disability. Boards of Trustees are required to include the following goal in their charters:

> *To enhance learning by ensuring that the school's policies and practices seek to achieve equitable outcomes for students of both sexes: for rural and urban students: for students from all religions, ethnic, cultural, social, family and class backgrounds and for all students irrespective of their ability or disability.*
>
> (Department of Education, 1989:10
> cited by Mitchell, in Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2000, p. 32).

The Special Education Policy

Almost ten years later but still riding on the crest of a wave of rising social and political recognition of disability and the consequential growing awareness of the practical implications of the rights of all children to an education, was the introduction of the Special Education 2000 (SE2000) Policy, (MOE, 1995). This policy contained reforms based on five basic principles: equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and economy. A number of official New Zealand statements and documents underpinned the provisions provided in the policy.

The SE2000 policy brought together a number of different funding initiatives intended to support the many and various 'special' needs of students and to ensure equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and economy of support provision. A general overview of the support and resources available, to support special education needs, under the Special Education Policy and additional provisions can be found in Appendix Two.

Included in the SE2000 Policy (MOE, 1996) were support initiatives for 3% of students. These were students who were considered to have the most significant or 'very high' needs for support. This support was provided by individually targeted funding made available under the Ongoing Resource and Transition Schemes[2], behaviour, communication and, more recently, high health initiatives. Support for less disabled students – those considered to have moderate to high needs – was funded directly to schools, in the form of the Special Education Grant (SEG) and the Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) service.

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[2] Now known as the Ongoing and Reviewable Resource Scheme (ORRS)

Two special education professional development programmes for schools

From 1999 to the end of 2002, The Ministry of Education (MOE) funded delivery of two special education professional development programmes. The first of these - the SE2000 Professional Development Programme for Principals and Teachers - was offered to all state schools in New Zealand. The second, The Introductory Professional Development Programme for Teacher Aides/Kaiawhina, was available for all schools meeting criteria related to the numbers of teacher aides working for significant time each week with students regarded as having significant special needs.

The underlying intention of these programmes was to inform schools about the various support provisions under the SE2000 Policy, to ensure they understood how to access this support, and to increase schools' confidence and competence in meeting the diverse needs of students. Throughout both these programmes the students in focus were referred to as students with 'special' needs. Yet all students have needs and to imply that some might be more special than others reinforces

> "...the notion of a normal group and 'other' or minority groups of children" and denies "the approach taken in diversity in New Zealand education that it honours articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of Waitangi."
> (Alton – Lee 2003, p.v).

Both these professional development programmes drew very noticeable attention to the concept of *special* education. This was a nationally coordinated programme delivered by thirteen teams contracted by the MOE. Team members were required to have (at the very least) local reputations as experts in the field of special education. The Special Education Service (SES) contributed six of the teams and the remaining teams consisted of educators contracted by universities and tertiary education providers. The competitive nature of the contracts meant that the teams went to extraordinary lengths to engage as many schools as possible. Being special educators the facilitators also ensured that the delivery of the programmes modelled the espoused inclusive theory. For four years schools had opportunities to accept frequent invitations to participate in a range of off-site and within-school special education workshops, seminars and activities supporting further development of policies and procedures and advocating for inclusion and responding to diversity.

The reverse effect

While the intention of the policy and the professional development programmes was to support schools to include students with disabilities, it seemed at times that the

attention now given to special education resulted in a reverse effect. During the SE2000 professional development some schools shared that they were feeling unsure, reticent or even angry about changes in legislation that made it obligatory for them to accept students with disabilities. Tomorrow's Schools had increased the power of parent opinion and many school staff expressed nervousness about the reactions of parents who feared that the presence of students with disabilities in mainstream classes would deprive their own children of valuable teacher time.

The label 'special' and the focus on the disabilities of the students had increased schools' fears about their ability to respond to these needs. This was not helped by a number of dissatisfactions arising from the complexities and fragmentation of the policy and the many facets of the funding (Wylie, 2000, p.30). The 'specialness' of special education was, and still is, further reinforced by the culture of 'acronymphylia' (Booth, 2003) prevalent in special education policies, programmes, literature and language of special educators. It seems that almost every role, funding initiative and intervention or teaching approach is referred to by a different acronym. This phenomena and fragmentation of the funding also meant that there was a variety of acronyms with which students could now be labelled to reflect their type of disability or entitlement to support. In order to compete for and access funding teachers and parents felt obliged to focus on and emphasise the inabilities and weaknesses of students. This further reinforced the deficit view associated with the medical model of disability that locates the problem with the student.

Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour

The history of the Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour

Teachers who were working in Guidance Learning Units at the time of the introduction of the SE2000 Policy were offered the option of becoming RTLB. School clusters were also offered the opportunity to use one of their allocated cluster (RTLB) positions to retain existing staff in a special class or experience unit within the cluster. This arrangement was intended to minimise the 'fallout' of job losses due to the disestablishment of attached units and to ease the transition process during the introduction of the SE2000 support provisions.

Special class, experience unit and mainstream teachers, particularly seasoned educators with experience or particular interests in special education were understandably attracted to RTLB positions. These positions came with funding, a computer and weekly release to participate in a tailor made government funded university programme that would result at the very least in a graduate diploma.

Many teachers and some Specialist Education Services (SES) staff capitalized on this opportunity to start or complete a degree course.

Initially RTLB were regarded by schools generally and principals in particular with some degree of scepticism. They were 'guilty by association' in that they were associated with one of only two school-funded initiatives under the SE2000 policy. The two initiatives – the Special Education Grant (SEG) and RTLB support – were regarded by many principals as inadequate compensations for including students with special needs. All the RTLB were in training and therefore unavailable to schools one day a week while they attended their university course. Further, they were unable to perform the 'magic' expected of them by the many who believed students with special needs had no place in mainstream classes. In the eyes of principals there were a number of issues associated with the RTLB service. These issues were outlined in "Picking up the Pieces, Review of Special Education 2000", (Wylie, 2000).

There are approximately 762 RTLB supporting primary, intermediate and secondary schools nationally with 230 of these working in the wider Auckland area (MOE, 2001b, p.2). RTLB are usually employed by one school board of trustees on behalf of a cluster of schools. Clusters are arranged geographically and teams are often located in rooms at one of the schools in the cluster to which they belong. Most RTLB are itinerant, working in approximately five to eight schools. However, in the case of schools with particularly high rolls and/or high numbers of students with special needs the RTLB may occasionally work exclusively in one school.

Each RTLB cluster comes under the governance and guidance of a management team, usually consisting of school principal/s, teacher parent, local Iwi and RTLB representatives and personnel with an interest or expertise in the field of special education. The role of the RTLB within the cluster is largely determined by the way the cluster management team has interpreted the Ministry of Education Guidelines (MOE, 2001a), the culture of the community and the perceived predominant special education needs of the cluster. Even within the same cluster the role of the individual RTLB may vary according to the expectations of each school, the principal's perceptions regarding their role, the personal strengths and interests of the RTLB and the way they respond to the needs of the schools in which they work.

RTLB working exclusively in one school or located by themselves in one school and working predominantly in that school are subject to considerable influence from the

management of that school. In these cases, because of the power the school principal has and variations in perceptions about the intended role of the RTLB, their roles can differ widely from colleagues working in the cluster to which they belong. This can have a marginalizing effect in that the issues and concerns related to their work are frequently different to those of their colleagues. This difference is further emphasised when they are placed in secondary schools. The four RTLB who are the focus of this research work in varying numbers of schools: two exclusively in a very small number of secondary schools and each of the other two in one secondary and several primary schools.

Many of the clusters hold regular cluster support meetings. RTLB also have access to supervisory support from GSE fieldworkers. At the outset of this research project neither of these structures was entirely meeting the support needs of the RTLB who responded to the invitation to form a learning support group. Wylie's concern that the "quality and quantity of SES [now known as GSE] supervision and support for RTLB (also) varies" (Wylie, 2000. p.92) still had relevance for some of these RTLB.. A pertinent feature (regarding GSE supervision) for this group is that GSE fieldworkers have responsibility for the supervision of RTLB in specific cluster teams. This is because the number of RTLB in any one area outnumbers GSE field workers available to provide supervision. In the case of all the RTLB involved in this project their cluster teams contain both primary and secondary RTLB. The support needs of RTLB working in secondary schools differ noticeably from the needs of RTLB working in primary schools and cannot be met effectively in supervision sessions that include both primary and secondary RTLB.

The role of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour

The Ministry of Education guidelines for the *Effective management and practice* of *Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour Clusters* outlines the role of the RTLB in the following manner:

An RTLB who is working effectively will:
- *Maintain and educational focus*
- *Assist teachers to develop inclusive classroom environments*
- *Support academic achievement and behaviour change/management*
- *Facilitate collaborative problem-solving*
- *Support individual students for brief periods to assist staff in establishing appropriate programmes*
- *Support systems analysis, review and development*
- *Use and support culturally appropriate practices*
- *Promote effective parent/caregiver/whanau and appropriate community involvement*

- *Work with teachers to adapt the curriculum Support education initiatives within the school*
- *Collaborate with other professionals and support services.*

(MOE, 2001a, p.5:2)

The role of the RTLB in the context of the secondary school differs widely from school to school. A number of factors have influenced the way the role has evolved: the policies of the schools employing the RTLB, the knowledge, experience, attitudes and values of the principals concerned, the needs of the school community and the strengths and interests of the RTLB. In many cases, however, the position is in essence a lonely one, with the RTLB trying to satisfy a number of contradicting and often conflicting expectations.

The role of each of the RTLB participating in this study differs from school to school and varies according to the number of schools they work in and the needs and resources within each school. The focus of the work of the learning group was primarily on how each RTLB responds to the needs within their secondary school/s.

Contradiction between expectations and effective practice

Secondary school RTLB are working in a challenging context. In addition to the conundrum outlined earlier in this chapter and inherent for anyone currently working in a special education role in secondary schools (Hough & Paine, 1997; Hargreaves, 2003), RTLB are also aware of, challenged by and significantly alienated from their school colleagues by a more personal dilemma created by differing perceptions about the RTLB role. They are still experiencing the expectation identified in evaluations by Wylie, (2000, p.92) and Bourke, Kearney, Poskitt and Mc Alpine, (2001, p.62) that they will work within the medical model of taking responsibility for and "fixing the student" rather than addressing an environment that is frequently failing to meet and often even creating or adding to the diverse needs of students.

> *There is mismatch between the intention of the RTLB service to provide support and advice, and the expectations of principals and teachers that RTLBs will take over the responsibility and one-to-one work with students with special needs on an ongoing basis, particularly in secondary schools which lost staff through the disestablishment of units.*
>
> (Wylie, 2000. p.92-93)

Many of the teachers and school management teams these people work with regard the RTLB role to be one of responding to teacher or school referrals of individual students. The expectation is that the RTLB should assess and 'fix' the learning and or behavioural difficulties associated with catering for these students in general education classes.

In contrast, the group members all share a belief that limiting the RTLB role to that of attempting a 'quick fix' intervention with individual students is very much a 'band aid' approach that brings little prospect of long-term solution or benefit either for the student or teacher. Aside from the frustrations arising from attempting to work within these contradictory paradigms the RTLB recognise the potential leadership role there is for them in modelling the desired values and attitudes that they hope will eventually effect a sustainable change in the adolescent world of secondary schools. RTLB are searching for ways to bridge the divide, establish meaningful connections, and to be more effective in supporting both students and teachers.

Issues related to the role of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour

Although it is now five years since the Wylie report many of the issues identified in it are still evident. Generally speaking though, RTLB, especially those working in the primary sector, are now enjoying much greater credibility with the schools they support. There are however, some issues cited by Wylie that remain pertinent to and a cause of concern for some RTLB working in secondary schools:

1. *The clusters were centrally determined and not always workable.*
2. *The onus for making clusters work fell to principals, with some having to make extraordinary efforts to pull together other principals who were used to operating autonomously.*
3. *Secondary schools are not used to itinerating support; and many would prefer on-site specialist support, or a definite time allocation...*
4. *There is sometimes a mismatch between the intention of the RTLB service to provide support and advice, and the expectations of principals and teachers that RTLBs will take over the responsibility and one-to-one work with students with special needs on an ongoing basis, particularly in secondary schools which lost staffing through disestablishment of units.*
5. *The failure of the severe behaviour initiative to provide support to the number of students it was expected to serve has eaten into RTLBs' own capacity, and involved them with more crisis-management and work with students with severe behavioural needs than intended...*
9. *Teachers expect RTLB to provide them with knowledge and skills additional to their own. The credibility of RTLBs varies.*

(Wylie, 2000, p.92-93)

Learning community

There are two potential learning community contexts central to this investigation. One is the context of secondary schools and the importance of the concept of schools as learning communities. The other is a small reflective practice group of professionals working together on an area of common interest and regarding themselves as a *learning community* or *community of practice*. Each of these contexts has critical relevance to the concerns that underpin this thesis about the need to increase the capacity of secondary schools to respond effectively to diversity.

The importance of schools as learning communities

In today's multicultural society, with increasing numbers of fragmented families, and accessibility of travel it is not uncommon for families to be spread across a number of countries. In spite of advances in technology, it appears that more and more students are experiencing a sense of dislocation and disconnection. Many students, especially those coming from dysfunctional families that are unable to fill their 'belonging' needs, are looking for that belonging in other contexts (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990). They are searching for a sense of belonging that provides meaningful, quality relationships with people whose acceptance of and caring for them are both founded on and reflected in social interactions.

For many years traditional, formally organised schools have sought to provide a sense of belonging to generations of students from the same families. However that sense of belonging only extended to those who had the same or similar beliefs, achieved the necessary 'standards' and behaved according to the norms established for that school. These norms were usually based on the beliefs, ideas and ideals of the dominant culture present at the school's inception but are no longer relevant in multi cultural city environments resulting in a dominance of diversity.

The concept of changing schools into learning communities is supported by an abundance of literature and an increasing number of evidence-based research projects. Sergiovanni (1994); Louis and Kruse (1995); Hough and Paine (1997); Andrews and Lewis (2002); Carrington and Elkins, (2002); Gideon, (2002); Huffman and Hipp, (2003), Fullan, (2003) and Hargreaves, (2003) are a few of the many, during the last decade, who provide convincing arguments for organizational changes and school-wide reforms to address the need to transform schools into communities of life-long learners. This solution is seen not only as a remedy for the missing sense of community for many students but also as a means of effective teaching practices.

Professional learning communities

The implications inherent in transforming schools from organizations to learning communities involve a change in the orientation of many secondary trained teachers. "The central argument for [the development of learning communities] is the presumed link between a school's organization and their purpose and ability to make meaningful changes in teacher effectiveness in classrooms" (Dilworth, 1998, cited by Timperley, 2004, p.4). Traditionally secondary teachers have been regarded as specialists in their subject field. Their status as expert holders of

knowledge related to the subject about which they are usually very passionate, and which is a significant aspect of their identity, is reinforced further by the exam orientation of the secondary school system. However, a learning community focus involves whole classes working collaboratively, developing meaningful and trusting relationships that foster reciprocal support, sharing and making knowledge together.

> *The change in paradigm is away from the teacher in his or her own classroom to the development of learning communities which value differences and support critical reflection and encourage members to question, challenge and debate teaching and learning issues.*
> (Peters, Dobbins & Johnson, 1996, cited by Mulford et al, 2004, p.2).

To this end there is another strand of research addressing the professional development and learning needs of the teachers. This is also resulting in convincing evidence that (professional) learning communities are "a key element of school capacity, a way of working, and the most powerful professional development and change strategy available for improving our educational system" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p.vii). The sustainability of these communities will "depend on the established professional communities' ability to create a broader school-wide' understanding of these new relationships. It also requires developing a new image of teacher and student in their workplace" (Andrews & Lewis, 2002, p.237). The general opinion is that whole school cultures need to "create a broader school-wide understanding of these new relationships" (ibid).

Many schools are already engaging in a range of models of professional development that involve reflection, collaboration and problem solving. Among these models are: quality learning circles, critical friends groups, reflective practice groups, and learning conversations. The degree of benefit teachers' are gaining from these models is dependent on a number of factors. These would include, the degree of support available through school organizational structures, the wider cultures of the school, the paradigm of management teams, the commitment of teachers and their ability to establish effective and caring working relationships. Underpinning this thesis is a belief that there is potential for RTLB to participate and, in some cases, provide leadership in the facilitation of these models. There is also potential for RTLB to support teachers in implementing the collaborative learning inherent in the processes (of the models) in the context of the classroom.

The recently released Springboards to Effective Practice (MOE, 2005c) contain key points gleaned from the Building Capability literature review completed by the Beazley Institute in 2004. This literature review gathered together extant

information and evidence related to effective teaching strategies and quality outcomes for students to inform an MOE funded professional learning and development and research programme now referred to as Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EEPiSE). Key findings of the literature review reflect evidence that "effective teachers use teaching practice to create a classroom environment that works as a learning community", (Alton-Lee, 2004; Thorburn, 1997, cited by MOE, 2005c). This notion (of learning community) is basic to this thesis.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS:

The volume and nature of the data resulting from the three dimensional aspect of this thesis has required a deviation from the traditionally accepted format for theses. The following is an outline of the structure of the thesis.

This chapter has provided an introduction to an investigation into the possibility of the concept of learning community being an effective response to the challenges of responding to diversity in secondary schools. The four contexts of the investigation - secondary schools, special education, Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour and learning communities – have been outlined. The sense in which these terms are used in the thesis is further defined in chapter two along with the background of the researcher and rationale for this thesis.

The investigation has utilised a number of strategies that have involved a blending of three paradigms – normative, interpretative and critical. Chapter three outlines these and provides a description of the research journey. This includes the ethical considerations and descriptions of the methods employed for gathering data.

Chapter four examines each of the nine sources of data. A description is provided of methods used to gather, collate, interpret and analyse the data. To facilitate ease of (reader) reference to examples or exerts of each source of data, they have been placed on pages facing the relevant descriptions.

Participants' quotes have been woven mainly into the three 'findings' chapters but are also, to a lesser degree, included in other chapters. They have been recorded in italics and, wherever possible, credited in the body of the text (*or in brackets*) to the relevant participant. When the quotes are the result of considerable discussion and represent the ideas, theories or feelings of the group as a whole they have

been credited to the group. In cases where the quotes might lead to the identification of the participant the credit has been recorded as '*(Anon)*'.

In preference to devoting one chapter to a literature review, this has been woven into chapters five, six and seven, each of which contain a different one of the three layers of learning that were the outcomes of the investigation.

The first of layer of learning relates to the findings about the group and group processes. They have been presented in chapter five where participants' perceptions about the features of a successful (learning) group are examined alongside the literature related to effective groups.

Power in relation to how it is experienced in the group and in the context of the classroom forms the basis of the second layer of findings. This and relevant literature have been examined in chapter six.

The third layer of findings was revealed, like reflections in a mirror, through the discourses of the group. These related in part to the functioning of the group but were mainly in relationship to the complexities of working in a special education role in secondary schools.

The eighth and final chapter provides a summary of the research process. The limitations of this particular study are identified along with a summary of each of the three strands of learning. A case is made for reframing or adjusting the paradigm of 'special' as it is currently understood in education circles in New Zealand. Suggestions for strategies to clarify the role of RTLB in secondary schools are also presented in conjunction with conclusions drawn from the findings of the investigation.

The focus of this thesis

This thesis focusses specifically on the RTLB's special educator, 'practitioner' perspectives of responding to the complex needs created by diversity in secondary schools. It does not include first hand recounts of teacher or student perspectives and the potential for examining these aspects is huge. Some of these perspectives have been or are currently being explored in a number of different New Zealand and international research projects recently completed or in progress. The questions underpinning the thesis relate specifically to the role of RTLB in initiating

and fostering the concept of learning communities as an answer to responding inclusively to diversity.

Each of the three layers of findings in this study has highlighted possible areas for further and ongoing investigation. These aspects are discussed in greater detail in chapter eight.

SUMMARY

This chapter has set the scene for the thesis. The research questions have been explained and an outline has been provided for each of the four contexts in which the thesis is located. An overview of the structure of the thesis has been provided with reasons for deviating from the usually accepted format.

The following chapter elaborates further on the context of the thesis by defining the concepts of diversity, special education and learning community as they are used in the thesis. It also provides the reader with the rationale for the proposal that the notion of learning community might be one solution to the challenge of responding effectively to diversity.

CHAPTER TWO:
DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter defines the key concepts underpinning the investigation and introduces the notion of a small learning community providing one context for addressing concerns outlined in chapter one. The original idea for establishing the learning group that became the catalyst for this thesis arose out of a small research project and a number of work related activities. Underlying both the research and the activities was the growing concern discussed in chapter one about the difficulties many secondary schools are experiencing as they attempt to be both inclusive and effective.

There is a potential for RTLB to support and facilitate of small learning communities in secondary schools. This could provide one means of establishing realistic expectations and clarifying misperceptions about the RTLB role. It might also assist in demystifying the 'special' in special education and in developing schools' capacity to respond effectively to the increasingly diverse needs of their students and staff. These concepts are defined in order to set the scene for the remainder of the thesis

DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

Three interrelated concepts underpin this thesis. They are: diversity, special education and learning community. This section defines how these concepts underpin the discussion in this thesis and guide the direction of the investigation.

Diversity

The term *Diversity* is used through the thesis to convey the notion of difference and heterogeneity in the same sense as used in the Best Evidence Synthesis where diversity:

> "... rejects the notion of a 'normal' group and 'other' or minority groups of children and constitutes diversity and difference as central to the classroom endeavour and central to the focus of quality teaching in Aotearoa, New Zealand."
>
> (Alton-Lee, 2003, p.12).

The use of the term in this way is anchored firmly on a personal belief - in the equality of all people regardless of age, gender, race, religion, ability or material wealth. A lifetime of teaching experience has affirmed this belief and related it to an

understanding that teaching strategies proven to be effective for students with impairments are also effective in teaching able students[3].

Special education

As outlined in chapter one, considerable changes have taken and continue to take place in special education since the 1989 Education Act and especially, since the introduction in 1996 of the Special Education 2000 Policy - now referred to as the Special Education Policy.

> *There is an evolving concept of what constitutes special education, who is responsible for educating students with special needs, what sort of education they should receive and where they should receive it.*
>
> (Fraser, et al, 2000, p.30)

During the SE2000 professional development programmes *special education* was defined as:

> *The provision of extra assistance, adapted programmes and/or modified learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support children and young people in a range of education settings.*

At this time, students with special needs were regarded as those who needed:

> *A significant change in programmes and/or additional resources to benefit from their learning environment.*
>
> (MOE, 1999)

And the programme changes or resources were considered necessary when the learner had:

> *Special developmental needs such as difficulty:*
> * *Looking after themselves*
> * *Coping physically*
> * *Getting on with others*
> * *Understanding and communicating.*
>
> (MOE, 1999)

These definitions, used by all of the teams delivering the SE2000 professional development programme, were similar to definitions current in the United States of America, Scotland and England. While they were based on the principles of equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and economy, they all reflected the deficit medical paradigm of that time, locating the disability and the need for change with the student rather than the environment - viewing diversity as a problem not a resource.

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[3] An overview of the researcher's background is provided in Appendix 2.

A clear message about the need to change this paradigm was evident following the introduction of The New Zealand Disability Strategy (MOH, 2001), which clearly stated that:

> New Zealand will be inclusive when people with impairments can say they live in "A society that values our lives and continually enhances our full participation"   (MOH, 2001, p.5)

Objective Three of the Disability Strategy (MOH, 2001, p.11) was to:

> Provide the best education for disabled people – Improve education so that all children, youth and adult learners will have equal opportunities to learn and develop in their local, regular educational centres.

Shortly after the introduction of the Disability Strategy in N.Z, there was evidence that a shift in paradigm was already happening in the U.K. This was also reflected in the Index for Inclusion and summed up in the definition for inclusion as:

> The process of increasing participation in and decreasing exclusion from the culture, curricula and community of mainstream schools.
> (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.3)

The move towards this change had begun some years earlier, not only in UK but also in Australia, Canada and U.S.A. The Index for Inclusion was the result of trials that had taken place in six U.K. schools between 1997–99. These trials were developed as a result of the work of Yola Center working out of Macquarie University, Australia, and Luanna Meyer and colleagues at Syracuse University, U.S.A.

With this change in focus from the pathology of one student to whole school learning environments, also came the move to evidence-based research and a number of research and evaluation projects focussing on education issues. A series of evaluations of the SE2000 Policy initiatives sought and brought together the opinions of the various stakeholder groups involved in special education. These reports highlighted the need to examine critically the effectiveness of current provisions and to develop a greater understanding of inclusive teaching and learning strategies.

In the period since then a host of research projects have focussed on various aspects of teaching and learning. Among them, Alton-Lee's (2003) Best Evidence Synthesis, focussed on "Quality teaching as ... a key lever for high quality outcomes for diverse students". This synthesis identified "ten characteristics of quality teaching derived from a synthesis of findings of evidence linked to student outcomes" Second among these findings was that:

> *Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groups to work as caring, inclusive and cohesive learning communities.*
>
> (Alton-Lee, 2003, p.3)

Currently the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EEPiSE) project involves forty-nine schools working in either action learning, or an action learning and research framework to discover what constitutes effective strategies and resources to meet the needs of students perceived by schools as requiring significant adaptation to the curriculum.

Similarly, during this time, a number of evidenced-based projects also focussing on effective teaching strategies and what constitutes inclusive pedagogy have been facilitated in UK over the last three or four years. The findings in these studies have also reinforced the importance of pedagogy defined as

> *What one needs to know and the skills one needs to command in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted...*
>
> (Florian & Rouse, 2005a, p.11)

In discussing the findings from four of the UK projects Florian and Rouse (2005b) reported that very similar issues and challenges had been identified in UK to those still present in New Zealand. Key among these is:

- Lack of clarity about what constitute special education needs
- Competing models of disability
- Contradictory policies
- Different views of inclusion across the system.

These findings not only affirm the findings and focus of NZ studies but also demonstrate the way the progress and mistakes we make in special education in NZ follows larger countries like U.K, U.S.A and Australia. Most heartening however, is the full extent of the change in paradigm from locating the problem with the child to moving the focus onto the capacity of schools to respond effectively to diversity. This is reflected in the updated definition of special education:

> *It is not the differences among children, their characteristics or upbringing that is problematic but when the magnitude of these differences exceeds what schools can accommodate that children are considered to have special needs.*
>
> (Florian & Rouse, 2005b, p.12)

This change in paradigm and the findings in evidence-based research relating to what constitutes quality teaching more than imply – they necessitate - reforms that

include changes to funding mechanisms, school and community cultures, school systems and teaching and learning methods. The researchers referred to above are few of the many providing evidence that the way to achieve these changes is to develop whole school learning communities where all students are valued and provided with opportunity to be contributing members.

Learning community

The concept of 'learning community' is central to the discussion in this thesis. In broadest terms it is used in the sense of it being a group of people connected by a common interest in learning, working together to further that interest. Each of the three contexts outlined in chapter one could be regarded as a learning community. Secondary education, special education and the RTLB service might all be regarded as one community, with the common interest of secondary age students with special needs as their focus of work. Likewise each of these contexts could be perceived as a separate learning community, made up of a series of smaller learning communities depending on their focus.

This investigation is specifically related to two different categories or types of learning community - secondary schools and small learning groups or professional communities of practice.

> The need for community is universal. A sense of belonging, of continuity, of being connected to others and to ideas and values that make our lives meaningful and significant – these needs are shared by all of us.
>
> (Sergiovanni, 1994, p.xiv)

In defining schools as communities, Sergiovanni (1994) highlights the contrast between practices in organisations and those in communities. This contrast is reflected in the quality and type of relationships. In schools functioning as organisations people have their relationships defined by the structures and the hierarchical systems that define roles and responsibilities. In schools that are learning communities, people are united by common values, attitudes and beliefs that create a kinship of mind. These relationships are characterised by caring, acceptance, support and sharing.

Authentic learning communities in secondary schools would move away from teaching and learning that traditionally has been "perceived as fragmented, subject based and academically oriented; reliant on text books; with a lack of student collaboration and active involvement in learning..." (Kruse, 1996, cited by Hawk & Hill, 2004, p.5).

This would involve a:

> *Philosophical commitment to allowing students' learning needs to determine the learning process and where students are actively involved in the learning process (they learn <u>with</u> the teacher rather than having the learning done <u>to</u> them).*
>
> (Hawk & Hill, 2004, p.5 & 6)

The group that is the focus of this research project is a small learning community. It might also be regarded as a *Community of Practice* in that it is:

> *A group of people who share concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.*
>
> (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.4)

Integral to the concepts of both *learning community* and *community of practice* is the notion of 'community'. It is this sense of community that creates the affinity between people, provides the belonging factor integral to well being and to a person's identity. A sense of *community* also provides the framework within which learning can take place. It provides the structure for the interactions of its members, a forum for establishing and growing relationships, developing responsibilities, identifying common understandings, sharing and making new knowledge ongoing basis (Wenger et al, 2002, p.34).

RATIONALE FOR THIS THESIS

This thesis is motivated by a strong belief that developing school wide cultures of learning communities is one of many much needed steps towards meeting the challenges created by the increasingly diverse composition of our school communities. This belief is grounded in personal and professional experiences in a wide range of educational contexts. Among these are the recent experiences of facilitating a small learning group to support four RTLB in their role in secondary schools.

During 2003 I, completed a small (unpublished) research project (Guild, 2003), Ownership of Learning, that explored how teacher values, attitudes and beliefs might be influenced to result in increased student participation in, and contribution to, the learning process. Inclusive teaching strategies were used to facilitate activities that provided teachers with opportunities to share their ideas about ownership of learning. This was successful in not only changing teacher beliefs about learning but also in strengthening what was already a 'community of learners'. The teachers who participated reported that the opportunity to experience a student's perspective of effective teaching strategies gave them a

greater understanding of the students they teach and the importance of using strategies that engage students in the learning process (Guild, 2003).

The positive outcomes of this project further affirmed a hunch I had that participation in a successful small learning community might become a catalyst for each of the RTLB to facilitate similar groups either in the context of their RTLB clusters or within the schools where they worked.

I also realised that:

> *The model of professional development explored during this project was only one component of what needs to happen. School-wide changes to values and attitudes are required in order to develop collaborative learning communities. In addition to any professional development and learning programmes, individual and practical assistance needs to be provided to support teachers, while they develop the skills and understandings necessary to sustain long-term changes in their practice*
> (Guild, 2003, p.75)

The obvious person to provide this school-based support is the RTLB, especially in schools yet to develop collaborative problem solving among their teaching teams.

Meeting diverse needs in secondary schools

In spite of ongoing debate about their primacy the "dual dimensions of care and valuing of diversity are core features of a learning community" (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. 28). Their relevance for effective teaching and improved student achievement highlights the importance of transforming schools from traditional *'discovered knowledge'* to inclusive *'knowledge made'* cultures. In New Zealand there are a number of government and university funded evidence-based research projects investigating teaching and learning strategies that meet the wide range of diverse needs now present in New Zealand schools. Many of these and international evidence-based research projects are producing ongoing evidence that:

> *The development of inclusive practices involves processes of social learning that occur within particular contexts. It is about those within a school working together more effectively, using various forms of evidence about existing practices in order to think creatively about how to address barriers experienced by some learners.*
> (Ainscow et al, 2003, p.3).

Not only is this born out in international literature but also in recent New Zealand (evidence-based) research projects such as: Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara (SEMO) (Robinson, V., Timperley, H., & Bullard, T., 2001); The Understanding Teaching and Learning Project (Alton-Lee & Nuthal, 1998); The Best Evidence Synthesis (Alton-Lee, 2003); Te Kōtahitanga, (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai

& Richardson, 2003); Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EEPiSE), O'Brien et al, 2004). These projects confirm the pertinence of international literature for the New Zealand context and visa versa. They also provide relevant evidence of the importance and effectiveness of a range of different learning communities in responding to the increasingly diverse needs within New Zealand schools.

Developing professional learning communities

"The central argument for [the development of learning communities] is the presumed link between a school's organization and their purpose and ability to make meaningful changes in teacher effectiveness in classrooms" (Dilworth, 1998, cited by Timperley, 2004, p.4).

The importance of developing school-wide professional learning communities is reinforced in a number of features identified in evidence-based research, as contributing to the effectiveness of professional learning communities. In a review of the theory of professional learning communities there are five variables that had been commonly identified in the literature as "distinctive of and critical to strong professional learning communities":

1. A focus on student learning that leads to student achievement
2. Collaboration to develop skills and share knowledge
3. The teachers engage in deprivatizing practice - activities like peer coaching, team teaching, classroom observations
4. Reflective dialogue that develops understandings and includes examining assumptions related to teaching and learning
5. Shared values and expectations about children, learning, teaching and teacher's roles (Louis & Marks, 1996) cited by Timperley, 2004, p.4).

The following three recommendations relevant to learning communities are among fourteen propositions identified in the Enhancing Effective Practice in Special Education (EEPiSE): A Pilot Study (O'Brien et al, 2004, p.56), as contributing to effective outcomes for students:

- *Ongoing professional development that is self initiated within the school community*
- *Action-based research that informs practice and reflects the unique needs of the school community*
- *A whole school approach to policies and practices that facilitate diversity as it affects student growth, development and acceptance.*

Clarifying the role of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour

The provision of professional learning activities and support for school staff provides an appropriate context and opportunities for RTLB to model inclusive values and attitudes. RTLB recognise that a key aspect of their role involves working with classroom teachers to develop teaching practices that will meet the diverse needs of the students within their classrooms. This "agentistic" stance is held by many RTLB and highlights for classroom teachers the differences in the attitudes, values and beliefs of the inclusive paradigm of RTLB in comparison with the deficit model that locates the need for change with the individual student. The underlying implications for teachers in terms of teaching expectations often stimulate defensive and even resistive reactions towards the RTLB. This 'resistance' was the first and most significant of nine key barriers identified in the 2001 evaluation of the RTLB initiative (Bourke et al, 2001, p.59) and it is still prevalent, particularly for secondary RTLB. There is a need to support RTLB in developing a resilience that will provide the emotional and intellectual safety needed for them to survive in this atmosphere.

The secondary school staff room is a particularly daunting platform for professional development activities. Most secondary teachers, by their own admission, regard themselves as 'subject' specialists. In many cases (the nature of) their passion for the subject in which they specialise, and the increasing pressures (to cover prescribed amounts of curriculum content) created by the secondary school 'exam and National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) oriented' system reinforce the necessity of teachers' focus on teaching subjects. Often these pressures also preclude the time and energy needed to explore, trial and build into their teaching repertoire differentiated teaching strategies or modified resources to meet the diverse needs of individual students. This comment is not intended as a criticism of secondary teachers. Rather it is recognition that the 'subject' focus evidenced in their praxis is the result of a very genuine passion for, and specialist ability in, that subject. The subject is key to the 'teaching' person that they are (Apps, 1996).

Learning community schools where people are accustomed to reflecting, sharing, collaborative teaming and problem solving would provide climates more receptive to participation by RTLB. Their inclusion in small learning groups within the school could be the vehicle needed to allow them to work in partnership with teachers to further develop inclusive classroom cultures.

SUMMARY

Underlying this investigation is a growing concern discussed in chapter one about the difficulties many secondary schools are experiencing as they attempt to be both inclusive and effective. The key concepts underpinning the investigation are diversity, special education and learning community. This chapter has defined how these concepts are used in the thesis in relation to the literature and introduced the notion of a small learning community providing one context for addressing those concerns.

The potential for RTLB to support and possibly even facilitate small learning communities in secondary schools would provide a means of establishing realistic expectations and clarifying misperceptions about the RTLB role. It might also assist in demystifying the 'special' in special education and in developing schools' capacity to respond effectively to the increasingly diverse needs of their students. These concepts are outlined in greater detail to set the scene for the remainder of the thesis. Chapter three outlines the methodological framework, describes the journey of the group that became the vehicle for the investigation and the methods used to gather the data.

CHAPTER THREE:
THE RESEARCH APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodological framework of the investigation, describes the research journey and the methods used to gather the data. This project used a variety of qualitative approaches and research methods. These are described and compared with approaches used in similar projects. A rationale is provided for the methods chosen. The ethical considerations are identified and discussed. These included the need for preserving anonymity of the participants and schools, the multiple roles of the researcher and the researcher's various relationships with the participants and their work contexts.

The features of the research process are described with an explanation as to how a small learning group became the vehicle for conducting this investigation. The people who are the focus of this case study are also introduced along with the story of how their working partnerships in school contexts resulted in the forming of a small learning group. The process of the 'growing' of the group that is the focus of this study is outlined with an explanation of how it became a vehicle for investigating issues and constraints related to working in secondary schools.

THE RESEARCH APPROACH

This research project did not begin with a deliberately chosen or planned research approach. The methodology grew in response to the needs of the investigation and was shaped by the desire to capitalise on all opportunities to gather data and employ methods best suited and to answer the research question. 'Methodology' is used here in the sense of it being "a way of thinking about and studying social reality" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.4) with the "aim of helping us to understand, in the broadest possible terms" ….the process. (Kaplan 1973, cited by Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.43). Just as Clough and Nutbrown, (2002, p.17) suggest, the research methods have been "constructed (for particular purposes) rather than selected (for any general usefulness)".

A blending of paradigms

In broad terms this is a social, qualitative, evidenced-based investigation conducted within an educational context and sitting within a blending of paradigms that are predominantly interpretative and critical. However there is also a quantitative

element to the methods employed to gather, interpret and analyse the data that was examined for frequency of recurring concepts in order to identify key themes arising out of the investigation. When the study is considered against the "differing approaches of behaviour" outlined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2000, p.33) it has elements of all three paradigms – normative, interpretative and critical.

There are normative elements to the study, in that it is about "society and the social system" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.33) within secondary schools and learning groups. The underlying rationale for this investigation was the identification of an urgent need for further development of cultures of inclusion in secondary schools. This required examination of the social system within two contexts – secondary schools and special education. Putting the interactions and relationships between members of a small learning group under the 'research microscope' became a vehicle for exposing the complexities arising from participants' interactions in the secondary school context.

"Generalisations have been drawn from specifics and explanations are offered for the causes of some phenomena" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.33). Common facts and features evident in participants' experiences in each of the three contexts for the investigation – the group, the role of RTLB and special education in secondary schools - have been identified and then compared with relevant literature and policies to offer generalisations or explanations for some of the occurrences.

However, there are also significantly interpretative features to the investigation. It is a "small-scale (single case study), subjective" investigation. The "personal involvement and practical interest of the researcher has arisen out of a life-long interest" in special education (Cohen et al, 2000, p.33). Interactions with people employed in each of the three contexts of the study are pivotal to the researcher's work role and that work is motivated by the same ideals as those underpinning the investigation.

The normative features are further reinforced by an element of "investigating the taken for granted" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.33) which happened at two levels. The group (which included the researcher) explored, teased out, unpacked the complexities of the RTLB role in secondary and special education contexts and the researcher observed investigated and analysed the functioning of the group. The study is also riddled with what Cohen et al (2000), refer to as "micro- concepts: individual perspective, constructs, negotiated meanings, definitions of situations"

(p.33) in that a significant portion of the data includes both participants' and researcher's perceptions.

There is also a significant element of the critical paradigm as prescribed by Cohen et al, (2000, p. 33) in that both the researcher and the participants have a strong "emancipatory interest" in the study and there are a very significant "political, ideological factors and power and interest shaping behaviours" involved. The establishment of the group (that is the focus of the case study) and the initiation of the investigation have both been motivated by the participants' and the researcher's passion for bridging the gulf between espoused theory (inclusive ideology) and theory in practice in three political contexts – secondary schooling, special education and the role of RTLB.

Yet another similarity between this study and factors identified by Cohen et al as being indicative of the critical model is the multiple roles of the researcher – in this case: researcher, facilitator, participant, action researcher and practitioner.

Evidenced-based research
In keeping with recent research practices in New Zealand education circles, especially projects commissioned by the MOE, this is evidenced-based research. It is an amalgamation of an eclectic range of data gathering techniques within a mini evidence–based framework. The term "evidence-based" is used here in the sense that it is systematic - "a piece of research in its own right... using explicit and transparent methods" and the outcomes "include the perspectives of stakeholders" (Oakley, 2002, p.280), The outcomes are the result of the intersection between the findings arising not only as a result of incorporating views and opinions of expert practitioners, researcher and literature, but also including those of RTLB - one of the three groups of stakeholders within the context at the centre of the investigation. There are limitations however, in that the project does not include first hand views and opinions of the remaining two (of the three) groups of stakeholders in the research context – the students and the teachers.
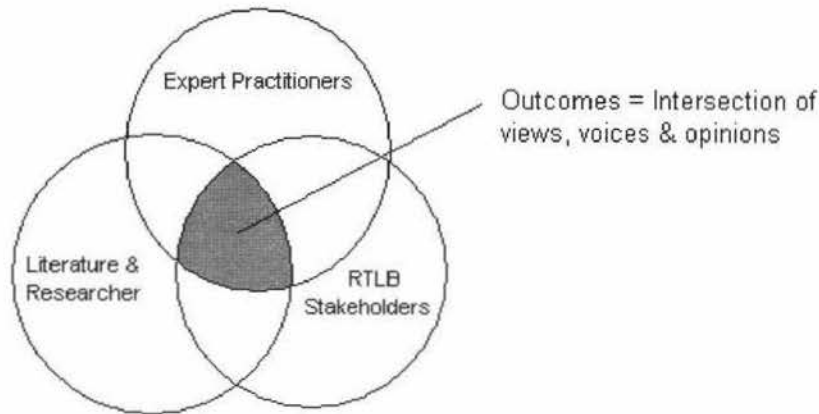
Diagram1: Applying the evidence-based model to this investigation

While the initial focus of the research was the impact (for RTLB) of their participation in a small learning group, there are two additional but extremely significant dimensions of the inquiry. These were the role of the RTLB in secondary schools and the issues and complexities of working in this context. They evolved as a natural consequence of the interactions of the group. They were the result of the ongoing dialogue that happened among the members of the group. Like Nutbrown (2002) "I learned that these women were the 'data'. They created new knowledge through connective discourse, as they listened and spoke together" (p.74). This discourse became a mirror that reflected the collective experiences and beliefs that inform the way RTLB in secondary schools do their job and highlighted the complexities of their role and their work contexts. These 'reflections' were inherent in the impact for the participants and therefore impossible to exclude from the analysis and outcomes.

The timeframe of the research process

The official data-gathering period was one school year – from February to December 2004. During this time the different contexts, in which the participants and the researcher worked, shaped both the activities of a small learning group and the methods employed to gather the data. It is important to recognise that the data has also been influenced by the experiences in education contexts during the lifetimes of both participants and the researcher. If participants' and researcher's personal schooling experiences are included in this timeframe, it is a period spanning more than fifty years.

THE PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Partnerships between Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour and the Ministry of Education: Special Education

At the time of this investigation the role of Enhanced Programme Funding (EPF) adviser resulted in my working with schools that are recognised both by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the schools themselves as having disproportionate numbers of students with special needs. A common feature of these schools (and the criteria for EPF adviser support) is that there is a perception (both in the schools and within GSE) that they would benefit from review and further development of their systems for identifying and responding to students with special needs. It is the EPF adviser's role to facilitate the review process with the school.

Prior to beginning EPF work with a school a meeting is arranged with the principal, the person responsible for coordinating special education support – often referred to as the special education needs coordinator or SENCO, the RTLB and any GSE fieldworkers currently working in the school. In addition to ensuring everyone understands the nature and limitations of the EPF role, this meeting is primarily to familiarise with the special character of the school, to identify the school's needs and to plan how we might best work together to meet those needs.

RTLB are included in this discussion and in the subsequent review process with the school because their (RTLB) role is integral to the process. They have a key role in the school systems about to be reviewed and are better able to perform this role if the school has effective processes for responding to diversity. Because they have an ongoing role in the schools, and also work within a framework of inclusive and collaborative pedagogy, they have the understanding required in order to support the schools to implement plans for further development that arise out of the review process.

Some of the schools beginning the review process have not yet integrated RTLB into their support systems. Others are relying on the RTLB as the first and only 'port of call' when teachers look for support with students whose needs are not being met by the regular classroom programme. Including the RTLB in the review process reinforces the role of RTLB in school systems and provides schools with first hand experience of the positive outcomes that can result from the sharing of "diversity of experience, perspectives, values, abilities and interests" (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 2002, p.7).

The underlying principles, practice, skills and knowledge of RTLB are often similar to those underpinning the review process. Therefore the RTLB are often able to participate actively, in the modelling of a collaborative and problem solving team approach. This involves a range of school and support personnel all "working towards a common goal" (Snell & Janney, 2000, p.3), helping each other by each bringing together different perspectives to create a positive interdependence among the collaborators who share skills, knowledge and resources (Rainforth & York-Barr, 1997; Snell & Janney, 2000; Dettmer et al, 2002). To ensure that the RTLB understand the EPF adviser role and the intentions underpinning the (EPF) programme, every effort is made to either include them in the meeting with the school or to meet with them prior to beginning the review process in a school.

While it would be ideal for all staff to be included in the entire review process, the time required for this is beyond the resources of most schools. Usually the alternative is to facilitate a two-step process. The first step is a review with a small core team of people representing the various groups involved in the process (for example, the deputy or assistant principal, special education needs coordinator, guidance counsellor, deans, and senior teachers or faculty heads). The review process involves extensive scrutiny of the school systems to ensure the school is capitalising on every opportunity to develop positive relationships and to identify and respond to the diverse needs of their students. The result of this first step is the development of a draft flowchart reflecting the review team's perceptions of the school's current process and identifying possible areas fror further development. The second step involves taking the draft flowchart to the whole school staff and asking for their input. Underpinning this process is the expectation that the desired outcome is an inclusive system, understood, acknowledged and practised by all staff. A system that fosters a partnership between school, student, family, whānau, and caregivers and, in some cases, includes specialist assistance to meet the differing needs of all students (Guild & Espiner, 2005).

Capitalising on an opportunity

Towards the end of 2003 I realised that the following year I would be working in a number of secondary schools. Previous interactions meant I was also aware of the work the RTLB were already doing in these schools and the constraints they were experiencing in relation to working in a secondary school context. I recognised the potential for reciprocal support among the RTLB in these schools. I also realised the potential for each school to benefit from the learning that was happening in schools that were facing similar challenges to their own. One of the questions I am most

frequently asked by secondary schools is: "What are other (secondary) schools doing?" With these factors in mind, and to gauge interest in forming a small shared learning group, I invited a number of RTLB who were working in secondary schools to meet together.

Here was an opportunity to set up a small learning community that, if considered successful by the participants, might encourage and support them to facilitate similar learning communities within their schools or RTLB clusters. Additionally, one of the invited RTLB had been facilitating a project to trial a model of working one-to-one with teachers to assist them in using cooperative learning and reciprocal teaching techniques in the classroom. There was considerable potential to use these two approaches as a foundation for developing professional learning models to support teachers in sharing and further developing effective teaching strategies.

While there are many RTLB working in secondary schools, these specific people were invited because they all work in schools common to my own (EPF) work. I already had a working partnership with each of them in relation to their work in one or more secondary schools. Each had expressed feelings of isolation in relationship to the nature of their work roles. Additionally, in the course of interacting with them in their work contexts, I recognised that there was limitless potential for shared learning and mutual support among them. The common values and beliefs underpinning their practice provided an ideal foundation for growing a support network.

It was my hope that these RTLB would agree to work together as a small 'learning community' providing reciprocal support to develop and facilitate professional learning in each of the schools where they worked. I was also hopeful that this would lead to the group further developing generic models of professional development that could be adapted for a range of contexts, especially secondary. In addition to increasing teacher capability to respond to diversity in the classroom, it was my intention that the underlying agenda would be for the professional development models to have a positive influence on teacher values, attitudes and beliefs about the learning process – for teachers to discover the importance, value and benefits of facilitating student participation in and contribution to the learning process.

As is the case with most RTLB, each was responding to the needs of the school community in a different way and capitalising on the special characteristics of the

Diagram 2   **Participants' Introductions**

Kia Ora, I'm Kara

Perhaps I can best be described as a 53 year old RTLB. Previous educational experience includes 23 years primary teaching at all levels from Year 1 to Year 8. In addition to this I also did supply teaching at an American-run International School in Hong Kong for two years. I moved from the classroom to a job as an RTLB, six years ago. The first year was spent in a sub cluster with one other RTLB, dividing time between 2 decile 1 schools and a decile 10 school – all primary. For the last 5 years I have been in a cluster comprising 20 schools with 7 other RTLB. Within this cluster, decile ratings range from 3 – 10, and within this mix, there are 4 secondary schools.

Hi, I'm Serena,

I am a primary trained teacher with 25 years experience in primary and secondary schools both in NZ and overseas. My overseas experiences include a number of roles that have provided opportunities to work with a wide range of diverse cultures. When I completed my RTLB training I continued doing uni work part time and recently graduated with a Masters in Education with Honours.

I believe that education in the 21st Century is about learning and teaching skills that will help us negotiate the huge diversity of environments and pathways in our future lives. We need to be inclusive, strengths-based and relationship focused, walking the talk of our values and beliefs. We have a long way to go to get beyond nice sounding words.

Hi, I'm Denise.

I have been working in both primary and secondary schools as an RTLB for the past 5 years. My main focus and particular interest in the secondary school has been in the area of behaviour management and developing systems that support restorative practices. At times this work has been frustrated by the constraints of the system and the reluctance to change a way of thinking. However I believe that it has been worth the persistence.

As I live and work in a small community I see many of the 'at risk' students in the community and, through other support groups, have been able to look at how agencies can provide services more effectively. I have gained confidence through participating in the group as we all seem to be working from a strength-based approach. This has helped me to work within the system in ways that maximise my strengths.

As an RTLB I have been fortunate to work with senior management teams who allow me to be flexible in the way I work and are open to proposals re systems change and new initiatives. I enjoy this aspect of my job and through the group have been able to increase my knowledge. The shared experiences of the group have been extremely valuable. The collegial support both at a professional and personal level that the group has provided has been very important and appreciated.

Hello, I'm Pamela

I am currently an RTLB who has worked in schools for over twenty years. My educational experience has included teaching and been across Primary and Secondary schools. I have worked in mainstream and special education. My work is driven by a strong belief in social justice and that people count. I believe that, with support, people can change and that problems are opportunities to learn and grow.

schools in which they worked. But, in each case, they recognised that their work was very much in jeopardy owing to: the size of the task, misperceptions about their roles, lack of adequate support and the differing attitudes and beliefs of the teachers. They were experiencing firsthand the fallout occurring with many teachers as they struggle to come to terms with the changes needed to survive in an ever increasing knowledge society (Sergiovanni, 1994; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2003).

The RTLB who came to the first support group meeting were united in their concerns about the limitations of the traditional method teaching practices to meet the wide range of diverse needs currently evident in many of the secondary school classrooms.

(A short personal introduction provided by each of these women can be found in Diagram 2, on the facing page. Pseudonyms have been used in place of participants' actual names).

Many of the students who are referred for RTLB support would be well catered for within their schools if they were the caring, inclusive, cohesive learning communities referred to in the Best Evidence Synthesis (Alton-Lee, 2003). It is often the case that schools believe and espouse the values, and have policies outlining the necessity of providing a safe learning environment but, sadly, the reality for both students and staff is frequently far from safe. The challenge of meeting the escalating curricula and assessment demands in addition to responding to the increasingly diverse range of student needs is frequently too complex for teachers or schools to manage effectively.

A fellow GSE fieldworker, Wilma was also invited to the initial meeting. She had a number of connections with members of the group and shared concerns similar to my own regarding the complexities of working in secondary schools. At the time of the first group meeting Wilma was working closely with one of the RTLB and the teachers and families of students in two schools common to them both.

The coming together of this group happened prior to the group initiating the decision to make itself a focus for research. By the time the data-gathering period was completed, the role of the group in the research project had changed from being the sole focus of the investigation to that of being a vehicle for exploring a number of aspects related to the complexities of RTLB working in secondary schools. However, the actual process of becoming a group still has considerable

significance in the outcomes of this investigation and for this reason I have recorded the progress of the group's development. The following is the story of the 'growing' of the group.

The coming together of the group

Previous experience in facilitating professional development had proven to me the importance of using facilitation strategies that 'walk the talk' by modelling the values and attitudes underpinning the topic they are teaching. As I was interested in the possibility of group members replicating learning communities in their schools, it was essential that these values, attitudes and beliefs be identified and discussed. One of the characteristics of a successful learning community or team is a shared vision, - a vision founded on common values, attitudes and beliefs. As the learning community grows and changes so will the vision – but the core values that underpin the vision will be a continual point of reference as the learning community adapts and changes in response to the needs of the members, (Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994; Hord, 1997b; Hough & Paine, 1997; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Snell & Janney, 2000).

It was also essential that the group functioned in a manner that reflected collaborative teaming and problem solving strategies. In order for the group to become and work as a collaborative learning group, some team building first needed to take place. I believed it was important, and an essential aspect of team building, that the group have opportunity to define itself - for the members to get to know each other and to find some common ground on which to pitch the 'group tent'. The participants needed the opportunity to identify values, attitudes and beliefs common to all members, to shape a group vision and develop a plan of action.

I recognise that in making this decision I was bringing a key aspect of myself to the research by indulging a personal passion – for process. Like Nutbrown (2003) I felt that it was the process that seemed most important. One of my original motivations for inviting the group to come together was the hope that we would work together to produce models of professional learning that could be generically recorded and used by schools to further develop the culture of learning community. Even as early as the first session the interaction among the members, the passion and depth of discussion that this generated, highlighted for me the importance of the process (of the 'coming together') of this group. It was the value of the process that initiated

the idea of exploring the possibility that it would have an impact on what happened for participants outside the context of the group.

Developing the group vision

This foundation building of the group happened over three meetings each of two hours duration. The first part of the meeting was devoted to taking time to 'connect' with and get to know each other. Participants shared information about themselves, their work context and their RTLB clusters. During the remainder of the meeting a process of *graphic facilitation,* (Sibbett, 1981) was used to develop, record, and reinforce participants' ownership of the evolving vision of the group. This process involves using colour, words and images in a layout on a large wall chart that captures the concepts arising out of and developed through the conversation (Horn, 1998). The technique encourages participants to contribute to discussions and stimulates development of dialogue in a modality that allows the participants to visually track the development of concepts thereby fostering whole group ownership of the resulting vision. The end result in this case was a diagram that reflects the common values, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations and action plan of the group.

(Diagram 3 on the following page contains the vision with names of schools and identifying features removed).

The vision was recorded in the form of a circle of five koru. This particular template was adapted from the (circle of arrows) template provided by the Ministry of Education, as a strategic planning guide for schools, in their *Planning for Better Student Outcomes* (MOE, 2003). Each aspect of the group's vision - the goals, method, action-plan and ideas were recorded in a different koru. The common values attitudes and beliefs that underpin the work of all members of the group were recorded in the middle of the circle. The following is an explanation of the ideas developed by the group as it developed the vision reflected in the diagram. *(Italics reflect statements taken directly from the vision or 'group' understandings arrived at during the planning of the vision.)*

The common values, attitudes and beliefs

Initial discussions identified the values attitudes and beliefs common to all the members of the group. A strong valuing of diversity underpins the work of all members. The RTLB see this as involving them in considerable risk taking, collaboration and problem solving that builds bridges to connect students, families, school and support agencies. Members saw a need to further develop methods that
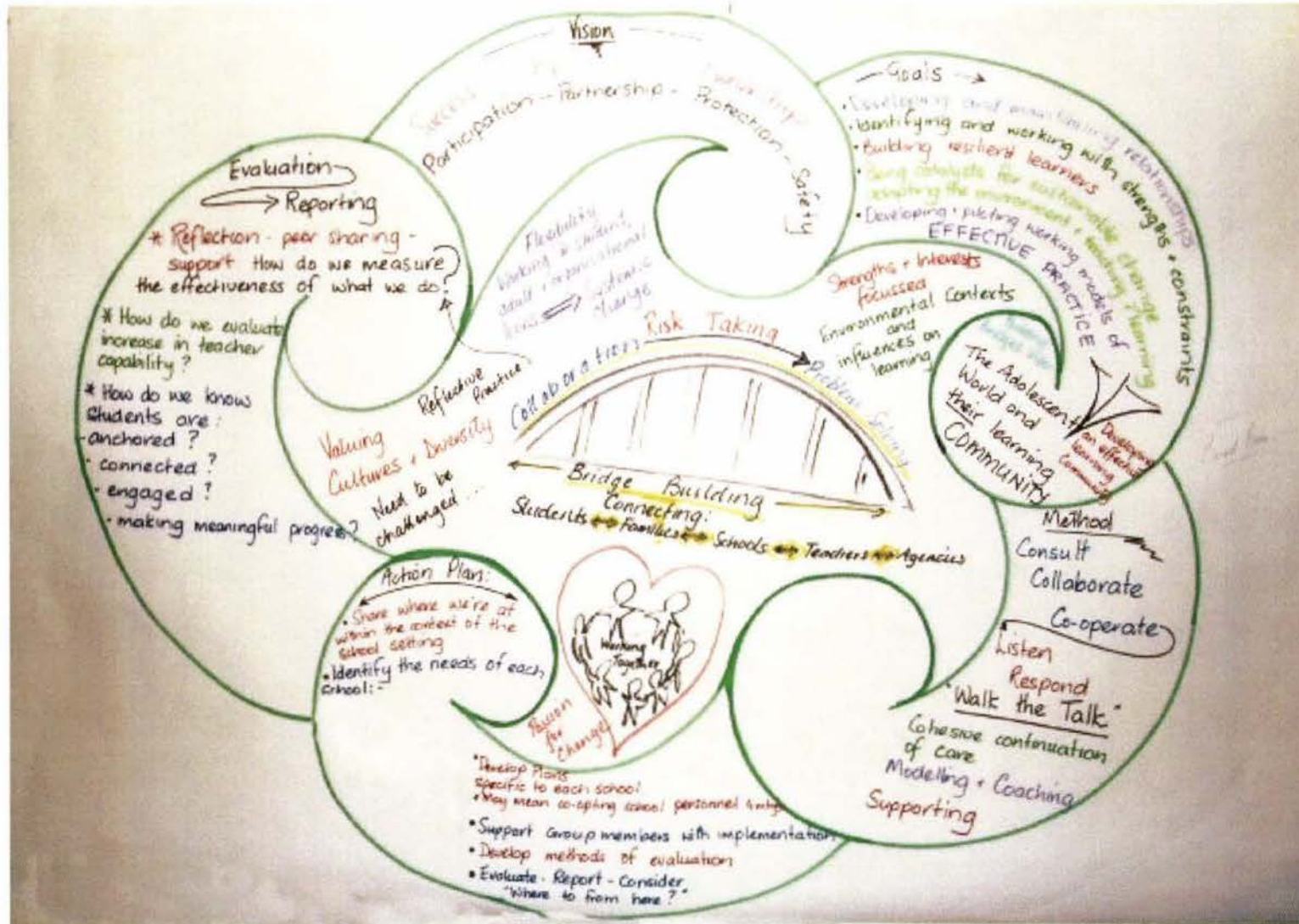
Diagram 3: Group Vision

focus on students' and teachers' individual strengths and interests. This involves recognising, taking account of and responding to the general characteristics, strengths, interests and needs of adolescents in combination with the particular characteristics associated with the culture of the school. The group also recognized that this is a challenge in the light of the deficit-oriented special education funding framework in which we all work. There is a need to be flexible and able to work at student, adult and organisational levels with a focus on bringing about systemic change that will have a positive effect on the environmental context.

These discussions also highlighted the fact that the energy the members of this group have for the work they do, arises from a passion for making a difference for students. While they are no longer working as classroom teachers, all the group members have roles that involve supporting teachers and schools to grow their capacity to meet the needs of all students within general education programmes in regular classes. A firm belief in achieving effective practice means they are all striving to further develop both their own personal practice and that of the teachers in the schools where they work.

The vision

Members' vision for the group itself was recorded in the top koru. Although this contains only seven words, considerable discussion ensued with the group coming back to this aspect during each of the planning sessions. When the participants were asked what they wanted for themselves, the key requisites they identified were: *belonging, success,* and *ownership.* They also hoped the group would provide opportunities for *participation, partnership, protection* and *safety.* It is no surprise that these factors are the same or very similar to those identified by a number of developmental and educational theorists (Maslow, 1954; Cooper-Smith, 1967; Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bokern, 1998.) as being the key elements to fulfilment and self-esteem.

Goals

In identifying goals for the functioning of the group the members gave priority to *developing and maintaining relationships.* This goal applied to relationships both within the group and the members' work contexts. Group members also expressed the intention to *identify and work with strengths and constraints* to support schools in *building resilient learners.* They saw this as requiring them to be *catalysts for sustainable change* that involved them in *developing and piloting working models of effective practice* that result in *adapting the environment and teaching and learning*

practices. The group summarized these goals as working towards a desired outcome of:

> *Developing an effective learning community that worked towards building bridges into the adolescent world and their learning community.*

Methods

At this early stage in the growth of the group, how the goals would be achieved was still very much an unknown. The group had yet to discover and 'shape' the way they could work together. Specific methods were not discussed but participants recognised that, in order to achieve the goals, they would need to:

> *Consult, collaborate and cooperate both with each other and with teachers, students, their families and their schools.*

The RTLB members thought this would entail:

> *Listening, responding, walking the talk, and providing a cohesive continuation of care that modelled, coached and supported teachers.*

Action plan

In a fashion typical of educators, the group then developed an action plan. It was decided that the group work would start with *each RTLB sharing where they were at within the context of the school setting.* In doing this they would try to *identify the (RTLB) support needs of each school.* This would entail scoping the potential for RTLB to be involved in the school in a way that the school would find helpful. The group then intended to *support each other to develop and implement a specific plan for each school.* Group members also recognised that, in addition to *evaluating the effectiveness of any plan* facilitated in each school, it was important to spend time *evaluating the effectiveness of the group, reporting the outcomes* and *considering "Where to from here?"*

Evaluation

Probably the most difficult aspect of the vision to develop was that relating to how the group might measure or evaluate its own effectiveness as a group. There was a feeling that, in the interests of credibility or authenticity of professional functioning, some kind of report of the group's activities would be a valuable outcome and add to the integrity of the group. It was thought that people interested in such a report might be: the schools that were the focus of this work, the RTLB clusters and their management groups, GSE and perhaps readers of the RTLB journal *Kairaranga.* Members also saw considerable value in the group developing a means to measure the effectiveness of the work RTLB do in schools. They saw the potential for this to be a worthwhile focus of a group project.

Key factors identified as needing to be taken into account when evaluating the effectiveness of the group were *the benefits for teachers and students*. To this end it was thought to be important to find ways to determine any *increase in teacher effectiveness* that might be perceived (by the teacher) to be a result of working with the RTLB. Quite obviously this implied a need to develop a model for engaging in some kind of reflective interaction with the teachers. With regard to measuring effectiveness in relation to students, it was agreed there was a need to find ways to *determine when students are anchored, connected, engaged in the learning process* and *making meaningful progress*.

Establishing group process

Once the vision and purpose of the group had been defined the group moved on to planning the meeting processes. The options of rotating or static leadership were considered. There was an awareness of the need to model collaborative teaming processes and recognition that the group meetings could be an opportunity for the less experienced members to practise and increase confidence in what they perceived as a safe context. The decision was made to rotate both facilitation of the meetings and record keeping.

The process developed by the group is very similar to the formulae for effective and collaborative meeting processes found in the work of Snell and Janney, (2000) and Dettmer, Thurston and Dyck, (2002). Group members recognised the value of agreeing on a prescribed process and expressed the desire to include recognised key elements in their meeting processes. Consequently, it was agreed that the group would meet on a regular fortnightly basis, rotate facilitation and record keeping and have a pre-agreed agenda that included inviting visiting speakers when opportunities arose. The group also thought it would be a good idea to develop a template for recording key points, decisions and actions planned during the meetings.

The discussion included examining the merits and disadvantages of rotating meetings around the schools in which the RTLB worked. The RTLB expressed a preference for meeting in the GSE rooms rather than rotating round the schools. The rationale for this was that the GSE rooms were central for everyone, there was value for the RTLB in having opportunity to move out of their schools for a short period and, at that stage, some wished to be discreet about their participation in the group.

The format for meetings was also discussed. It was decided to start meetings with a round of "What's on Top?" for each person and then spend the remaining time supporting members with ongoing school based projects or working together on group projects. The importance of ensuring members who were not present were kept up to date with what happened in their absence was addressed by setting up a group email.

While a formal, structured meeting process might work with groups that do not know each other, the general feeling was that this would not allow the depth of process that was already happening in this group. However, the collaboratively developed meeting process, that contained the elements recognised as key to the effective functioning of successful and collaborative teams, reflected the considerable group skills of the members and their intention to contribute to effective meetings. There was no discussion though of the formal process, for problem solving or making decisions, that is considered by Dettmer, Thurston and Dyck, (2002) and Janney and Snell (2000) to be a feature of effective groups.

Further, the ongoing participation in the weekly conversations was so enthusiastic and energetic that no time was given to evaluating meetings on a regular basis. From time to time throughout the year however, the group suspended project work and reviewed the group process. This was motivated by an understanding that effective groups audit and evaluate their processes and an awareness that the group was having difficulty covering all the topics participants had expressed an interest in exploring. Members recognised the importance of checking to ensure that the group was being responsive to everyone's individual needs.

Decision to research

On a number of occasions during the first three or four meetings the participants spontaneously reiterated several key points - they valued the opportunity to meet together and to share ideas, they found the meetings helpful and said that they met a number of supervision needs. The enthusiasm in group members' responses to Pamela's suggestion, at the end of the fourth meeting, that *someone should be researching this!* initiated the idea of the group becoming a vehicle for the research. Additionally, the group had a considerable uniqueness about it that reinforced the idea the worth of investigating its impact. Unlike many RTLB cluster groups, the members all worked in secondary schools. The fact that some of the members considered the benefit of coming to the group to be *better than any*

supervision distinguished it even more from a number of cluster support groups, especially those to which the members had belonged previously.

Ethics approval

The idea was then discussed with my thesis and work supervisors. Measures were planned to ensure group members did not feel pressured to agree to participate and to enable them to respond to the proposal anonymously. The topic was re-visited at the following meeting. I deliberately absented myself for a period following this discussion to enable group members to share and discuss any concerns. The group were asked to consider the idea and submit their responses to Wilma who had agreed to protect the anonymity of the respondents. When this offer was made participants suggested they could just decide at the meeting but I asked that they respond individually in order to ensure no one felt pressured by the group.

This discussion included details of practicalities like time frames, proposed data collection methods and implications in terms of extra time that might be required of participants. When they were reassured that the only time commitment, in addition to that already agreed to for fortnightly meetings, would involve approximately one hour for individual interviews and another for a group interview at the end of the year, all the members were very positive about the idea of the research.

In spite of the affirmative group response, the decision to use the group as a focus for research was not finalised for a further two weeks in order to give people time to reflect, ask any additional questions that came to mind and respond on a one to one basis so responses could be confidential. These precautionary measures were not used by any of the members so contact was made with each person separately to confirm they were happy for the research to proceed. Following this decision a Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) application was prepared, submitted and approved (See Appendix 3). Information sheets and consent forms were provided to the participants and further opportunities for discussion and clarification of questions provided. (See Appendices 4 & 5)

The option of taping the fortnightly meetings was not discussed. By the time the research decision had been made, the sharing of confidential information in discussions had been such that at least some, if not all members of the group would not have been comfortable having their comments recorded. This was not merely an assumption but a common sense judgement based on the content of the discussions to date. This was in contrast to Nutbrown's (2002) strategy of using a

tape to record the conversation of the small writing group – in order to capture all that the group said and to be able to participate in the conversations herself. To employ this strategy in the context of these meetings would have considerably limited the depth of sharing that took place. This in turn would have lessened the therapeutic impact for RTLB and reduced the data available to the researcher.

Role of researcher – participant – facilitator

This case study also meets Stake's (1995, p.4) first criterion for selection in that it provides optimal conditions for 'learning that leads to understanding'. This was a case that was more than just "easy to get to and hospitable to (the) inquiry" – it was one in which I was already very much a participant. My part in this research project encompassed a number of roles:

– Convenor of group meetings by sending a reminder to each member several days prior to each meeting, of the location, time and topics that had been pre-planned by the group at a prior meeting

– Recorder in that I kept an ongoing record of each meeting and ensured all participants received a copy of notes within days after each meeting.

– Facilitator of the meetings – in spite of several attempts to encourage participants to rotate this role

– "Author becoming a participant in the group under study" (Grbich, 2004, p.77)

– "Author and behind-the-scene facilitator of other's voices" (Grbich, 2004, p.74), in the way that I have attempted to identify with the 'perspectives' of the (RTLB) participants and ensure theirs have been the dominant voices in the group activities.

Throughout the year I struggled with a feeling of ambivalence in relation to my multiple roles in the group. Contrary to usual practice when facilitating groups, I had not initiated discussion to clarify Wilma's or my role. By inviting people to form a group and by facilitating the discussions during which we had developed the group vision I had set a precedent and established a 'facilitation' role for myself. This was further emphasised by the group decision to become the topic of research, my taking on the role of researcher, and the reticence of the participants to rotate the facilitation role.

My ambivalence coupled with concern about not using the facilitation role to exert power meant that that there were occasions when I held back or refrained from expressing my own preferences, participating in discussions or sharing personal learning that might have contributed to the general learning of the group. This

meant there were times when I was not functioning in the role of 'participant'. Additionally, I was conscious that the 'researcher' role and failure to successfully enlist group participation in facilitation or recording of meeting notes had resulted in my 'keeping' the records of the group. I realised the 'power imbalance' in doing this. It also created some degree of dependency within the group that meant there were times when the researcher – facilitator role felt rather like the 'glue' role many mothers perform in families.

The decision to use the group as a focus for the (masters) research project had a significant influence on a number of group processes. One example is what happened in relation to record keeping. The group had agreed to rotate the roles of record taker and various members of the group had tried on several occasions to fulfil this role. Regardless of who was in the role of recorder I also made notes for the research purposes. However it soon became apparent that the RTLB all became so involved in the discussions they forgot to take notes. The fact that Wilma and I were able to take the notes reflected the slightly more removed positions we held in discussions that tended to focus on the complexities of working in the role of RTLB in secondary schools. The research notes ended up becoming the basis of meeting records for group members.

I was very conscious of the 'power' I held by coming home after meetings, recording notes on the agreed template and emailing them to participants. Had I been following what are considered to be effective collaborative teaming practices as outlined by Snell and Janney, (2000) and Dettmer, Thurston and Dyck, (2002), I would have recorded these notes straight onto the template during the meeting, photocopied them and given them to participants as they left the meeting. However, the speed and content of the conversations was such that I was only able to make brief notes. Not trusting my 'aging' memory I fell into the routine of coming home after meetings and writing up the notes, to ensure I captured all I possibly could of what had transpired at the meeting.

It was not until after the period of data collection when reflecting on the progress of the group that I realised the change that had occurred in my own orientation around the time of the group decision to be involved in the research. My ambivalence about my own role in the group and my anxiety around attempting to maintain a 'low profile' to ensure there was group 'ownership' of the process had resulted in my neglecting to facilitate the closing evaluation round that is my usual practice when facilitating meetings and professional development activities.

The establishment of the group and the evolvement of the meeting process up to this point form the 'backdrop' for the various scenes that developed as the group members collaborated to support each other to meet the challenges in their individual (RTLB) work contexts.

Characteristics of the process

The process used for this inquiry has a number of elements often used in, or considered characteristic of, feminist research. The qualitative nature of the research style allowed me to observe the participants and to actively participate, in a small-scale social setting that was within the culture of both the participants' and the researcher's work (Neuman, 2000). It involved the retelling of women's stories in their own words, investigating women's feelings and highlighting the complexity of the integration of working and personal roles for women. It is extremely subjective in that I bring to it the complexity of my own personal, family and working life. My professional background, and personal worldview are so similar to those of the participants that I have no difficulty relating to, identifying and empathising with, the celebrations, issues and concerns that the group members bring to the meetings.

The principles and practices of the members of the group are akin to those of both feminist critical pedagogies (FCP) and the Person-Centred Approach to Education (PCAE); all members "share an ethical imperative: to empower persons" and are motivated by "reactions to traditional teaching practices that neglect the dignity of students" (Cornelius-White & Godfrey, 2004, p.166). The 'drive' to build bridges between the adolescent world and classroom teaching, and the consequential focus on developing and piloting working models of effective practice, in all that the group does is so strong that they might well give rise to a new concept – that of ACP - Adolescent Critical Pedagogy.

There is a similarity, in this group's process, with *standpoint feminism* as described by Wyatt, in Frey (2002) in that the coming together of this group has provided the RTLB members with "opportunities to collaborate with marginalized women whose knowledge (and experience) has not been represented in (our) theories and to validate their knowledge" (p.53). Their 'oppression' lies both in their work roles and work contexts. These secondary RTLB are marginalized in that they are the only people performing the roles they have within the secondary schools. In most cases they are neither regarded as members of faculty teams or of management – they are team-less within this context. They are marginalized in that their understanding

of effective (secondary RTLB) practice differs from that of many of the people with whom they work in the schools and some of their RTLB colleagues in their clusters. Three of the four RTLB in this group are physically marginalized by being located (individually) in offices within their schools – as opposed to most RTLB who share offices with cluster teams. They have been marginalized further by their passion for instigating change and their own discovery that, in order to do this and to perform their roles effectively, they feel a need to operate in a manner that differs from the policies and protocols reflected in the *"privileged standpoints"* of Ministry of Education policies, RTLB management committees and school protocols.

However, while the members of this group "share a common history and common experiences and knowledge", (Wyatt in Frey, 2002, p.52), there are differences between this project and many that are cited as examples of research projects using consciousness-raising as a context for group communication. This is one very small group whereas some cited by Wyatt, in Frey (2002) like: The Highlander Folk School (Horton, 1970), Political and social groups (Blenkey et al, 1997) Community education groups used to empower the poor to political activism (Freire, 1970), appear to be much larger and considerably more politically active.

The members of this group were aware of their own isolated positions in the context of the secondary schools where they work. However, it was the not until they had opportunity to come together as a group that they realised the commonalities of their values and frustrations and therefore the validity and value of their unique knowledge and skills. Rather than political activism though – the work of this group is more project orientated with a focus on developing effective models of professional learning for teachers.

So, the similarity lies in the process in that (like the examples of *standpoint feminism)*, this study is located "mainly in [the] sharing and analysing [of] common experiences through group storytelling and discussion" (Chesebro, Cragan & McCullough, 1973, cited by Wyatt in Frey, 2002, p.52). Wyatt refers to consciousness-raising as "a process by which members come to recognize their common oppression..." Some people, especially staff in secondary schools, might consider that, 'oppression' is too strong a concept and over dramatising the constraints of the work contexts of the RTLB. However, there were many occasions during meetings when the RTLB needed and drew mutual comfort from sharing the disappointments, frustrations and anger arising out of the constraints and contradictions in their work contexts.

"It's actually changing how we are –and even though I'm shouting and screaming and go berserk, it enables me sometimes to go and sit in the school and look at all that stuff and hear it then come back to the group and process it."

(Serena)

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preserving anonymity

There were a number of personal and political reasons for preserving the anonymity both of the participants and schools. The members of the group were striving to establish professional credibility and develop positive relationships in the schools. This thesis is largely reflective of the complexities of their role and the general context of working in secondary schools. It was important to be able to discuss these without fear of causing unnecessary misunderstandings. A significant risk factor in the research project was the possibility that the schools in which the RTLB work may be able to be identified. This aspect and whether or not to seek permission from the schools was discussed at length with the participants. There was a feeling that once the RTLB involvement was made public they would lose their anonymity. At the time it was thought this might considerably limit what could be reported of personal impact for each participant.

While the RTLB recognise that their position is the result of political and policy inadequacies and lack of consistency between evidenced-based theory and current practice, there was a concern that misunderstandings might result from the differing worldview of readers and possible lack of ability to empathise with the RTLB position. Quite early into the data gathering it became evident that the incidence of consistency in the data would provide ample validity in generalisation and therefore negate the need to identify individual schools. Citing specific schools would have personalised the study more than necessary to enable the highlighting of the complexities of the RTLB position in their work context. Consequently, the decision was made to confine the investigation to a single, non-comparative case study, focussing on one small group of people and the outcomes of their participation in a small learning community. This has proved to be a wise choice given the volume of data generated by one group.

Given that the initial focus of the research was the evolving story of the process of the development of the group and the impact of participation, on the lives of the participants, all the group members requested at the outset that their participation be confidential. Considerable depth of feeling was already being plumbed in the

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sharing that was taking place at the meetings. It was important that this was respected. Throughout the year when the need arose to refer to or discuss the group in the context of my own (GSE) work I was careful to protect the identity of the participants. Most of them however, were quite open with RTLB colleagues and the schools about their participation.

Prior to the research it was agreed that:

- The one possible identifying feature was likely to be the models of professional development being facilitated by the RTLB. If these were considered relevant to the outcomes, they would be reflected in the form of generic models that could be applied to (secondary) schools in general. Any focus on them would be with the intention of providing a resource that might be useful in the future.

- Personal stories would not be included in the research without prior agreement by participants who would have the right to request editing of any possible identifying features. It was intended that personal reflections would be presented in a manner that precluded identification of individual personnel, unless the participant requested otherwise.

Each participant was asked to select a name they would like to be known by in the write up. The fact that all the participants initially elected to have their own names used seemed to indicate that the need for anonymity had become less of a concern. However, in the interests of ensuring no one had felt pressured into this decision and to ensure there was safety for all participants I exercised researcher's prerogative and chose to use pseudonyms.

Relationships between researcher, participants and schools

My role of special education adviser and more specifically as Enhanced Programme Funding adviser meant that prior to beginning the research I ('R') - *see diagram 2 below*) already had an established collegial relationship with each of the participants. The four Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour: (Kara, Pamela, Denise and Serena) were employed by six schools (Schools 1 - 6) with which I had already established connections and was expecting to have a short-term role the following year. This role was in the nature of working with the schools in the reviewing and further developing of systems to recognise and respond to the diversity of students. One of the participants, Wilma was also employed by the Ministry of Education and, at that time, involved in case work with students in two of the schools (5 & 6) that employ Denise.
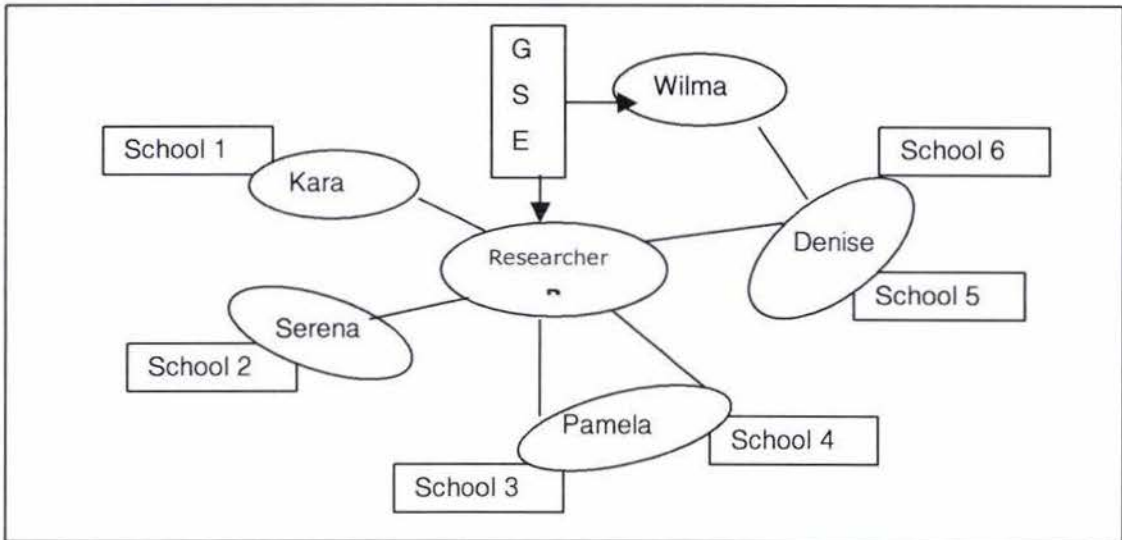
Diagram 4: Relationships between researcher, participants and schools

The roles of the Group Special Education members

While the main participants of the study were the RTLB, it is also important not to overlook aspects arising from the participation in the group of the two GSE members. Their engagement with the group is very much integrated with that of the RTLB. The roles of the two GSE members were, in part, determined by the original intent behind establishing the group – primarily to facilitate a forum for shared learning and to establish a network of support for the RTLB but also to enhance the work roles both Wilma and myself had in schools common to the RTLB participants. These roles were further developed and clarified, as the project progressed, when the needs of the RTLB become more apparent and the GSE members responded to those needs.

Supporting participants

Wilma regarded her role very much that of support person. In fulfilling that role, rather than bringing her own issues to the group discussions, Wilma reinforced the focus on the role of RTLB and the complexities of this role in the secondary context. This focus also enhanced the work we both do in secondary schools. At the end of the year Wilma commented:

> *It's been a good thing to be involved in the dialogue of RTLBs working at secondary level...I've become more aware that the RTLB role is a complex one at high school level...It's reinforced for me the way that RTLB at secondary level are positioned – badly - in schools.*

The group also benefited from Wilma's support in the analysis and reframing of problems associated with the complexities of working in the secondary school context.

Wilma also provided direct feedback when I sought to cross check my own perceptions relating to group reactions, feelings and needs. At times, her support extended beyond the group context when members sought help during personal crises. This was helpful in that, apart from the times when I was interacting with participants in my work (EPF adviser) role, it made it easier to view group processes with some degree of objectivity.

METHODS

The following section provides a general outline of the methods used to gather the data. A more detailed description of the specific sources of data, how they contributed to the findings and the processes used for collating, coding, analysing and interpreting each source is provided in the following chapter.

Case study

This is a single, descriptive, participant-observation case study investigating, within a qualitative framework, how and why participation in a small learning group influenced what happened, for each participant, in their work context and, in their personal lives. Definitions of case studies found in; Stake (1995), Tolich and Davidson (1999) and Cosmos Corporation's relevant situations for different research strategies (cited by Yin, 2003,) all confirm this investigation meets the criteria for a case study. The most apt general description of this study is that offered by Stake (1995, p.xi): A "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances." According to Yin's (2003, p.5-7) matching of (research) question types to research forms, it meets the criteria for a case study on two counts - it has both descriptive and exploratory qualities.

There are both descriptive and exploratory elements about the way the study has followed the development of a small group of people and investigated the impact (of participation in the group) for each of the participants. The study is descriptive in that it narrates the story of the group but also exploratory in that the purpose of the study has been to investigate the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of the effects that participation has had on each of the RTLB. The focus being on contemporary events further adds to its validity as a case study.

There is also a strong ethnographic aspect to this inquiry in the nature of my (research) role as a participant-observer although this differs from many ethnographic studies in that I had a working association with the participants and

was already a member of the group prior to the decision (by the group) to make the group the focus for research. However, even though I had been working with RTLB in a variety of contexts over the two years immediately prior to this project, this interaction was minimal compared with previous professional development and research projects that had brought me into contact with large numbers of schools where RTLB had worked. In these contexts I had been privy to the opinions and perspectives of school principals and teachers about the work and role of RTLB. There was considerable fascination in exploring the (participant) RTLB viewpoints by designing and "using the multiple sources of data" recommended by Stake (1995).

The enjoyment of participating in the group generated considerable enthusiasm, especially among the RTLB group members, for 'researching' the group, and that as researcher – and special educator - I had a strong interest in the case gives added weight to further defining this as an *intrinsic case study* (Stake, 1995 p.3). However, although the initial focus on the first dimension of the study (the impact of participation in the group) well qualifies this case as an *intrinsic case study,* the two additional dimensions created through the outcomes of the group dialogue mean the inquiry could also be regarded as an *instrumental case study*. A key outcome of this case study is that the exploration of the participants' experiences in the group has been instrumental in exposing the complexities of RTLB working in the secondary school context. That the key participants in the study were four RTLB, each working in different secondary schools also adds a *collective* quality to this case study.

Sample size

Although four RTLB may seem a relatively small sample group, given these four RTLB currently service five of approximately fifty secondary schools in the region, this equates to ten percent of the Auckland city secondary schools. However, the data also includes the experiences of the two GSE participants and, between them, they have worked in more than two thirds of the remaining forty-five schools.

At the outset the collective quality provided a temptation to treat this as a cumulative inquiry that would bring together four or five separate case studies – one for each of the four RTLB participants or one for each of the five schools. This would have placed the primary emphasis on exploring in detail any possible impact in the schools where the RTLB work. However, it quickly became apparent that the process of 'becoming' and functioning as a group and the personal impact in this for

each participant were too significant to overlook or minimise. It was also obvious that a closer examination of the impact within the schools where the RTLB worked would have required relating details that revealed the identity of the schools.

Focus groups

Although there was a distinct focus group flavour to many of the fortnightly meetings there were two very critical differences – my triple roles as participant, facilitator and researcher and the facilitation of the group discussions. The researcher's role in a focus group is usually considered to be that of an unbiased, objective facilitator (and often recorder) of pre-set questions. In this case, although I was sometimes a less vocal participant, my participation and facilitation was anything but unbiased and objective.

The absence of any formally presented pre-designed questions used by the researcher to guide the flow of the discussion was especially significant to me because I felt it lessened some of the power that is inherent in the roles of both researcher and facilitator. The 'questions' that guided the discussions of this group were either deliberately brought to the meetings by members seeking group input or they arose out of the issues, concerns and problems unpacked at the meetings.

There were occasions though when, in any one of the three roles, I also brought questions to the group. As the researcher, I sometimes, requested a 'brainstorming' session to audit or crosscheck my understandings with those of the group members – to clarify or confirm my perceptions of the 'group' stance. Sometimes I asked questions from both a participant and researcher perspective to increase my own understanding around the complexities of the RTLB role and their work context. When, as facilitator, I perceived differing understandings of the same issue or topic among the group I asked questions to clarify meanings and establish common understanding or transparency. At other times the questions I asked were in response to a request from the group, to facilitate work on a particular topic of common interest.

Focussed conversations

Nutbrown (1999), as cited in Clough and Nutbrown (2002) outlines a process she terms "focussed conversations" that I believe is a relevant methodological fit for this investigation. There are numerous similarities in the characteristics and very few exceptions between the *focussed conversation* method Nutbrown describes and what happened within the group meetings that were the main forum for data

gathering. The two key differences between Nutbrown's process and this study are the focus of the conversations and the nature of the writing process. The focus of Nutbrown's study was the practice of a small group of early childhood educators whereas this study is about the practice and context of RTLB working in secondary schools – otherwise Nutbrown's description could well have been referring to this project.

The second difference is in the meeting and research processes. Nutbrown involved the group in the writing process - the actual writing was the main work of the group and the focussed conversations a means to achieving this end. While I would have been very pleased to include the group in the writing, in this case, the (research) writing was secondary to the work of the group. The work of the group was in itself so time, energy and focus consuming that including the participants in the writing process would have detracted considerably from the outcome needed by the participants. Whereas the end result required from Nutbrown's focussed conversations was a written description of their work, this group was working to develop models of effective teaching practice. A large part of participants working together for this first year was about growing relationships within the group to the point where participants felt comfortable about sharing their work-based projects and eliciting group input for their further development.

Nutbrown's (writing) process included her taping the group conversations, and applying "initial structure" to them which the group would then "shape and re-shape" until they were "sufficiently satisfied to make the writing public" (Nutbrown, 2002, p.74). The only time I used a tape was at the end of the year when recording the reflective interviews and the final group discussion (and participants were included in the transcribing and interpreting process). Like Nutbrown, I also found the "best exchanges with the women were our lengthy, detailed, animated conversations" (Nutbrown 2002, p.53). These conversations went beyond each women sharing her own experiences. They resulted in the "constructed knowledge" arising out of reflective dialogue that "reaches deep into the experience of each participant" and drawing "on the analytical abilities of each" referred to by Belenky et al in Brockbank and McGill (2002, p.59). However, I am left in no doubt that recording these conversations would have considerably stifled their length, the content and the resulting understandings and shifts in assumptions.

Interviews

Towards the end of the year of the investigation, individual interviews were used to gather data relating to participants' feelings and opinions about the perceived impact of their participation in the group. At a group meeting several weeks prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a copy of the interview questions, an outline of the process and opportunity for discussion. The agreements made earlier in the year regarding the taping of interviews were re0visited to ensure people were comfortable with the process and participants were invited to select a venue for their interviews. The interviews were more in the nature of one to one conversations, the flow of which was guided but not dictated by four open questions (Clough & Nutbrown, 2003, p.105).

Once all the data had been processed (as described in chapter four) a very open group interview was facilitated. This was guided by five pre-set questions that had also been provided to the group prior several weeks prior to the occasion. There were a number of reasons for the group interview:

1. To ensure there was transparency of processes by reporting back to the group the messages gleaned from analysis of the individual interviews. They knew what they had contributed personally in their individual interviews but they were all very interested to hear what findings had been extracted and how they had contributed to the group 'group' opinions and beliefs

2. To provide opportunity for further discussion and development of the findings and to clarify of any ambiguous messages

3. To source group opinions and ideas related to what had worked well with the group and the direction they wanted the group to take the following year

4. To create an opportunity to gather 'group' voices in a context created with prior understanding that both individual and group voices might be quoted in the thesis.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an outline of the research approach and methods used in the investigation. The process of the coming together of the group that is the focus of the case study and the subsequent research journey have also been described. Ethical considerations have been identified and discussed including the need for preserving anonymity of the participants and schools, the implications in the multiple roles of the researcher and the researcher's various relationships with the participants and their work contexts.

Because the range of data for this study is so extensive, chapter four has been devoted to further describing the specific sources of data and explaining how the process used for gathering, coding, interpreting and analysing the data resulted in three layers of outcomes. These three layers of outcomes have then been presented as findings – one layer per chapter, in chapters five, six and seven. Chapter eight provides an overview of the study and uses the findings to inform a discussion about the possibilities of a small learning community becoming the catalyst for growing a culture of learning community in the wider educational context.

CHAPTER FOUR:
PROCESSING THE DATA

INTRODUCTION

One of the features of this project is the extensive range of data that resulted from the investigation. This chapter provides the rationale for using multiple sources of data and identifies the various data sources. The possible risks associated with the chosen methodology are identified and the process used to ensure the validity of interpretation of the evidence is described. The methods used to gather, collate, code and interpret each of the nine sources are outlined and illustrated with examples of each source.

Analysis of the data resulted in identification of dominant themes related to the study. The learning within each of these themes has contributed to three layers of findings that are the basis of the learning arising out of the investigation. In this chapter the three themes are identified and their presentation in the thesis is explained.

THE DATA

Data gathering

Much of the data gathering was a matter of listening – in the complete sense of the word, with eyes, ears, heart, intuition and memory - examining how what was heard 'sits' with what I know. Recognising at the outset that what I know is the sum of my own experiences, first and foremost as a woman, but also as a: mother, grandmother, student, teacher and, during the last ten years, facilitator of an eclectic range of professional development activities in numerous educational contexts.   At the outset of the project I hoped that the privilege of having witnessed and shared secondary school life through my own direct experiences both as a student and a teacher and the experiences with my children, grandchildren, students and colleagues, would assist me to connect and empathise with the range of perspectives related to the celebrations, issues and concerns that would arise in the meetings. I did not however, expect the volume or range of data that this investigation generated.

While the initial focus of the research was the impact (for RTLB) of their participation in a small learning group, two additional but extremely significant dimensions of the inquiry (the role of the RTLB in secondary schools and the issues

and complexities of working in this context) evolved as a natural consequence of the interactions of the group. They were the result of the ongoing dialogue that happened among the members of the group. Like Nutbrown (2002), "I learned that these women were the 'data'. They created new knowledge through connective discourse, as they listened and spoke together" (p.74). This discourse became a 'mirror' reflecting the collective experiences and beliefs that inform the way RTLB do their job and highlighting the complexities of their role and their work contexts. The reflections in the mirror were inherent in the impact for the participants and therefore impossible to exclude from the analysis and outcomes.

The scope of the data

The research was approached both indirectly and directly. Observations, reflections and notes taken during twenty group meetings over the (February to December) period of the 2004 school year provided data that contributed to the tracking of the group process and identifying the complexities of the role of the RTLB in secondary schools. Towards the end of the data gathering period individual reflective interviews with each participant and an open group interview or conversation provided additional and direct information that was triangulated alongside the indirect data, participants' contributions and the literature. This "*between-method data source triangulation*" (Denzin, 1989, p.243-244) was used to discover if there was consistency of data across a range of contexts. The learning group was a vehicle for accessing some of these contexts. The contexts were the principles and practices and the varying experiences of four RTLB and two GSE fieldworkers working in five secondary schools, the range of experiences and evidenced based theory represented in the literature – particularly recent local literature related to effective practice - and the experiences, principles and practice of the researcher.

The range of data included:
1. A diagram of the group's vision and plan for the year
2. Meeting records of group conversations
3. Mind maps summarising group brainstorming sessions that explored themes and topics central to meetings
4. The group SWOT analyses of the school context of each RTLB participant
5. The group planned and facilitated workshop for teacher and RTLB colleagues
6. End of year one-to-one open interviews with each of the participants
7. The group conversation at the end of the (2004) year of data gathering

8. The researcher's own (work, personal and family) experience, knowledge and learning gained through interactions with participants in the context of their respective schools

9. Local and international literature.

The specific sources of this data and the methods used to gather, code, interpret and analyse it are described in the section titled *Process of Interpretation*.

Participant contributions

Group members were also invited to contribute to the data gathering in any additional form they chose. At the outset of the project some members expressed the intention of keeping a diary for the duration of the data-gathering period. I have attributed the absence of these diaries to the series of personal, family or work crises that eventuated for each member of the group at some stage throughout the year. That I did not feel comfortable asking if people had kept these diaries reflects my ambivalence about the power in the role of researcher - facilitator.

As the group progressed, a custom evolved of bringing to the meetings 'treasures' to share. These participant' contributions were plentiful. In addition to edible delicacies they brought to the meetings, copies (for each member) of action plans, outlines of support models, assignments, newspaper cuttings or papers related to topics currently in focus with or related to the work of the group. The recipients of these offerings always accepted them with considerable glee – pouncing on and devouring them with enthusiasm. There was never any room to doubt the hunger of the group members for new learning.

By mid-year each participant (with group support) was preparing a small paper and associated activity (based on their current or recent in-school projects) as a contribution towards a jointly facilitated workshop for fellow RTLB and secondary school teachers. These contributions reflected the individual focus of each participant, ongoing collaboration among group members and considerable effort on each person's part. Workshop participants' enthusiastic responses and participation did much to increase group members' confidence in their facilitation ability. The workshop also resulted in the establishment the following year, of a learning support network for secondary special needs coordinators.

Ensuring validity of the data

The participants' 'insider' views discovered in the course of this study highlight some key differences between general and political perceptions about the role of

the RTLB. Therefore, I could not rely on what Stake and Trumball (1982), cited by Stake (1995, p.42), identify as the "naturalistic generalisation" element of analysis "based on the harmonious relationship between readers' experiences and the case study itself" (Stake, cited by Tellis, W. 1997, p.2). Given the small number of RTLB in New Zealand and the even smaller number who work in secondary schools there might well be some readers who have had little if any experience related to RTLB – especially those working in secondary schools. The validity of the interpretation was therefore further increased by "between-method triangulation" (Denzin, 1989, p.243-244) using a number of different data sources and a range of approaches to interpret the data. This section outlines these approaches.

Meeting records, observations and summaries of discussion themes have traced the progress of the group and then been processed in a number of ways. The data has been analysed to differentiate the story of the group process from the stories of the individual participants. This revealed the complexities, issues and concerns related to the role of the RTLB working in secondary schools. Exploring the impact that participating in the group had on group members' work and personal lives assisted in discerning the elements, perceived by participants, as being key to the success of this learning community.

While there is an advantage in having a very similar 'world view' that enables the researcher to easily empathize with the participants, the inherent dangers in this ethnographic perspective must also be recognized. There was a need to be mindful throughout the investigation and especially during the closing stages of the data gathering and analysis that, because I 'speak the same language' as the participants, there was considerable risk of assumed understanding of implied meanings that could possibly result in erroneous misunderstandings.

The compatibility of the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participants and the 'common language' of the group made it important, when planning the research process, to think ahead and build validity checks into the data gathering and interpretation process. Multiple sources of data were used to investigate if there were findings common to more than one source of data. The following "data source, theory" and "methodological" triangulation (Yin, 2003. p.99) strategies allowed me to corroborate my understandings.
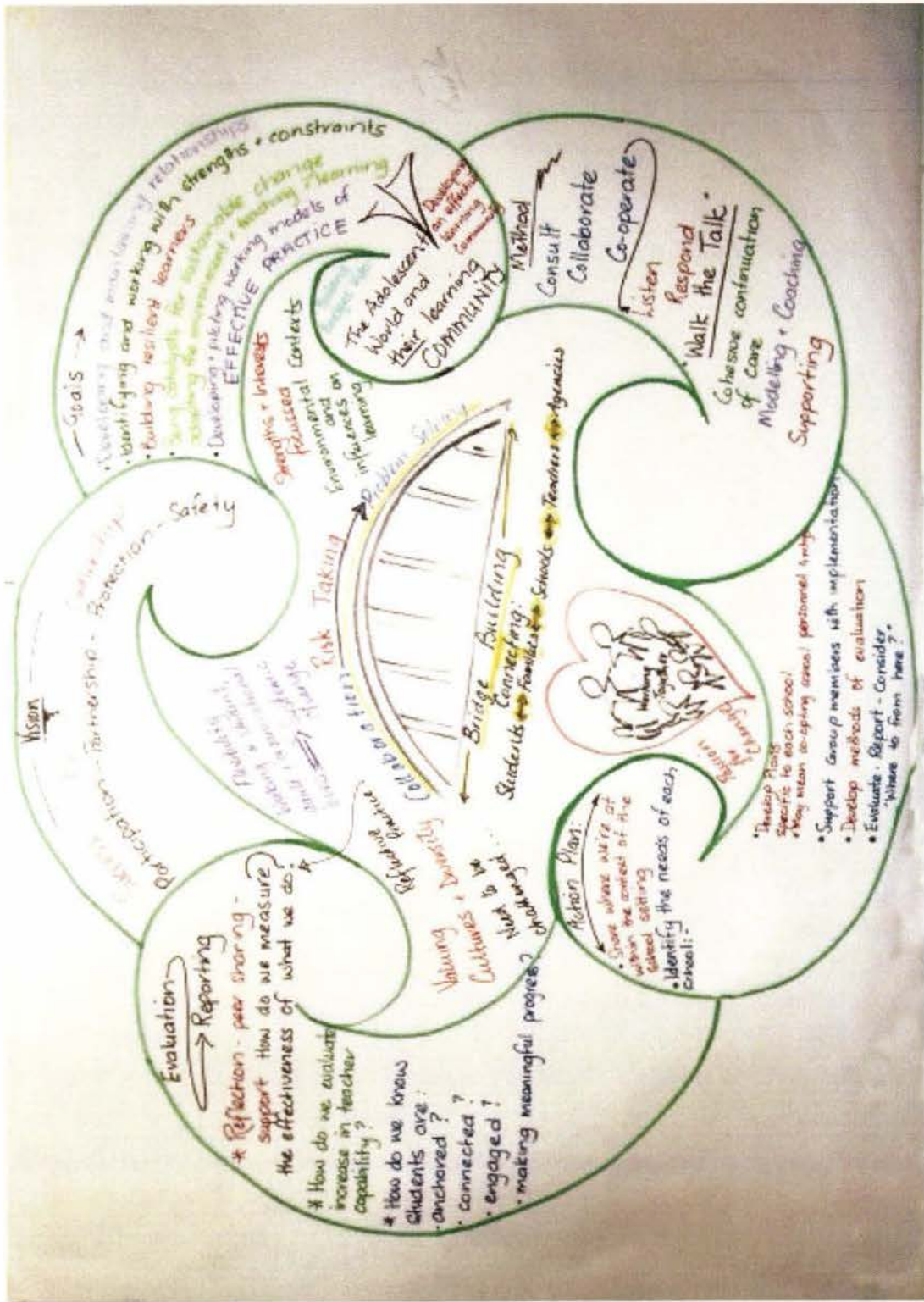
Diagram 3: Group Vision

The process of interpretation

This section looks at each source of data in turn, explaining how it has contributed to the findings. The processes used to gather, collate, interpret and analyse the data has been described. An example of, or exert from each source of data has been placed on the facing page to enable easy reference while reading. Some of the key themes in the findings are identified. These are described in greater detail and compared with relevant literature in each of the following three chapters (five, six and seven).

1. *The group vision*

The group vision was developed over a period of three meetings, using the process of "graphic facilitation" (Sibbett, 1981). A description of this process was provided in the discussion about the research journey in chapter three. Although the group's vision was developed over the first three meetings and these took place prior to the decision to research, the diagram has (with participant permission) been included in the data.

In the process of developing the vision the group identified the common underlying values, attitudes and beliefs of the members, what they wanted to achieve through membership in the group and how they believed they would do this. The goals for the group reflected members' perceptions of the complexities of working in the secondary school context. The entire vision with the shared values, attitudes and beliefs, the goals, action plan and ideas about how the group would evaluate its work, all reflected members perceptions about the role of the RTLB in secondary schools. *A copy of the group vision was provided on page 38a and for reader convenience has been repeated on the facing page.*

2. *The meeting records*

The meeting records were monitored to identify the themes of the discussions at each meeting. These discussions reflected the most common areas of concern and aspects or projects with which the RTLB felt they needed support. A template for recording key points and planned or subsequent action arising out of main topics discussed at meetings was designed by the group. This was trialed and redrafted twice during the first few meetings to better meet needs.

Throughout the year, after every meeting, each participant was emailed a completed template reflecting key points from the meeting. Each time this included the request that they amend or add any comments as needed to ensure validity of

Diagram 5:   Condensed example of a meeting record

Date: 22.10.04
Present: Kara, Denise, Pamela, Serena, Wilma, Diane

Topic / theme discussed	Action outcomes to date:	Issues / concerns / potential:	Who/when
Wilma:	• Reported back re her trip to Great Barrier – leaving us all 'green' with envy re the story of her interaction with the Dolphins		
Serena: • Engaging with students – developing positive relationships – building trust • Changing the focus to a strengths-based approach	• Tried the 5 column (strengths based) approach with several students • Is finding the strength based mtgs helpful	Potential here to further develop this approach – perhaps share it with grp & colleagues at school Potential for more RTLBs to attend these – this would strengthen partnerships with GSE also	During the Inclusive programming workshop
Kara: • Addressing the issue of challenging classes	• Is currently working. with an RTLB colleague, observing one particular class – considered challenging by the teachers. It is interesting that this class is having success when being taught by one specific teacher	Potential here to identify what it is in this teacher's style / relationship with students that the students are responding so positively to.	Kara to keep us updated
Pamela: • RTLB role • Further clarification of the role	• Reflected on how her role has grown – in spite of differing perception and limitations placed on the role • Has a mtg with the principal to talk about her role – has organised a support person to be at the mtg with her	Potential here to clarify and further develop the role? Keep us posted re outcome of mtg.	Pamela to update us at the next meeting
Denise: • Recent loss of a long-time and very dear friend • Informing peers and setting up support for students	• Discovered the healing process of preparing and delivering a speech at the funeral • Shared story about considerable success in putting support in place for a student with Aspergers	It would be good to take time to share more with the group re strategies used and consideration to keep in mind when using them.	Next meeting

Action items for next meeting: Planning workshop x Inclusive Programming for Secondary Schools – (see below for draft outline as planned to date):

Themes for this week were: Relationships
Progress with current strategies and situations in schools
The role of the RTLB
Inclusive Programming workshop
End of year get together and final group conversation.

NEXT MEETING: **Date:** 5/11/04   **Time:** 1.00 - If you're eating with us, otherwise **1.30**   **Venue:** Training room - GSE .

the record. On several occasions participants added to or corrected these notes. The bottom of each meeting record included a list of the key themes that I had identified in the discussions that had taken place during the meeting. *An example of one of the meeting records is included on the facing page.*

Meeting records reflected progress of both individual and group projects and the sharing of information related to latest developments, research and articles about effective teaching strategies. The focus of these projects reflected key issues and concerns related to the secondary school context, the role of RTLB in that context and growing awareness of professional learning processes. Note was taken of the dominant themes of the discussion at each meeting. These were monitored throughout the year. They were listed under the dates of each meeting, and each theme was colour coded:

Two group members shared what they consider to be the 'needs' of the school in which they are working:
  - *Transition from yr 8 -> yr 9*
  - *Shifting values & attitudes*
  - *Need to define the role of the RTLB (with the school)*
Index for Inclusion (Booth et al)
Inclusive, co-operative teaching strategies
Remaining two group members shared what they consider to be the 'needs' of the school in which they are working:
  - *Educational leadership*
  - *Measuring mixed ability*
  - *Restorative justice- opportunity to restore relationships. Teachers find it difficult to change their own behaviour*
Professional safety of RTLBs – (defining the role) "The domestic cat in the jungle"
Transformative processes / system change
How does this group contrast with one to one supervision

KEY:
Role of RTLB
Group process
PD for staff & RTLB
Need for system development
Relationships

Diagram 6: Sample of colour coding of meeting themes

The key themes were transferred to a table showing the year's meetings. This highlighted the recurring themes. It also enabled me to identify and analyse patterns in the presence or absence of themes. An example where there was an obvious pattern is the discussions related to the group process. This was the main topic of conversation during the first four meetings. Once the process was established, the group was able to move on to focus on individual and group projects. But every so often the group would come back and re-visit group processes. This pattern was examined in relation to the literature about group processes and is discussed in greater detail in the section about group process in chapter five.

For us

as R.T.L.B

ie: the model/framework we work in within secondary context

! Sharing here, what works in best practice

Networking - using resources to facilitate ur own practice

CONTRADICTION IN EXPECTATIONS

For teachers

→ Supporting tchrs to develop effective practice

How do we evaluate Did it work?

For Students.

Building bridges between the adolescent world and student learning

For the school

- Sustained + strategic change?
- Fostering an open non-threatening learning environment.

For ERO

Black n White Did this - achieved that!

What teachers want (RTLB 'own' the

Roaming round the bridon - to work within the

What we know will bring about change

Diagram 8: Factors that need to be taken into account when RTLB evaluate what they do

The following diagram is an excerpt from the table showing recurring themes of discussions.

	17/11	8/12	3/2	10/2	19/2	5/3	19/3	2/4	7/5	21/5	11/6	23/7
Expectations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationships	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Systemic change	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Role of RTLB	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	
Prof. Dev x sch.			X		X	X	X			X	X	
Prof. Dev. RTLB	X	X	X	X						X	X	X

Diagram 7: Excerpt from table illustrating dominant themes

3. *Mindmaps exploring dominant themes*

When a dominant theme was obvious and there was sufficient time at the end of a meeting, 'brainstorming' around the theme further developed the group stance with regard to the key ideas. Brainstormings were recorded in the form of mind-maps on an electronic white board, printed and copied so that each person had their own record. The mind-map on the facing page reflects the key points arising during a discussion about *Factors that need to be taken into account when RTLB evaluate what they do.* (See Diagram 8)

Each of the mind maps was then processed in a manner that assisted in identifying issues, concerns and developing themes. Sometimes this involved translating the mind-map into a computer model. This helped to clarify the concepts and to cognitively process the linking of the ideas in the mind-map with those that were becoming the foundations of many of the group discussions. A computer model of the mind map of *Expectations in the context of the classroom* is included in chapter seven along with discussion of the findings related to the complexities of working in secondary schools.   (See Diagram 23)

The 'mind-mapping' of discussions provided opportunities to cross check understandings and to validate findings. It also provided summaries of the main themes that surfaced and kept re-occurring during the meeting. Six of these mind maps were developed in the course of 20 meetings. The topics were:

- *Where do we come from?*
- *Power as experienced in the group,*
- *Power as RTLB experience it in the context of the schools,*
- *The role of the RTLB, Expectations of RTLB,*
- *Expectations in the context of the classroom*
- *How do we evaluate what we do?*

Flowchart (left column):
- Hand book Review
- Observations in Yr 8
- Baseline Data
- Yr 9 tchrs participating in transitions inquiry
- Establish Pilot Project (Yr9) Year level
- Yr level teachers infect faculties
- Rotating Deans infect year levels
- RTLB infects RTLB cluster

Strengths
- Philosophy that embraces inclusion
- People attending mtgs re Transition project - include DP, Yr 9 SMT
- Principal in active dialogue with RTLB:
  - open to moving forward
  - pro-active → immediate action
  - supportive of consistency in RTLB representation in school
  } + motivation from mngmt
- Role model in system depends on Background data → referral { venue for observations, supportive, perception of curriculum contexts
- Most yr 9 teachers have observed in quality/effective yr 8 classrooms
- Professional dialogue re observations (includes HODs) } foundation for further obs. dialogue workshops
- Observations were subject specific

Threats:
Anxieties about
- NOT being able to (A) deliver curriculum in time (B) control students
-
- Reluctance to look at teacher role in student behaviour

Weaknesses/Issues
- Different style of tchg (Yr 9) to what students are accustomed (Yr 8)
- Balkanisation - people in little factions (according to faculties)
- Limited opportunities to discuss effective strategies
- NO needs assessment/pre-testing of existing knowledge
- Limited understanding of curriculum levels - fixation on Yr level tchg focus
- Deficit view of students @ risk or not achieving or not conforming
- Lack of understanding re RTLB role
- More than 1 RTLB wkg in the sch - different modes of wkg - Conflicting "Ladders of Inference"
- School-wide streaming → 2 A+P and 1 Performing Arts class cream off good role models
- Predominance of challenging behaviours (ie disengaged learners) swamp lower classes.

Opportunities
- → Te mana Korero video + team could provide catalyst
- → Foundation for strong/effective Collaborative Teams
- + All teachers of one class (cross curricular team) get together to discuss Common concerns/admin/mngmt - identified need for data → system review
- → Support from Student Support (Team Solutions re curriculum levels, asttle
- → Focus for PD to "empower" tchrs
- → Principal supportive of consistency of RTLB role
- → Rotating Deans will aid inculturation
- → Opportunity to engage RTLB support

Diagram 9: Example of a SWOT analysis (using a participant's perceptions) of a school context
(Identifying features have been removed)

Because I was keen to investigate (from a research perspective) how members perceived power in the group, I did not participate in this particular conversation - apart from performing the role of scribe. The conversation was very fast and energetic and a challenge to record. To ensure the meanings were captured as intended by participants the key points were recorded in the form of a mind-map on the whiteboard. Participants added to or corrected notes as the conversation progressed. Later that day the mind-map was used as a prompt to help record the conversation in greater detail for the raw data.

4. *A SWOT analysis of the school contexts*

At the end of the first school term the group spent a whole day using the SWOT analysis approach to process each participants' perceptions of one of the secondary school's in which they worked. This provided opportunity to put the 'talk' of the group into context and support each RTLB as they reflected on the their work contexts and possible roles they might have working with the staff and students. Each RTLB, prompted by questions and reflections from group members described the special features, strengths and current areas of focus in the school.

These analyses were recorded on very large sheets of paper on the wall so that the whole group could track the progression of the analysis and see the opportunities arising out of strengths and weaknesses. This process assisted each participant to identify possible areas where they might use their own strengths to capitalise on opportunities to initiate, support or facilitate possible areas for further development within the school. Threats to the role of the RTLB were also identified and reframed as opportunities or goals. An example of one of these SWOT analyses (with identifying words removed) is on the facing page. (See Diagram 9)

The themes from each of the four sections of the SWOT analysis for each school were then collated into two tables: one recording the strengths and opportunities and the other, the weaknesses and threats. This not only highlighted the common issues and concerns but also identified key areas for the group to focus their work. Prevailing weaknesses common to three or more schools and strengths and opportunities common to all four schools highlighted possibilities for RTLB to support these schools in further development of:

- School wide systems for responding to diversity
- Communication processes among staff and between contributing and secondary schools
- Development and clarification of the role of the RTLB

Diagram 10: Collation of key themes from Strengths and Opportunities sections of SWOT analyses of four secondary schools

School S	School E	School N	School K	Strengths -Opportunities
Classroom management workshops gaining popularity Focus = relationships that lead to engaged learners	Establish a PD team and address practical strategies to release teachers. Identify HOD & tchr needs	Support from team solutions for PD x curriculum levels & astle Te Mana Korero video could provide catalyst re Co-op. Lng.	- Year level meetings - Taskforce day - Whole staff PD x RTR system	**PD with staff**
Pastoral network mtg = good forum for communicating. Is case specific but could lead to identifying trends	Seek feedback re PD. Investigate new ideas Trial in sch. context Report to committees	Most yr 9 teachers have observed yr 8 teachers at contributing school. People attending 'transition' mtgs include DP, yr 9 Dean, SMT.	Need to resolve disparity between the language of the school culture and that of restorative justice	**Communication**
Weekly pastoral network meetings established -but no clear identification system	RTLB currently involved in review x whole school system	Identified need for systems review -- management open to this.	Consider "How we need to function to be effective?"	**Systems**
RTLB wkg on a one-to-one level -slowly developing credibility	Establish a 'safe' template for relating with teachers	Rotating deans will aide inculcation.	Jan Hill & Kaye Hawke = staff appraisal	**Staff**
	Change beliefs -> ownership -> commitment.		Discipline committee could be re-named -> RTR committee	**Power**
	Critical friend x P. Wkg with DP to arrange PD for staff	Principal in 'active' dialogue with RTLB.		**Relationships x principal**
High turnover helps to eradicate 'history' re past RTLB role. Success in one-to-one support is increasing awareness re classroom management	Develop a balance between: -Individual case management -Teacher case management -Leading PD - Systemic support	Transition inquiry with year 9 teachers. Establish pilot project with this team. Yr level teachers infect faculties. -> rotating deans infect other year levels	Addition of new school to cluster next year will provide ideal opportunity to re-negotiate RTLB role	**RTLB role**
Students do self refer. – Developing process /template for engaging with students	Te Mana Korero, Co-op Lng, & Effective Teaching but not transferring into tchr change.		After 4 mtgs re RTR student's parents are called in	**Students at risk**
Working relationships now developing with HOFs	Presentation re the role of the RTLB -> re-negotiating the role of the RTLB in the school.	Tendency to factions could be turned into foundation for strong & effective collaborative teams		**Relationships X staff**
Developing cross-cultural understandings thru orientation package		Interactions with contributing schools. Reciprocal visits between yr 9 & yr 8 teachers	Potential to grow positive relationships between students & staff	**Relationships X community**
HUGE potential for school-wide review x systems	System under review		Teachers rostered on duty	**School organisation**

- Enhancement of relationships among staff, students and school community
- Processes for supporting students to develop appropriate behaviour
- Identification of students at risk
- Enhancing teacher expectations of students
- Transition processes – from contributing schools and through the year levels within the secondary school
- Staff professional development and learning programmes.

A table showing the collated summary of the strengths and opportunities of each school is included on the facing page. (See Diagram 10)

5. A Workshop for school and RTLB colleagues

At the end of 2004 a group-facilitated interactive workshop provided an opportunity for the RTLB to share their work with school and RTLB colleagues. The topics and activities chosen by the group reflected the current projects and key areas of concern of each RTLB. The content of the topics reflected some of the learning that had resulted from the year's work both in the group and in the context of their schools. The following is a summary of the workshop programme:

Inclusive Programming Workshop (Secondary Schools)

- Welcome and introductions
- Agenda activity *(interactive consultation with participants to determine what they need from the workshop)*
- Setting the scene *(establishing workshop protocols & comparing with student's needs)*
- The Adolescent World *(Fishbowl activity)*
- Transitioning year 9 students
- Using the 5 Column Approach *(a model for positive conferencing and problem solving with students)*
- Setting up an Inclusive Class *(establishing a positive climate at the beginning of the year)*
- Sharing strategies *(Participants share favourites inclusive strategies)*
- Recap & Reflection

Diagram 11: Summary of Inclusive Programming workshop

Diagram 12:   **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Introduction

You have been offered the option of participating in an interview with me to provide opportunity for us to engage in a confidential reflection on your participation in the learning group and the impact of this for you.

If you have agreed to us taping the interview and indicated this preference on the completed participant form the discussion will be taped. Please feel free to indicate at any time during the discussion if you wish the tape recorder to be turned off.

As soon as possible after the discussion I will transcribe the tape and provide this along with the transcription for your verification before any information on the tape is included in the project report. Please inform me if you consider I have misreported or misrepresented in meaning of anything we discussed.

You also have the option of receiving the tape back once we have both agreed that the transcript is accurate and only includes information that you have agreed to being included in the report.

Apart from the opening questions the interview will be in the nature of an informal discussion. It is impossible to pre-determine any subsequent questions as these will depend on your response to the key questions listed below:

Leading Questions:
- How has participation in the learning group impacted on you in your work context?
    - Has participation reinforced or changed any of your beliefs?

- Has there been any impact for you in contexts other than work?
    - If you answered "yes" would you care to tell me about this? pedagogy?

- Has the journey of the group surprised you in any way? – if so, can we talk about that?

- Do you have any suggestions regarding the future of this group?

Thank you for participating in this discussion

Diagram 13: **Exert from one of the individual interviews**	
Has there been any impact for you in contexts other than work? And you don't have to share this if you don't want to but if it is "yes" would you care to share it?	*(Researcher's Analysis)*
You know, what really turns me on about this job is that vision for the future –and that um... like your looking way out here and its really exciting – to start you know to have that vision and to have the ability - sometimes to do it. Because I always found, as a teacher. I was overwhelmed. By bureaucracy and all the things... And when you're at the coalface you don't really have a lot of time to see that. You haven't got a lot of opportunities to change kids' lives in the classroom context – but you don't have opportunities to change their futures. I think, in this job, you do. Greatly. So I get really excited about that – and I could talk about it all day actually because I still have that passion...	*This 'passion' for the work and the energy gained from what might be in the future – how we can bring about changes that improve life for students - is one of the common features that unites the group.*
...So, I think personally and also I feel, that being able to talk about some of those overwhelming things and see positive things in them through the group, I don't go home with all this negative baggage all the time. You know? Which is really important and I go home feeling stimulated –on a Friday – you know - with kinda ideas and thoughts and um	*Although, she has been out of the classroom some time it is still not difficult for Pamela to empathize with the teacher perspective.*
So you go home on a bit of a high perhaps as opposed to going home drained and ?.	
Yep – absolutely – so it's like stuff's coming in – I'm pulling stuff in rather than giving it out. I spend all week giving it out and I kinda get to put it in and yep so I have the energy and also I have the ability to reset my compass for the next week .	*Recognition of:* *- reframing that happens at meetings* *- the 'healing' aspect of the meetings* *- the energy we get from each other*
Like - Right! Well I'll get on to that – and – I'm going to do that.	*- the energy and passion in the group is 'nourishing'..*
So are you saying it's a bit of motivation to go into the next week?	*–often the guidance and perspective is indirect but effective.*
It's guidance and perspective.	
Right – so 'compass' is a really good word to use.	
Yes – and it gives me my... I have to keep this job in perspective I can't change anything overnight. Systems change really slowly...	

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6. Semi-structured open interviews

At the end of the year group members participated in a semi-structured open interview focussing on the impact of their participation in the group. Participants were sent the interview schedule and consent form two or three weeks prior to the date of the interview. All participants signed consent forms and selected the option of agreeing to their interview being taped. Once the consent forms were received a date was arranged for the interview. *A copy of the interview schedule can be found on the facing page.* (See Diagram 12)

The interview schedule consisted of four leading questions to guide the flow of the discussions. Subsequent questions depended on answers to the leading questions. Participants put considerable thought into their answers prior to the interview. One even came to the interview with her answers written down because she did not want to forget anything. She read these (answers) and then we discussed them further.

To maximise comfort levels for the participants they were asked to choose the venue for their interview. Some chose to come into the GSE office, others asked for the interviews to take place in their own offices.

The interviews were planned, timed, located, facilitated and recorded so that it was possible to make a number of validity checks by:
- Reflecting back during the interview process
- Taping and transcribing the conversations verbatim
- Formatting the transcripts with a column on the right side in which the participants were invited to make their comments, amendments, additions, elaborations, corrections to, or explanations of what they had said during the conversation
- Providing each participant with the tape and draft of the transcript of their conversation with the specific request that they audit, or amend the transcript where necessary
- Amending the transcripts where directed by the participant
- Analysing the amended transcripts to identify the underlying messages and themes
- Recording my own comments and reactions in the right hand column.

A sample portion of one of these amended and analysed transcripts is on the facing page. (See Diagram 13)

Diagram 14:   Excerpt from the table illustrating the common themes extracted from the individual interviews.

THEMES: Participants ->	1 Pamela	2 Denise	3 Kara	4 Serena	5 Wilma
Group has meant the difference between staying in this job	was about to resign			Has been the key to survival	
Affirmation - validation	validation	affirmation	confidence	affirmation	
A network of support – support system	+ reciprocal support	+ collegial support	+	+	+
Safety – felt professionally safe	+	+ a forum to try out ideas	+ safe context to practise in	+ (a space to be vulnerable)	
Trust & deep sharing & recognition of the ground work needed to develop trust	+	+		Concept of well-being	
Transparency	+		+	+	
Common (secondary) issues	+		+	+	+
The role of (secondary RTLB) has been clarified	+			+	+
Shared knowledge	+ prof. learning	+	+	+	+
Stimulation	+	+ strengthened things I have done	+	+keeping the passion alive	
Common beliefs	+	depth of understanding	+	+	
Positivity	+			& reframing	
Lack of ego & power play	+		+	+	
Opportunity to celebrate achievements	+	+ outlet	+		
Recognition of the specialness of the relationships	+	+	+	+ critical friends	+
The power of the group		+	+ Collective wisdom		Problem solving
Less stressed – get rid of negative baggage before going home - 'Friday high'	+	kept things in balance	changed her life – relationships & family life	+	stress management
Energy from shared passion	+		+	+	
Getting input to balance week's output	+				
The belief she could do it	+strengthened belief in inclusion	+ belief in 'good' teaching	+ respect & acknowledgement		
Interest in further study		+	+	+	
Guidance & perspective	+ re-set the compass		nourishment & insights	+	

(Left margin, upper section:) Impact – work context

(Left margin, lower section:) Impact – other than work

Each interview was then scanned and main points or key themes marked with a highlighter. The identified themes from each interview were then collated into table form. Key themes were listed in the left column and when these were evident in a transcript, this was recorded in the relevant column headed by the participant's name. This assisted with identifying patterns and dominant themes.

An excerpt from this table is contained on the facing page (See Diagram 14)

The table was then scanned for the recurring themes. These were collated in one list under five headings - the four (interview) questions and additional comments. The findings from the table and this list are incorporated in the chapters related to the three layers of learning arising out of the investigation.

Comments by participants during the interviews highlighted the support they had received from the group and the difference this had made to participants, particularly in the context of their work, but also in their personal lives. The interviews also put a spotlight on the need for networks of support and forums that provide opportunity for ongoing reflection and sharing in contexts that provide safety to problem solve around issues and concerns. The findings also demonstrated a need for RTLB to have access to support groups that are arranged according to the nature of the work they do and the level of the school in which they work, rather than arbitrary clusters organised according to geographic placement of schools.

6. *A whole group discussion*

After all the one-to one interviews had been transcribed and audited a whole group discussion was arranged. This meeting was deliberately scheduled for after the interviews in order to provide participants with a summary of, and to corroborate the findings from the interviews. Again participants had been provided with leading questions prior to the meeting to allow time for them to reflect and to ensure no one felt "put on the spot" during the discussion. This time the questions were:

1. *What has worked well? And why?*
2. *What would you like to change?*
3. *Where do you want to go from here?*
4. *How do you see my role this year?*
5. *How do you see my role next year?* (This meeting was the last data gathering activity and therefore the research role would not continue the next year).

During the individual interviews all participants had indicated that they wished for the group to continue the following year and this had been reiterated during several preliminary discussions as the end of the year approached. The questions were designed on this understanding. There was little discussion around the two questions related to the future of the group. *"What would you like to change?"* drew the united response of *"Nothing!"* The question: *"Where do you want to go from here?"* prompted one person to say *"Go on as we are."* Everyone agreed with this.

The whole-group focussed conversation was facilitated and recorded. The discussion began by reviewing a summary of the key messages from the individual interviews. These were discussed, clarified and enhanced as the group further developed concepts and ideas that had resulted from the individual interviews. This discussion reinforced key ideas about the impact of the group, its processes and some of the issues related to working in the secondary school context. Further ideas for future group activities were also discussed. The possibility of widening the membership of the group was revisited and the group confirmed a previous decision to maintain the closed membership.

The transcript of the conversation was analysed in a similar manner to the individual interview transcripts. It was first scanned for key ideas. These were then classified according to whether they were similar to, or contrasted with, those that had already been identified in the data from group meetings, individual interviews, SWOT analyses and mind maps. New ideas were noted and a list of the themes and ideas from this conversation was developed under the following headings:

- *Factors that contributed to the success of the group*
- *What has worked well*
- *Other themes and ideas discussed during the conversation*

This list was compared and contrasted with the literature and my own experiences and incorporated into the three layers of findings in chapters five, six and seven.

7. Researcher's experience, knowledge and interactions with participants.

My interactions in each school further developed both my understanding of the relationships and work of each RTLB in the school and also the general complexities of working in secondary schools. This also enabled me to better understand situations when RTLB were sharing within the context of the group.

8. The literature

Exploring the local and international literature provided opportunities to cross check individual and group experiences against existing theory, research projects and evidenced-based practice. Reports about local research projects and evidence-based practice provided relevant substantiation of the validity of the findings. The complexities associated with the diverse urban, multi-cultural school communities were the same or similar to the secondary school contexts in which the RTLB work. Discussion of the literature related to each of the three dimensions of the study is woven in with discussions about the findings reported in the following three chapters.

External influences

An important feature to keep in mind, and to take into account during the analysis and write up, has been the fact that the fortnightly meetings have been only one of a number of influences that may have contributed towards any 'ripple' effect resulting from this learning community. It would be difficult to determine to what degree participation in the group has been a precipitating factor for the involvement of any of the members in the facilitation of learning communities within their work contexts and any changes in their practice, beliefs or relationships. As the formal data-gathering period finished at the end of 2004, subsequent observations or participants' comments relating to any increase in their confidence in facilitating groups have not been included in the write up. However, some of the learning community activities, that have subsequently taken place, have been noted in chapter eight.

Convergence of the data

Yin uses two diagrams (cited from Cosmos Corporation, 1983) to illustrate *data triangulation* and the difference between convergence and non-convergence of data (See Diagram 15 on page 69a). Yin makes the point that it is possible, when there are a number of sub cases within the same case study, to "use multiple sources of data as part of the same study, but they nevertheless address different facts" (Yin, 2003. p.99) and the outcome is a series of conclusions.

Yin's diagram has been adapted (See diagram 16 on page 69) to show how, although there are multiple sources of data and three different layers within this one case study, "the findings of the case study have been supported by more than a single source of evidence" (Yin, 2003, p.99) and there is convergence of the triangulated data.

Diagram 15: Yin's (2003) model showing convergence and non-convergence of data. *(Copied from Yin, R.K. 2003, p.100. Case Study Research, Design and Methods (3rd ed)*

CONVERGENCE OF EVIDENCE

(Single study)
Archival
Records

Documents

Open-ended
Interviews

FACT

Observations
(direct and
participant)

Focus
Interviews

Structured
Interviews and
Surveys

NON CONVERGENCE OF EVIDENCE
(Separate substudies)

site visits ⟶ findings ⟶ conclusions

survey ⟶ findings ⟶ conclusions

documents ⟶ findings ⟶ conclusions
analysis

Figure 4.2 Convergence and Non-convergence of Multiple Sources of Evidence
SOURCE: COSMOS Corporation

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Convergence of data as triangulated in this inquiry

Meeting records x
Focused conversations

Group Vision
&
Action Plan

Interactions with
Participants (in the
context of the schools)

Group
brainstorming
sessions

Researcher's
knowledge &
experiences

FINDINGS re:
- Sp. Ed in sec. schools
- Role of RTLB
- Participation in a
learning community

(Group) planned &
facilitated workshop
for teachers & RTLB
colleagues

Semi -
structured
interviews

Group S.W.O.T
analysis x each school

Local and
International
Literature

Final whole group
focus discussion

Diagram 16: Adaptation of Yin's model showing convergence of data as it occurred in this investigation. (Adapted from Yin, 2003, p.100)

While there are concepts or findings arising out of each source of data that are not necessarily indicated in all the sources, the key concepts and findings related to this study are based on (convergence of) data that is evident in multiple sources. In other words data from each source integrates with and in many cases corroborates findings in all or almost all of the other sources indicated in the diagram above.

To further illustrate the corroboration of data across multiple sources this has been presented in a table (Diagram 17) showing the nine sources of data and the presence of direct (D) or indirect (I) evidence related to the key themes of the findings. Indirect evidence is used here in several senses. It may have been that the activities in the context of one source - for example participation in the group - might have demonstrated or provided evidence of the direct findings in other source/s   - like the brainstorming about power as experienced in the group. Another example of indirect evidence is where the implications in the findings from one source might confirm the direct evidence in other data sources. This was demonstrated many times when RTLB discussed potential for further development of schools systems and presented convincing evidence of how they might support the school with this.

Diagram 18:   Sources of evidence related to the role of the RTLB

Themes	Source of evidence	Evidence is demonstrated:	Outcomes of / Implications arising from this investigation"
Thr Role of the RTLB	Group Vision	Reflected in each aspect of the vision but especially in the goals – particularly that of >*Developing & piloting working models of effective practice that will build bridges between the adolescent world and their learning community*"	The role of the RTLB in some secondary schools differs from that of the RTLB in primary schools
	Key themes of the records of the fortnightly meetings:	A dominant theme in 13 of the 20 meetings. Evident in: Analysis of underlying messages in many discussions being related misperceptions about the role of the RTLB & the need for clarification about the role of the RTLB	RTLB are under utilised in secondary schools There are misunderstandings and misperceptions about the role of the RTLB
	Mind mapping sessions to develop key themes:	Reflected in brainstorms re: Power, expectations, the Role of the RTLB & how do we evaluate what we do?	There is need for clarity to be established around the role of the RTLB in secondary schools
	Interaction with participants in the context of the schools:	Evident in the contrast between effectiveness of RTLB in schools where they are able to work effectively (due to understanding about their role) and those where their contributions are limited (due to lack of understanding)	There is a need to find ways to establish 'belonging' for RTLB in secondary schools
	SWOT analyses of each school context:	Reflected in the constraints around the recognised "opportunities" due to lack of understanding in the school about the role of the RTLB.	Expectations related to the role of RTLB differ from effective practice – particularly in secondary schools
	The end of year workshop for RTLB & teachers:	General theme = developing a culture of inclusion. Inherent in the: topics & content of the workshop, the skills of the RTLB in facilitating units and the feedback from the participants.	There is a need for increased support of RTLB working in secondary schools
	The end of year Interviews:	Reflected in responses to all four questions but especially in that relating to the future of the group: participants needing role clarification in their schools and the 2 GSE members all identified the group as having potential to be a vehicle that might contribute to role clarification in the ed. Community.	There is a need and huge potential for GSE, RTLB, schools and families to work in partnership
	The final whole group discussion:	Reflected in recognition of a number of the factors contributing to the success of the group – especially the common bond of the role of the (complexities around) the role of the RTLB, the support the group has provided in clarifying the role	There is a dissonance between literature related to effective practice and understandings and expectations about the role of the RTLB. This is especially evident in secondary schools.
	The local and international literature related to:	A range of local literature. EG: Best Evidence Synthesis, Wylie's (2002) review x SE2000, MOE Guidelines x RTLB cluster management, Ryba's response to ERO report. Guild & Espiner's (2005) 3 R's of diversity website.	

Findings re:	Group. vision & Action Plan	Key Themes x Group. meetings	Mind maps of key themes	SWOT x schools	End of year. Workshop	Individual interviews	Final group. discussion	Researcher's knowledge, exp. & Interaction in schools	Literature
'Growing' a culture of learning_community	D	I D	I D	D	I	I D	D	D	D
Power - of learning, groups & knowledge		D	D	I	I	D	D	D	D
The importance of relationships in learning contexts	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Need for clarification re the role of RTLB in the secondary school	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
The potential for RTLB to support further development of school systems	D	I D	I	D		D	D	D	D
Need for systemic changes in sec. classrooms & schools.	D	D	I	D	I	D	D	D	D
The influence of Expectations: (ours & other peoples) on work/ learning outcomes	D	D	D	D	I	D	D	D	D
Potential for joint professional development & learning: RTLB & school staff	D	D	I	D	D	D	D	D	D
Potential for further development of Partnerships: RTLB x school staff x GSE	D	D	I	D	I	D	D	D	D

Sources of Data: KEY: I = indirect   D = direct

Diagram 17: Table showing the sources of evidence of the concepts and conclusions.

Each of the data sources was examined to determine how the evidence related to each of the main themes is demonstrated in that data source. This has been collated in a separate table for each theme, showing the source of evidence, how it is demonstrated and the outcomes and implications related to the three layers of the investigation. One of these - the table showing *Sources of evidence related to the role of the RTLB* is contained on the facing page. (See Diagram 18)

Diagram 19:
Showing evidence of facts / conclusions re each of three layers in each source of data

Source of data	Facts / conclusions relating to participation in and process of the group are evident in:	Facts / conclusions relating to the secondary school context evidenced in:	Facts / conclusions relating to The role of the RTLB evidenced in:
The Group Vision and Action Plan	What each member hoped to gain from the group is reflected in the vision, goals and action plan. - The vision reflects both participants and students' needs.	The identified needs underpinning the vision, goals, action plan, method and ideas re evaluation of the group work	- The shared values attitudes and beliefs of the participants - The goals for the group work - Intended method & action plan - Ideas re evaluation of the group's work
Key themes in the records of meetings :	- The group process - The impact of participation in the group - Importance of relationships - Power - Prof. learning of the RTLB - Relationships & expectations	- Importance of relationships - Need for systemic change - Use & abuse of power - Importance of expectations - Role of RTLB & the grp process - Prof. lng x RTLB & sch. staff	- Importance of relationships - Need for systemic change - Use & abuse of power - Importance of expectations - Role of RTLB & the grp process - Prof. lng x RTLB & sch. staff
Mind map sessions	- Where do we come from? - Power - Expectations in general - Expectations (of schools / tchrs) - Role of the RTLB - How do we evaluate/did it work?	- Where do we come from? - Power – in the work contexts - Expectations (of ourselves) - Expectations (of schools / tchrs) - Role of the RTLB - How do we evaluate/did it work?	- Where do we come from? - Power – in the work contexts - Expectations in general - Expectations (of schools / tchrs) - Role of the RTLB - How do we evaluate/did it work?
Researcher exp. & interaction in school contexts,	- Comments by participants to school staff - Discussions during school reviews & in staffrooms - Demonstrated links between learning in the group & activities facilitated by RTLB in schools.	- General observations of school culture - Facilitation of reviews of school processes (with management) - Staffroom conversations - Interaction with staff - Support provided to school in making applications for EPF funding.	- General obs. of school culture - Facilitation of reviews of school processes (with management) - Staffroom conversations - Interaction with staff – (both casual and in meetings) - Support provided to school in making applications for EPF funding.

SWOT analyses x Schools	- Demonstrated group process during SWOT
	- Support provided by group for each member during SWOT
	- Ability of members to empathise
	- Participants' application to task
		Identified:
		  Strengths
		  Weaknesses
		  Opportunities
		  Threats
			Identified:
			- Strengths
			- Weaknesses
			- Opportunities
			- Threats

End of year Workshop:	- The activities the participants chose to facilitate reflected the dominant themes of the group meetings. -(Manner of) facilitation reflected the relationships that had developed through the group	- Topics prioritised for workshop activities - Facts & conclusions within the content of the topics -Information shared by other RTLB during activities	- Topics prioritised for activities - Facts & conclusions within the content of the topics -Information shared by other RTLB during activities - Responses of workshop participants
End of year interview	- Impact in the work context - Impact in contexts other than work - Surprises - Future of the group - other participant comments	- Impact in the work context - Impact in contexts other than work - Surprises - Future of the group - Additional participant comments	Impact in the work context - Impact in contexts other than work - Surprises - Future of the group - Additional participant comments
Final Whole group Discussion:	Responses to questions: - What has worked well? - What would you like to change? - Where to from here: - How do you see the facilitator's role? Dialogue that developed from the discussion -The (RTLB) group dynamics - Communication in the group	- Responses to questions listed in the previous column - Additional comments - Participants discussions prior to, during and after lunch	Responses to questions: - What has worked well? - What would you like to change? - Where to from here: - How do you see the facilitator's role? Dialogue that developed from the discussion
Llocal and international Literature related	Books, journals, reports re - Relationships - Group processes - Communication - Power - Expectations - Learning Communities	Books, journals, reports re: - Secondary schooling - Effective teaching - Evidence based practice - Local research projects - (Changing) School culture - Learning communities	- Needs reflected in literature listed in previous two columns - MOE guide re Effective governance & management of RTLB - Schools' memoranda of agreement - Local & international literature

A table has also been complied showing which aspects of each of the various sources of data contributed to the findings in each of the three layers of learning. This table also serves as a summary of the overall collation and corroboration of data for the study. (See Diagram 19 on facing page)

KEY THEMES AND THREE LAYERS OF FINDINGS

The convergence of the multiple sources of data that arose out of the interpretation process highlighted nine dominant themes:

1. The 'growing' of a culture of learning community
2. Power – the power of learning, working in learning groups and sharing knowledge. Power in the context of the classroom
3. The importance of relationships in learning groups and in effective teaching
4. The role of RTLB in secondary schools
5. The need to include RTLB in school systems
6. The potential for further development of systems in classrooms and in (secondary) schools
7. The influence of expectations on learning outcomes and on the role of RTLB
8. The potential for shared professional development and learning among RTLB and school staff
9. The potential for further developing partnerships among RTLB, school staff and GSE.

The question that triggered, and has underpinned this investigation relates to the growing of a culture of learning community. That is: *Can a small learning community or community of practice become a catalyst for growing a wider culture of learning community?* For this reason the investigation began with a primary focus on the RTLB learning group and the impact of (participating in) this group. However, because the convergence of data that arose out of the study was so strong in relation to the complexities of special education and the role of RTLB working in the context of secondary schools, these aspects could not be ignored. Therefore the findings have been arranged in three layers of outcomes. Some of the themes have relevance to all three layers and are included in each of the discussions. Each layer of findings has been presented in a separate chapter of this report and is discussed in relation to relevant literature.

The first layer is contained in chapter five and focuses on identifying and describing the features of this group and the group processes. These are compared and contrasted with the literature. This discussion also includes examination of the factors identified by participants' as contributing to their perceptions that the success of the group.

Participants identified a number of helpful impacts arising out of their participation in the group. Chapter six investigates what it was about this group that participants found so powerful and relates this to learning communities by anchoring it on a focus of the power of knowledge and learning both in the context of group and the context of the classroom.

The RTLB group had a mirror like effect that reflected the complexities of RTLB working in a special education context in secondary schools. Chapter seven, the third layer, presents these findings and in doing this reveals the critical issues and concerns related to the role of the RTLB in secondary education. These are discussed in relation to literature and reports about role of RTLB in secondary schools.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a rationale for using multiple sources of data and identified the possible risks associated with the methodology. The process used to ensure the validity of interpretation of the evidence has been described. The methods used to gather, collate, code and interpret each of nine sources of data have been explained and illustrated with an example of each source. Analysis of the data resulted in identification of nine dominant themes, each contributing to three layers of findings that are the basis of the results of the investigation.

Each of chapters five, six and seven present a different layer of findings. Chapter eight provides an overview of the whole research process. It also summarises the research findings and uses these to inform a discussion about the possibility of small learning groups becoming a catalyst for growing a wider culture of learning community.

CHAPTER FIVE:
THE FIRST STRAND OF LEARNING
- THE GROUP

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the scope of the data and explained how the interpretation process highlighted the convergence of evidence that exposed key themes in the findings of the investigation. Some of these key themes revealed the complexities of RTLB working in secondary schools, others included factors related to learning communities. Also included in the themes are findings that are the result of the way members have experienced their participation in the group.

It is these findings that comprise the first of the three layers of learning and are the focus of this chapter. The characteristics of the group, the way its members interact, the communication processes, and special features of the group are all examined and compared with relevant literature and participant perceptions. Factors contributing to the participants' perceptions about and the success of the group are also examined alongside the literature related to effective groups.

THE ESSENCE OF THE GROUP

The first section of this chapter examines the 'essence' of the group and the importance of the relationships in the group. The features of this group are then compared with various groups in the literature to determine whether or not this is a learning community. The processes of the group are examined and the factors that distinguish successful groups compared with participant perceptions about this group.

The characteristics of the group

Here is a group that is both heterogeneous and homogenous and the significance of the qualities contributing to these descriptors is too important to overlook. There is a heterogeneous aspect to the group in the collection of very strong, unique, and colourful personalities. The diverse life experiences of each person have resulted in their developing distinctly different and, in some cases, creative approaches to their work.

The group is also homogenous in that the members share a significant number of common attributes. The most obvious of these being the fact that all the members are women. What is not so obvious at first glance though is the number of similarities in members' personal circumstances, training and career paths. However, one does not have to be with the group for long to realise all members are driven by the same passion - a passion that is fired by the very similar values, attitudes and beliefs underpinning their work. Factors contributing to this are the secondary school and special education contexts that are common to the work of the six group members.

The common characteristics of the members define the fundamental qualities of the group and the way it operates. The most obvious feature is its membership. This is very much a *women's* group - both in its characteristics and in the way it operates. All the members are women, of a similar age with young adult children and a strong family oriented focus. Five of the six members were born in New Zealand and began their careers in education as New Zealand trained teachers. All have worked in large urban schools in low socio economic areas. This has contributed to a shared value that underlies the 'business' of the group and may not be immediately apparent to an onlooker. Each member has talked about the way their teaching and life experiences have involved intersections with a range of ethnicities and cultures other than their own and, as a result, all members celebrate diversity.

In addition to the value the group places on diversity *there is a huge passion around education* (Serena). This passion is the driving force from which stems the energy these women have for the work they do. The work they do is all about making a difference for children in general but particularly for young adolescents, especially those who, owing to their 'special needs' label, are the subject of discrimination. It is this passion and a love of learning that also 'drives' the group. It seems impossible for this group to maintain a conversation in a social context even for a short period like a tea break or shared lunch, without reverting to a work related topic. The fact that the group turns every occasion, even the social interactions, into one of learning reinforces its identity as a 'learning community'.

While no longer working as classroom teachers, all six participants (including the researcher) have roles that involve working with teachers, providing support to meet special education needs in the classroom. That these classrooms are in secondary schools and each group member has supported her own children through secondary education is likely to have reinforced the group perception that the

current secondary system is often failing to meet the needs of students and, in many cases, teachers.

The members of the group recognise the fallacy in perceptions they frequently encounter that the source of the problems evident in some secondary classrooms lies entirely with the students. Neither do they subscribe to the expectation of many teachers that RTLB have 'quick fix' remedies for these students. There is a recognition in the group that:

> we need to move schools from "they [students] are a problem"
> to "what can we do, what do have now, where can we go?" (Anon)

And

> Systems change really slowly. People's attitudes change over the years
> – It's never a quick fix solution in this job... (Pamela)

At one of the first meetings of the group, in brainstorming the commonalities among them, the members identified the need to:

> Be strategic, working within the current school structure, focussing on building teacher and school capability by scaffolding on what is already there and enhancing partnerships between the schools and families.
>
> (from the group vision)

While this might seem a bleak outlook, it is important to keep in mind that the belief group members have in their role as agents of change stems from having witnessed many classrooms and schools where students' needs are being met with innovative and effective teaching practices. Also, being 'special' educators they all understand the importance of maintaining a positive focus and helping each other keep sight of the progress they are making.

> It's OK to take small steps. I have lowered my expectations of myself and now see my role a lot more realistically. I don't feel buried in problems now. I feel like I'm taking small steps in building and changing systems – this is a far more effective approach.
>
> (Pamela)

There is a saying in special education circles: "celebrate the little steps..." There are a number of meanings inherent in this saying - one of them along the lines of the old adage "save the pennies and the pounds will follow". It is this positive group focus and the sharing of the effective practices that prompted Pamela to say:

> I go home after meetings on a Friday feeling stimulated - with a truckload of ideas to follow-up on.

and Kara to make the comment:

> This group helps me to look for strengths and solutions - a far brighter way to see things.

According to Hill's (2001) "simple cultural matrix" (p.56) it appears the group is "highly conceptual and values harmony". The features identified in the matrix are: "creativity, brainstorming and concepts" and there are also "highly procedural and harmony valuing aspects to the focus on customer service, pleasing people and practical tasks". These features are evident in the underlying passion that drives group members and the way they interact and function as a group. It is reflected in the energy they put into finding ways to develop positive relationships with a range of groups that are seen to be 'customers' - students, teachers, principals, parents and support agencies. There is also a focus on identifying teachers' needs and developing models of professional learning that meets these needs.

Relationships

One of the themes in the findings was the importance of relationships. Relationships have relevance to all three layers of learning - the group, the complexities of working in secondary schools and the fostering of learning communities. The relationships the group members have with each other are much more than the usual working associations – they are what de Pree (cited by Senge, 1990) refers to as a 'covenant' based on "a shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to goals and to management processes" (p.145). While the:

> Values, beliefs, norms and other dimensions of community may be more important than the relationships themselves... it is the web of relationships that stand out and it is through the quality and character of the relationships that values, beliefs, and norms are felt.
>
> (de Pree, cited by Senge, 1990, p.145)

Kara recognised this when she said:

> Don't open the group up because we've spent this year developing relationships. That's what I think it has been about. And we needed to spend this year building up the relationships and we can start to move into each others' schools and do things more with each other next year.

The strength of the relationships that developed out of the common bonds and values, that were discovered and further developed in the course of the dialoguing of the group, was something that every member identified as being both significant and surprising.

> There's a commonality in [our] age so therefore there's a commonality with our children and transitions and families and leaving home and things like that. This group has given us another level... And knowing the personal side actually helps understand how they approach some of the work things - their personal side and what it brings to the RTLB role helps.
>
> (Denise)

Kara identified how her experience of trusting relationships in this group differed from her experiences in other groups when she said:

> We shared a lot of personal things with the group and I don't think other people always do that in groups. So we got to know a lot about each other – about each other's lives.

Community of kinship

The values and beliefs underpinning the agentistic stance of RTLB and the shared focus on the constant investigation of strategies and models that may assist teachers to develop more effective teaching strategies, reflect participants' constant striving to further develop their own efficacy. These "shared ideas and ideals" are also the "bonding and binding" that Sergiovanni (1994) refers to as being "tight enough to transform them from a collection of 'I's into a collective 'we'" (p.xvi). Although the group hasn't been in existence long enough to develop the significant "community of memory" that Sergiovanni refers to there is no doubt about the "community of kinship" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p.6) arising out of the common sentiments and developing traditions.

Contributing to this "community of kinship" are the common values, attitudes and beliefs that the group took the time to develop in the first few meetings. However, while they provided a focus and the cement for the initial relationship building, it is now those relationships that 'hold' the group. They hold the group together and they 'hold' the members at times when support is needed. When the group was discussing the factors that contributed to the quality of the relationships everyone agreed when Serena said:

> There is a bit about being 'held' too – I mean it is so important that we are allowed to be vulnerable about our job and support each other.

Belonging

It is through these relationships and common bonds that the group members experienced the very essentials they are striving to support teachers to create for their students: *Belonging, mastery, independence* and *generosity* are the basic elements of a child rearing philosophy described by Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern (1990) as a metaphor for community building. Maslow (1954), Coopersmith (cited by Brendtro et al (1990,) and Sergiovanni (1994, p.126) all recognise the importance of these elements in providing the four basic components of self-esteem: *significance, competence, power and virtue.* All four RTLB identified the belonging to the group had restored or increased their self- esteem:

> *When I first came along to the group I was ready just to resign. I began to think, "I can't do this job. It's just too big and too hard". I was in a validation vacuum... and now... that [belonging to the group] really did change my belief in [myself].* (Anon)

The relationship and sense of belonging each person has with the group is further enhanced by the capacity of the group to provide each of the four elements for its members. It is possible that this sense of belonging may also be more meaningful for the RTLB members in that it might be compensating in part for a lack of belonging experienced in their school contexts, especially in situations where they find they are the only RTLB working in a school.

DEFINING THE GROUP

The abundance of literature on the subject of groups and group communication theory indicate that this group meets the criteria for a number of different types of groups. This section explores the literature related to group features and processes. Characteristics typical of different types of groups are used to highlight the features of this group. Using a few of the very many points made in the literature a picture is provided of how this group operates and the factors that contribute to its effectiveness.

Group or team?

It would appear that some researchers use the terms "team" and "group" to distinguish between different types of groups while others appear to use the terms less discriminately. Beebe and Masterton, (2003) are two of many authors who make a number of distinctions between groups and teams. These distinctions however can be very confusing. According to Beebe and Masterton, (2003, p.4 - 10), the members of this group have all the attributes they consider to be indicative of effective team members. However, the group as a whole does not meet their criteria for an effective team.

Many teaching groups are referred to as 'teams' and GSE employees are grouped in 'teams'. There are a number of distinctions between this group and the features usually associated with a (work – based) team. Probably the most significant is that the members of this group are each employed by a different school rather than one organisation. Additionally, while this group has the clear, well-defined goals and expectations for (team) operation and coordinated and collaborative methods for accomplishing the work, the members do not have the duties and responsibilities that Beebe and Masterton, (2003, p.4-9) consider indicative of 'team' members. That is, unless one regards the motivation members may feel to come to all

meetings as a 'responsibility'. If this is the case, this becomes yet another distinguishing feature in that the (voluntary) members of this 'team' are far more devoted to regular attendance than members of some work-based teams. This group determines its own tasks – they are self-set, not arising from the expectations of any one organisation.

An even more significant distinction between this group and a work-based team is the quality of relationships among the members who now know each other very well. This familiarity results in much less formal and more personal conversations than those of the work-based teams described in the literature. The quality of relationships also means that the 'work' of the group involves more trust among members than that usually characteristic of work-based teams. Wilma, when reflecting back on the year, described the difference between the work of this group and that of many RTLB teams when she said:

> I think also we seem to have our difficulties 'up on top'. Rather than our admin and all that sort of stuff [being] 'up on top' we actually deal quite in depth with the frustrations and the honesty about where we're at personally. That was 'up there' and the other stuff – um the colour of forms and how many on your caseload was, 'way down' - wasn't even discussed.

Comments made by the group members not only reflect a number of positive factors about this group but also fit into the three criteria that Beebe and Masterton (2003, p.4-9) have identified as being indicative of a typical group. Samples of these comments are matched against each of the three criteria listed below:

1. "The members are bound by a common purpose" (p.5), in this case described by participants as:

    Changing systems to accommodate students (Group definition)

2. " There is a sense of belonging" (p.5) – so strong in this group that Selena said

    > when I'm feeling alone – when things go wrong, terribly wrong and you want to hide under the duvet - if I didn't have this 'place' [group] to come to ...I'd be like 'Mrs Moggins' who knits under the rose bushes.
    > (Serena)

3. "The members exert influence on one another" (p.5)– to the extent that Pamela reported

    > I have had a major change in my approach to my work and this has been the direct result of [participation in] the group.

Container Model or Bona Fide?

Frey's (2003, p.3–7) definitions, however, are not quite so easy to apply as a means of classification of, or comparison with this group. Frey distinguishes between what he refers to as a 'container model' and 'bona fide' group

perspectives. He describes each group type as having two main distinguishing but different characteristics. It would seem that this group is not a neat fit for either category. In each case this group demonstrates one but not both of the distinguishing features of both groups.

Like the 'container model' this group has "a relatively closed identity with fixed boundaries and borders that define who is and is not a member" (Frey, 2003, p.3). Also like the container model, "the focus of the study is on internal processes as groups attempt to solve problems, make decisions, provide members with social support" (Frey, 2003, p.3). However, unlike "the container model, in which the environment or context in which the group is embedded tends not to be acknowledged" (Frey, 2003, p.3), this group's business focuses almost solely on the context in which the group is embedded and the group meetings have become the vehicle for exploring problems related to working in the secondary school context.

The '*Bona fide groups*' referred to by Frey are regarded as such because they demonstrate two important and interrelated characteristics: "stable yet permeable group boundaries and interdependence with their relevant contexts, (Frey, 2003, p.4)". In comparison, although this group has a stable membership, it is so *stable* that the boundaries are not permeable.

The one thing the RTLB participants in this group were adamantly clear about all year was that they wished to restrict membership to the current participants only. At the final meeting for the year, when considering the future of the group, the RTLB members all agreed with Pamela who said:

> *I feel like we've worked hard at building our foundations and I kind of think we've got lot's of work ahead of us really – and we've got lots of plans and we've got lots of really exciting things to move forward on and I don't think we can do that with a bigger group.*

The apparent exclusivity inherent in this (closed membership) standpoint is in direct opposition to the philosophy of inclusion that underlies the vision of the group. However, as the year passed and the culture of the group evolved, it became more and more evident that a newcomer could have considerable difficulty in feeling ownership of the group vision, identifying with the 'group identity' and understanding the 'language of the group'. By the end of the year the group dynamics were such that there were occasions when there was an obvious understanding and 'reading between the lines' that meant there was a lack of need to actually verbalise. The heap that was left unsaid and the safety to use humour

demonstrated the bond and understanding that had grown between members. It could be difficult for new members to feel a part of the group.

It is also important to recognise that, after only twenty meetings, this group is still in the early stages of development. Should the attitude of closed membership persist, as time progresses there is a danger of *'groupthink'* where "conflict is always avoided or not allowed and the group may not survive as a intact system" (Janis, 1972 cited by Arrow & Mc Grath, 2000, p.163). It is possible that the group has already reached this stage and that the attitude of closed membership is indicative of the faulty decision making that Frey (2003, p.2) explains can arise out of a state of *groupthink*. The decision to maintain closed membership is certainly in direct contrast to the ethos of inclusion that underlies the work of the group and would not be a desirable feature to foster in learning communities in schools.

On the other hand, if one uses the term *groupthink* in the sense that Frey (1999, p.8) refers to Keltner (1957) as having introduced it to describe the positive form of cooperative thinking, then one would have to conclude that this aspect of group phenomena is already evident. While there is an undeniable cohesiveness to this group, the lack of openness and the

> *tendency for group members to act uncritically rather than risk conflicts that might disturb group cohesiveness is compatible with the notion of [reverse process] experienced in a closed, decision making group context.*

(Frey, 1999, p.77)

Group supervision or reflective practice?

It is also important to recognise that the exclusive membership contributes to yet another distinguishing feature of this group. That is, the trust that has developed among members and the safety they feel to admit to the group that they are having problems or finding something difficult to deal with at work. Early in the group's development two sentiments repeatedly expressed by members were:

> *It is just so important that we are allowed to be vulnerable about our job and support each other.* (Serena)

and

> *This is more valuable than any [group] supervision we get.* (Pamela).

While the group was not established with the intention of being 'group supervision', the understanding of confidentiality about the sharing that happens in the quite obviously fulfils at least some of the supervision needs of some of the members.

This is further reinforced by the group focus on learning through reflecting about shared experiences and then integrating them with theory and evidence-based

practice (Beddoe, 2000, p.73). This strong reflective element is present in most of the communicative processes of the group. Many of the group interactions involve

> *Intentional reflection for the purpose of making sense of and learning*
> *from experience for the purpose of improvement.... and linking existing*
> *knowledge to an analysis of the relationship between current experience*
> *and future action...*
>
> (Mc Alpine & Weston (2002, p.69)

The reflective nature of the 'work' of the group, its size, the regularity and frequency of meetings, closed membership, quality of sharing and the benefits gained from their participation probably all contribute to participant' perceptions about the group fulfilling supervision needs. Pamela explained it in these terms:

> *I think this group has actually allowed me to reflect on what I've done*
> *and also to celebrate my achievements which is something...it's really*
> *hard to do on your own.*

There are equally as many features that negate the group's classification as supervision – the most obvious being the project-focussed 'work' and the sharing of resources.

Less obvious but more significant is the power differential among the members. While the trust demonstrated by the RTLB members in their sharing of work issues and concerns reflects the type of interaction one might expect in supervision circles, by comparison the two GSE members are somewhat constrained. There are a number of reasons for this, but probably the most compelling being that of 'the code of conduct' for GSE workers that requires them to refrain from talking in critical terms about the MOE to people outside the organisation. This factor reinforced the support and supervision aspect of the role of the two GSE members.

On this basis it might appear that the group has greater inherent benefits for the RTLB than for the GSE members. However, the benefits of the partnerships developed in the process of this group are reciprocal. The shared understandings, the support and knowledge that arose from the ongoing dialogue of the group not only provided clarity for both RTLB and GSE participants but also increased the efficacy of everyone's roles within the contexts of the schools. The learning that results from hearing the RTLB perspective of the complexities, issues and concerns related to their role and work in secondary schools has the potential to contribute considerably to knowledge and understanding that could further enhance the work of GSE in secondary schools.

Learning community?

Many of the features described so far in relationship to groups and teams are identical to those used in the literature to describe learning communities. It would seem that there is little doubt about this group's validity as a learning community - not just a 'learning' community but a number of different communities. According to the distinguishing qualities listed by Sergiovanni (1994. p.71) this group also has the attributes of: a professional community, a collegial community, an inclusive community and an inquiry community. Additionally the group demonstrates the "interdependent relationships, with all individuals engaged in a common purpose and where people rely on each other to reach agreed upon goals that they would not be able to achieve independently" recognised by Hord (2003), in Huffman & Hipp (2003, p.x) as key to effective learning communities.

The group also has evidence of the two indicators Hills' (2001) considers necessary in a learning community. That is: "Its members attitudes to mistakes" and "How many people help each other and to what extent?" (p.21-22). Hills suggests that a group is only a 'learning community' when members are happy to talk about the mistakes they are not happy about having made. If people are in a comfort zone of not making mistakes "they are not a learning community". Hills (2001) also suggests that "When people feel able to tell jokes, or make comments in which they are victims, this demonstrates an open, trusting environment that is so necessary for mutual learning to take place" (p.62). Wilma identified this during the final group conversation when she said *I think there was humour early on – very early [in the group's development]*.

If we, accept that communities are places where people really want to be because of a sense of kinship...and shared ideas and values...where people are working together to create the school which best meets their needs and there are five key ingredients for creating such a community...a shared vision, shared beliefs, personal mastery, team learning and system thinking (Hough & Paine (1997, p.196) then this group definitely is a learning community.

Does size make a difference?

In examining the size of groups Birmingham and McCord (2002) in Michaelson, Knight and Fink, (2002) comment on the 'trade off' between resources and member size. While larger groups tend to have more resources, smaller groups allow for more individual participation in discussions and members therefore feel more satisfied. They report that most researchers have concluded that for significant

intellectual work the minimum size for an effective group is five members. However they also report that difficulties with group processes tend to arise in groups larger than seven. It would seem the six-person size of this group makes it an ideal size for effective results.

Since its inception members have (as discussed earlier) had a number of discussions relating to the possibility of including more people. One of the factors creating reluctance to opening the group to a wider membership is the difficulty this would present in terms of the focus of the work of the group - the (secondary) schools in which each RTLB works. Although the issues and concerns challenging each RTLB are similar, the schools themselves are so complex and different that, if the group was any larger, there would not be time to address each person's needs in one meeting (Hills, 2000, p.79). At the end of the year, when reviewing the future of the group and yet again discussing the possibility of opening the group up to wider membership, Denise summed this up when she asked the group:

> [Like] how many high schools can we manage in our heads? We've got five high schools here. In terms of keeping in touch with where we're at....

The group identified the smaller number as being a critical factor in the quality of dialogue that had developed during the meetings (Senge, 1990, p.245). The fact that there are less than twelve members also increases the possibility of members participating freely and influencing each other. (Belbin, 1981, p.108; Beebe & Masterton, 2004, p.123-124) This freedom of participation is evidenced in the nature and focus of discussions that occur at meetings.

GROUP PROCESSES

Communication

Discussions quickly progressed beyond the 'didactic talk' referred to by Belenky et al, (1986, cited by Brockbank & McGill, 1998,) where each participant reports experiences "but there is no attempt among participants to join together to arrive at some new understanding" (p.59). They were interactive dialogues grounded in the realities and experiences of the participants. 'Dialoguing' is used here in the sense that these were the type of reflective conversations that resulted in greater understandings of the topic being discussed and what was happening in the dynamics of the group (Bohm et al, 1990; Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Frey, 2002; Mc Alpine & Weston, 2002; Senge, 2003). During these 'dialogues' members would:

> *speak openly and 'authentically... they would try and understand the experiences of their team mates...they would be 'present' in their interactions...by listening and responding throughout rather than 'tuning out' of the conversations*
>
> Bluber (1958, 1965) cited by Hoover, 2005, p.26).

Typical of many dialogues were the discussions that often began with a member expressing frustration about recently observed classroom situations in which students' needs did not appear to be recognised. As the dialogue developed the group was able to also identify with the situation from the teachers' perspective. In this way "shared meanings and understandings are enhanced" (Frey, 2002, p.169).

The reciprocal respect members had for each other, the discovery of the common ground in their similar roles, experiences in secondary schools, shared values, attitudes and beliefs, contributed to developing the trust needed for members to share their innermost feelings about the vulnerability they felt when working in their schools. The more members shared, the greater the understanding of the common purpose of the group and the stronger the collegial goodwill among the group.

Also contributing to the development of both the collegiality and the depth of dialogue was the absence of the hierarchy held by people in authority that Bohm (cited by Senge, 2003,) points out as being "antithetical to dialogue" (p.245). There was a lack of seniority of rank among the group that came primarily from the fact that, in contrast to work-based teams, all but two of the participants have different employers and no one among the group holds a position of seniority.

Just as Senge (2003) predicts, a feeling of friendship grew as a result of the vulnerabilities exposed and trust exercised during the dialogues that developed. This general feeling of friendship was to be the seed of a number of close friendships and interdependencies that developed outside the group meetings. These relationships, the common bonds and the feeling of friendship that developed as a result of the dialoguing were so significant that it was not until late in the data collection period when the group finally entered the 'storming' phase in their development that this feeling of collegiality had opportunity to be really tested. Members were able to work through a number of differences in opinions related to content and facilitation of topics for a jointly prepared and facilitated workshop.

Developmental stages

A number of researchers have identified four or five distinct stages in small group development. Example are: Tuckman's (1965): "forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning" or 'termination' as the later stage is referred to by Verdi and Wheelan (1992. p.327) cited by Harris and Sherblom (2005, p.76). Belbin, (1981) later adapted this model to a four-stage process of "forming, storming, norming and performing". Similar models but with different labels include "orientation, conflict, emergence and reinforcement" Fisher (1970, p.140 -144) and "orientation, conflict, consensus and closure" and Tubbs (2004, p. 230-232).

These all involve a four or five stage process of getting to know each other, working through discord as the relationships become secure enough for people to disagree and then settling to 'being' and working as a group. Some models depict the final stage as being when the group is working well together. Others have identified the eventual disbanding of a group as the final stage. Initially these "single sequence models" (Hirokawa & Poole, 1996, p.218) were thought to be fairly linear, implying that a tidy process happens in distinct and ordered stages. Then Scheidal and Crowell (1964, 1966) cited by Hirokawa & Poole, (1996, p.25) introduced the idea of a more "spiral model" of group development that contributed to the theory that groups may go through the middle stages several times.

While the linear models may be generically well suited to many group processes, Poole's (1981) "Multiple sequence" theory described by Hirokawa and Poole, (1996, p.218) and taking into account research relating to communication processes, is a much better match for what happened in this particular group. This model recognises the integrated nature of developing relationships, developing and maintaining group processes and working on projects. Poole described the process as groups jumping back and forth between the task (group process), topic (group project) and relationship tracks.

While every gathering of the group provided opportunities to further develop interpersonal relationships and many of the topic (project related) discussions also involved relationship building, there were times when the focus of the group was quite deliberately on further developing the interpersonal relationships within the group. At least every two or three months the group would leave the 'topic' track by suspending the project related work of the group and jump back to the 'task' track to revisit the group processes. This was to ensure that the way the group was functioning was meeting the needs of all group members. As the group became

more secure the time between reviews lengthened and the time devoted to the review shortened. (See Diagram 20)

Mtg:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Task Track	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X				X	X			X
Topic Track	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Relat-ionship Track	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X			X

Diagram 20: The integrated nature of the group 'tracks'

Eleven of the twenty meetings involved some element of working on the group process. On several of these occasions the focus was on analysing what was happening within the group and coming to a group consensus about how to proceed from that point. For example, in meeting six, the group looked at how the reciprocal support compared with one to one supervision and, at the following meeting, how members perceived or experienced power in the group. It is interesting that as time went on, and the cohesiveness of the group increased, more time could be spent on topic related work and less on the group process and relationships.

It seemed that it was not until the group began to work on the collaborative project of preparing a workshop for RTLB and secondary teachers that any need for compromise became evident as people began to engage in negotiating differences of opinions related to 'what' and 'how' topics would be facilitated. Any number of the following factors might have contributed to the lengthy 'honeymoon' period or delay of any 'storming' phase of this group:

1. The trust that grew out of the process of developing the shared vision
2. The common values, attitudes and beliefs and (work) experiences that were the binding of the members
3. Additional factors like the lack of power play and the quality of relationships
4. The meetings during the first half of the year were very much in a mode of reflective practice. Each person brought their own project or current challenges, issues or concerns to meetings. Members supported each other in the processing of these by asking questions, making suggestions and following with bringing relevant resources and articles to subsequent meetings
5. Members genuinely enjoyed coming to these meetings and having opportunity to get together with like-minded people.

Effective groups

The members of this group consider it to be the successful group described by Bertcher, (1994) as "...two or more individuals who interact over time to achieve one or more group goals or to achieve individual goals that are valued by each member who believes that this group can help him or her achieve them" (p.5). The group output "meets ... organisational standards of quantity and quality, members needs are more satisfied than frustrated," and the "social processes... enhance [the group's] capability ...to work together on subsequent tasks" as Hackman and Oldham cited by Pounder, (1998, p.67) consider indicative of effective groups.

It is also the "successful group" that Bertcher (1994) describes as being "... one in which leadership functions are shared by all members of the group" (p.11). This is in spite of comments by some participants who indicate that they equate leadership with facilitation. This belief does not recognise the culture of shared leadership that the group has in the way each of the members leads the group in its learning, contributes to the work and models for the group.

The intention of group members to support each other in their practice in secondary schools places this group very definitely in the category of the 'educational' group, described by Bertcher, (1994) as a group of people gathering on the assumption that "there is a body of knowledge and skills to be acquired and the group setting can be used to facilitate learning" (Bertcher, 1994, p.183). More specifically it is a small, educational learning group with a therapeutic element in the sense that a natural consequence of the 'work' of the group is the

> *Learning about themselves and their relationships with others. The communication in this (type of) group is characterised by discussion and analysis of a particular issue but it [the group] is not organised in such a way or vested with authority to directly solve problems.*
> (Harris & Sherblom, 2005, p.14).

The group also fits the local (GSE) concept of "Network of Learning Support" in that it is a bringing together of people from a number of schools to work in partnership with GSE with a view to supporting reciprocal learning and achieving better outcomes for students.

The degree of effectiveness of this group cannot be determined either by the presence or lack of attributes cited in the mountains of literature pertaining to groups or by any output of the group. Whether or not the group achieves the purpose that motivated the original invitation for people to consider forming a group also becomes an irrelevant measure of effectiveness in that light of the fact

that without its members it would not be a group. Therefore the effectiveness of the group must also be examined in the light of members perceptions about how well the group functions and meets the needs that motivate their subscribing to the group. The following section examines member perceptions about the effectiveness of the group.

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS

The agreed period of data gathering for this project was one school year. At the end of 2004 the group came together to reflect on what had gone before and to consider whether the group might continue the following year. After the group had discussed a summary of the results of the individual interviews that had occurred over the previous month they were asked to consider five questions:

1. *What has worked well? And why?*
2. *What would you like to change?*
3. *Where do you want to go from here?*
4. *How do you see my role this year?*
5. *How do you see my role next year?*

Participants' responses to the questions fell into two distinct themes. Firstly, how they experienced the group – the features of the group and group process and secondly, the relative factors that contributed to what they considered to be the success of the group. Some of these responses have been woven into the first two sections of this chapter - the remainder, including comments about facilitation, are discussed below or in chapter six. Many of the features or factors considered by members to contribute the success of the group were also evident in the findings from a number of the data sources.

Factors contributing to the success of the group

At this point in time (the end of data-gathering period), this group was still very much 'a happening thing'. There could be no doubt that members considered the group had been successful. All members were attending every meeting and the general consensus at the end of the year meeting was that the group should *continue as we are* (Denise)... supporting each other to facilitate professional development, supporting each other to realise individual school projects and working together to write another workshop for secondary teachers.

The following statements (in italics) are the key points talked about by members. They either reflect group feelings or the findings from more than one source of data. Therefore, they have not been attributed to individuals:

- *The time taken in:*
  - *Laying the foundations of the group*
  - *Identifying common values, attitudes, beliefs*
  - *Establishing common bonds*
  - *Establishing a group process and the process used to do this.*
- *Effective relationships that are founded on:*
  - *Prior connections* – participants all knew of each other at least by reputation and that reputation was positive
  - *Respect for each other and each person's role* and credibility as established in reputations
  - *Recognition of the importance of relationships* both to each person and to the group as a whole
  - *Recognition that these relationships are now personal* as well as work related
  - *Honesty and openness* - a factor considered by all participants as contributing significantly to the success of the group
  - *Trusting - personal sharing - deep sharing - responsiveness of members towards each other – especially when in crisis.*

- *The contrast between this group and others.* Some cluster groups were perceived as unhelpful in relation to the specific need created by the focus of the work of this group on secondary schools. Some of the features mentioned as specific to this group were:
  - *Having the space to talk* about what their issues are, to talk about what needs to happen and identify what they'd like to change
  - *Being 'held' by the group.* The provision of a safe context in which members could be vulnerable
  - *The trust between members* -people aren't scared to take risks
  - *The lack of negative power or 'power play' in the group.* There was no need to have power, no need to compete.
  - *Operating in a re–framing or problem solving mode – rather than a "see how good I am" mode*
  - *The presence of humour* in group interactions
  - *Sourcing outside 'expertise' / input / nourishment*

-   *The motivation and deliberate planning to do more work together* - a vision for the future.

•   *The network of support provided by the group.* Recognition of the value of support – comparing this to support in supervision

•   Recognition of the worth of the work that each person contributed through their topic for the 2004 workshop

Facilitation strategies

The (facilitation and support) role of the two members who are not RTLB. Factors participants identified as being indicative of what they considered to be the effective facilitation of this group were:

-   *Developing foundations and providing structure*
-   *The deliberate pacing of discussions*
-   *The facilitator being slightly removed –[not an RTLB]*
-   *Analysis – being able to draw the threads together*
-   *Recognition of need to facilitate and not to exert power over*
-   *Exploring issues common to secondary education.*

A number of features cited by participants as being indicative of an effective group also contribute to the effectiveness of the group as a vehicle for exploring issues common to secondary school education. They were the recognition that:

-   *The reflection has provided insight into what is happening both in the job and for us personally*
-   *The group helped us with identifying patterns in what is happening in the schools and gave us guidance with how to process*
-   *We were scaffolding – linking to and building on what we have already done and identifying what we have yet to do*
-   *The group provided stimulation and motivation to research, read, link in with and take account of the latest research, both to further our own knowledge and to give credibility to the group*

One of the most exciting and significant comments and the most confirming of the group's status as a learning community reflected recognition that there is a need for the culture of learning community to 'ripple' into the schools for the benefit of both teachers and students:

We are working on skills that we need to be developing with our schools and with the teachers that we're working with. So we're developing a level of working as a group and as a team that we are needing to develop in our school. And that's a level that nowhere, in the ERO report, is it talking about. This stuff and this is the imperative stuff... it's really crucial and schools - high schools in particular - have no idea how to do that. They don't understand how to process and give people the space to talk about what their issues are or what needs to happen or what they'd like to change and it's actually the same. It's the same lines for kids.

<div align="right">(Serena)</div>

SUMMARY

This chapter has described the first layer of learning arising from the study. The characteristics of the group, the way its members interact, the communication processes, and special features of the group have been examined and compared with relevant literature and participant perceptions. Factors contributing to the participants' perceptions about the success of the group were also examined alongside the literature related to effective groups. The findings in this chapter resulted in the conclusion that this group meets the criteria of an effective learning community or community of practice.

The following chapter looks at the second layer of learning. Participants' perceptions about the power in this group are examined and compared with the literature to highlight the implications for effective learning communities. Chapter seven examines the third layer of findings and reveals some of the complexities of working in a special education role in secondary schools.

Chapter eight provides an overview of the whole research process, summarises the research findings and discusses the possibility of small learning groups becoming a catalyst for growing a wider culture of learning community.

INTRODUCTION:

This chapter presents the second of three layers of learning arising from the investigation. The first of these layers was presented in chapter five where participants' perceptions about the features of a successful (learning) group were examined alongside the literature related to effective groups. A significant feature identified by participants was the impact of the power of the group and how participants experienced that power. This aspect is the basis of the second layer of findings and is addressed in this chapter. The third layer of findings revealed the complexities of the work and role of RTLB in secondary schools. The findings related to this are presented in chapter seven.

Literature about the relationship between power and knowledge in the traditional method classroom sets the scene for this chapter. This highlights the contrast with participants' experiences in the learning group and the implications for learning communities. Participants' perceptions relating to how they experienced the power of the group in the context of both their work and personal lives provides the evidence for discussion in chapter eight about the way the growing of learning communities might address many of the power struggles present in secondary schools.

POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING

In the traditional classroom described by Hough and Paine (1997) the teacher holds the power, makes the decisions and directs the learning. Students compete for power and teachers rank students according to marks. In a quality learning community the decision making and the learning is collaborative. Students take responsibility for their own learning and they learn in teams. There is no need to compete because students and staff learn together (p.157).

What is power?

There are twenty-two definitions of 'power' provided by the Collins Dictionary (Mc Leod, 1988). Whether these definitions convey a positive or negative connotation of power depends very much on a person's frame of reference, and the nature of the life experiences, skills and knowledge that might 'shape' that frame. The eleven definitions listed below all have considerable relevance when contemplating the

relationship between power and knowledge as it might be experienced or evident in the context of a classroom or a learning community:

Power might be found or perceived in:
-   *ability to do something*
-   *a specific ability, capacity or faculty*
-   *political, financial, social etc. force or influence*
-   *control or dominion or a position of control, dominion, or authority*
-   *a person or group that exercises control, influence or authority*
-   *a prerogative, privilege or liberty*
-   *another name for exponent*
-   *a person or thing that acts as an advocate of an idea or cause*
-   *the ability to perform work*
-   *a measure of the ability of a lens or optical system to magnify an object*
-   *a particular form of energy*

(McLeod, 1988, p.773)

Power and learning communities

Learning communities in themselves are powerful entities and power is a significant element in the context of learning communities. It is experienced in a variety of ways. This is evident in the numerous discussions about power in the literature related to groups and group processes. Features of power identified by group members, both directly in a discussion about power and indirectly when talking of the impact of their participation in the group, were similar to those identified in the literature. These aspects are acknowledged in the following discussion related to the features identified by the group.

The group perspective however differed significantly from much of the recent theory related to power and groups. The underlying implication of literature tends to reflect power in terms of ongoing competition for dominance among members of groups. This competitive element was seldom evident in the interactions of the group members. Although there was acknowledgement of the duality of power in one of the comments about the *power differential in what we share [in meetings]* (Group), the discussion emphasised the benevolent and energising aspects of the power of the group.

The literature descriptions of power most relevant to the positive experiences, perspectives and potential of the RTLB group are those identified by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, (2002). They describe a *"double knit" knowledge organization* (Wenger et al, 2002, p.18) in which there is potential for communities of practice to create new knowledge through the sharing of practice and then apply this new knowledge to the processes and work of the organisation.

The following two sections describe the notions of 'power' as experienced by the participants both in the learning group and in the context of their schools. In addition to a mind-map recording a group discussion that focussed on how participants were experiencing power in the group, the data gathered from the fortnightly meetings, the individual interviews and the final group discussion were all scrutinised for references that reflected participants' impressions about power.

Power in the classroom

In *Classroom Power Relations,* Manke (1997) considers the construction of power in the classroom. Ethnographic studies are used as a basis for discussions about the source of classroom power and to highlight the integrated nature of teacher – student interactions. Manke uses a number of post-structuralist theorists (e.g. Foucault, 1980 and Gore, 1995), to explore how the power arises from interaction between the teacher' and students' relations in the classroom.

> *Who has power in the classrooms? Willard Waller, an early sociologist of education, wrote in 1932, "Children are certainly defenceless against the machinery with which the adult world is able to enforce its decisions: the result of the battle between teacher and students is foreordained".*
> *...Waller's statement expressed the understanding of classroom power that prevailed then and prevails even now – more than 70 years later. ...Underlying this statement is the belief that the teacher must have the power in the classroom.*
>
> (Manke, 1997, p.1)

This belief was evident in the attitudes of teachers who participated in an investigative workshop that was one source of data for an (unpublished) pilot project (Guild, 2003) investigating ownership of learning. The teachers' beliefs were graphically reflected in statements like:

- *Ownership belongs to me*
- *I am the controller of the learning that happens in my class*
- *I 'own' the learning - therefore I own the responsibility*
- *The teacher owns the learning (process) in that it is their choice how they teach it - whether they choose to give the student some part in the process*
- *I am the dictator of the learning in the classroom.*

(Participants' definitions, 2003)

The (2003) pilot project that was one of the catalysts for this investigation arose out of my work with children who have challenging behaviours and my concern about their struggle for power in their classrooms. Often these power struggles reflect a lack of positive power in the learning experiences available to many students. The inability of a teacher to create a climate of shared learning in the classroom frequently results in students experiencing a feeling of powerlessness

and discouragement, triggers a downward spiral of disengagement in the learning process and results in feelings of failure, rejection, and damaged self-esteem.

As long as teachers cling to the idea that the teacher holds the knowledge and therefore the power in the classroom they will find themselves faced with repeated challenges as the students engage in the struggle for personal power (Manke, 1997). For without power the identity and integrity of the students are denied, damaged or distorted (Brendtro et al, 1998, p.64). The resulting power struggles are exacerbated if the teacher happens to be in a secondary school where adolescent students are of an age in which nature demands they make 'a place' for them selves to 'stand' – an age when they 'find themselves' and establish an identity.

In spite of the paradigm shift from the ancient Greek discourse of "discovered knowledge" vocabulary to "knowledge made" vocabulary, the culture of the supremacy of the teacher that originated in the era of "discovered knowledge" still remains in too many educational contexts (Mirochnik, 2000, p.7-14). Many teachers still cling to this legacy from a time when the dominance of a 'position of authority' was based on the fact that a person was considered to have expertise and exclusive knowledge in a certain field.

> *Teachers remain dominant in classrooms mainly by creating a teaching context of their own design, by constructing what Australian educationalist Robert Young (1991) terms as the traditional method classroom as a learning context for children.*
> (Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Richardson, C. & Tiakiwai, S., 2003, p.7)

In the 1970s, Walker (1973), followed by Young (1991), and then Bishop (1996), all identified that it was the "*power imbalances that impacted on Māori children's learning, rather than just the mono- cultural status of teachers*" (Bishop et al., 2003). Te Kōtahitanga, Bishop et al's (2003) investigation into the experiences of year 9 and 10 Māori students in mainstream classrooms also provides convincing evidence of this.

> *Young describes "traditional method classrooms" as classrooms where the teacher is dominant, where "transmission" is the main aim and "control" relationships have become the dominant pattern. Unfortunately for the well-meaning teacher, the problems of motivation in the classroom are not solvable through a technical fix, but rather through the development of new relationships of power with consequently different interaction patterns...*
> (Bishop et al., 2003, p.9)

These new relationships of power are the topic of much of the learning community literature referred to in chapter one. This is supplemented and supported by an

equally overwhelming abundance of literature related to leadership. The literature offers a wide variety of leadership models but a key theme in all of these is the (leadership) qualities and strategies necessary for managing change processes, changing cultures and implementing and sustaining learning communities based on shared visions, processes of collaboration, problem solving and shared power.

POWER AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Participant perceptions of the power in the group

A brainstorming session about power as it is experienced in the group brought a number of surprises, the greatest being the very positive focus on the benevolent aspects of power. When the group talked about 'power' it was not the conflictual (domination) of consensual power as described in many of the models in literature about group communication. Most of these models are based on the work of French and Raven in the 1950s (cited by Arrow, McGrath & Berdahl, 2000, p.100 and Harris & Sherblom, 2005, p.256). The power identified by this group is a *passionate* power – a power energized by the passion each participant has for their work. This was more the collegial, socially organized and alignment power spoken of by Wenger (1998, p.180-181).

This was only the seventh meeting of the group yet many of the elements of power that were identified by participants are indicative of established and successful learning communities. A number of the features or factors identified by participants as being sources of 'power' in the group were elements that participants also identified (at the end of the year) in the individual interviews and talked about during the final group discussion. Some of these, being indicators of effective groups, are also referred to in chapter five. The following is a discussion of the key points arising from the mind-map (contained on the next page), during the end of year interviews and group discussion.

Aspects of power identified by the participants fell into a number of categories of perceived benefits or positive features about belonging to the group. Many of these were akin to the stabilising power and support in the collegial relationships within communities of practice described by Wenger et al, (2002). This concept of 'stabilising power' summarises the type of power and multitude of benefits members perceived as inherent in their participation in the group. Some of these benefits had a direct or immediate impact during meetings. But participants also identified impacts that were the result of a more indirect 'spin off' effect causing
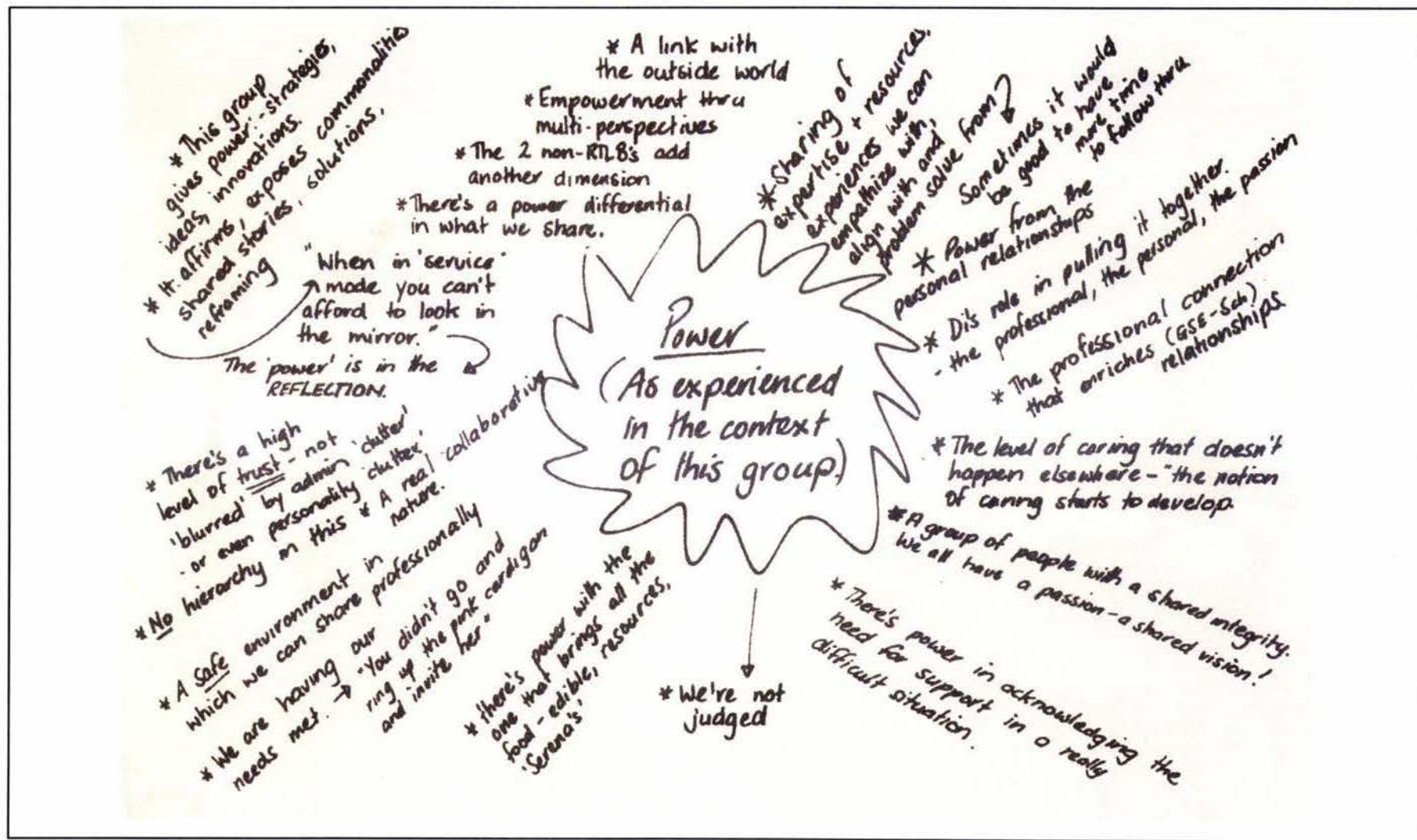
Diagram 21: Participants' perceptions of power as experienced in the context of the group

changes in the way people felt, thought or behaved. These were attributed by participants as being the result of their engagement with the group.

Examples of elements of power that had an immediate impact are those directly connected with the relationships within the group. These provided or reinforced the sense of belonging – of being a part of the group. They were attributes participants felt they either received from, or contributed to, the group. Other, less direct attributes mentioned were features that supported participants in further developing their own competence, confidence and independence in their work contexts and those that were considered to contribute to reducing the stress in their lives in general, but especially in their relationships with their families.

The following is a collation of participants' perceptions related to power as they perceived it in the group. In order not to distract from the flow of participants' perceptions about power and to allow the reader to get a feel for the ethos of the group *ITALICIZED CAPITAL LETTERS* have been used to identify similar concepts found in the literature. These have been bracketed under each paragraph along with the names of relevant author/s.

There is *empowerment through the multi-perspective that the group provides* in the way that *it is a link with the 'outside' world*. The group provides *a professional connection that enriches relationships* – their personal relationships with each other and those among RTLB and GSE colleagues.

(COLLEGIAL – STABILISING POWER: Wenger et al, 2002)

This perspective was further developed in the individual interviews. Participants commented both on the relationships among the members and the relationships they discovered between their personal selves and their work. They had come to understand the power of the influence of *personal values on how people do their job* and *how work becomes part of each person's unique and individual identity*.

Contributing to the quality of the relationships within the group is the *high level of trust* that creates *a safe environment in which we can share professionally*. 'Safety' here is used in the sense that participants consider they have safety and power in being able to *acknowledge the need for support in a really difficult situation – it's safe -we're not judged*. Hand in hand with the trust is a *level of caring within the group that doesn't happen elsewhere – the notion of caring starts to develop*.

(COLLEGIAL – STABILISING POWER: Wenger et al, 2002)

Group members were very aware of the importance of relationships in the context of their work. Relationships was a central theme running throughout the year and evident in almost every group meeting. There had been the repeated discussions, during group meetings, about the importance of relationships. These discussions had included references to findings in recent local research projects featuring the importance of relationships on students learning. Examples of these projects are: AIMHI (Hill & Hawke, 1999), Partnership: Focusing the Relationship on the Task of School Improvement, (Timperley & Robinson, 2002), Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis, (Alton-Lee, 2003) and Te Kōtahitanga, (Bishop et al, 2003).

Not only did participants identify relationships as being a feature that contributed to the power of the group, but they also identified this as being the most surprising factor. They had not expected what they termed *the depth of the relationships* – the very close friendships that developed as a result of getting to know each other in the context of the group. They shared the opinion that the commonalities that existed in members' values, attitudes and beliefs were a significant factor relating to the development of relationships.

The participants also expressed appreciation of the *real collaborative nature* of the group and the way it helps them to *reframe difficult aspects* of their work. A key feature of this is the opportunity the group provides for reflection. When they are working participants don't have time to stop and contemplate or critique their own actions - *when in 'service mode' [role] you can't afford to 'look in the mirror'*. So *the power (in what happens in the group], is in the [opportunity for] reflection* that it provides.

(COLLEGIAL – STABILISING POWER:
SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND
ALIGNMENT Wenger et al, 2002)

The work of this group *is not 'blurred' by admin 'clutter' - even personality clutter - there's no hierarchy in this [group]!* This group *gives power: in the strategies, ideas, innovations,* in the way *it affirms, exposes commonalities, shared stories and solutions* and in *the sharing of expertise and resources, experiences we can empathize with, align with, solve from.*

(INFORMATION & EXPERIENCE: Ross, 1989
KNOWLEDGE: Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1992
GENEROSITY – CONTRIBUTION, Brendtro et al, 1998).

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Participants also expressed appreciation for the opportunity the group provides for them to contribute to the wellbeing and effectiveness of the functioning of the group. Everyone agreed with the person who noted that *the power is with the one who brings all the 'food': - not just the edible food, but the resources, the 'Serena's'...* - 'Serena's' was an affectionate term 'coined' by the group in appreciation of the delightful and often metaphorical terms that Serena frequently used to express feelings about issues, concerns or celebrations. Some of these became group 'labels' for shared issues and concerns.

(ASSIGNED & PERSONAL, Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1992
GENEROSITY: Brendtro et al 1998)

It would seem also that the RTLB participants saw *a power differential in what we shared at meetings.* When questioned about this, they identified the fact that 'the work' of the group was mainly about supporting the RTLB in their roles within the secondary schools and consequently the RTLB tended to do more sharing of work related concerns than either Wilma or myself – the focus of group discussions was the work in the secondary schools. They also commented that because of our more detached positions, Wilma and I were able to add an analytical perspective to discussions.

(ASSIGNED Hunter et al, 1992
REFERENT, PERSONAL: Harris & Sherblom, 2005
REFERENT/ EXPERT: Arrow, McGrath & Berdahl, 2000;
Engleberg & Wynn, 2000;
Beebe & Masterton, 2003; Tubbs 2004)

During the final group discussion participants identified the *lack of power play* as a significant factor contributing their perceptions that this was a successful group. They felt that the trust between members was such that people weren't scared to take risks and to admit to being vulnerable:

> *There was no need to have people create leadership roles or to be Powerful.*

(Pamela)

Participant perceptions about power in the context of the school

The group also shared ideas about the ways they see power being exercised in the secondary school contexts. In relation to the students they work with, the (RTLB) participants consider that students exercise power in the way they: *withdraw, 'gap it', choose to engage or not engage with teachers and 'act' as students or fit into the 'student' role.* This later aspect highlights the importance of teachers'

expectations of students and the positive or negative influence these can have on students' behaviour.

(AVOIDANCE, PUNISHMENT: Harris & Sherblom, 2005)

Participants also identified the positive power experienced in the context of the group as being a contributing factor to success of the group. They compared the way they experience power within the group with the power exercised by three groups in the context of the school - power exerted by people in authority (management positions), the way they consider they (RTLB) use power and the way they believe teachers see them using their (RTLB) 'power'. These ideas have been arranged in chart form to facilitate comparison of the different perceptions. (See Diagram 22):

Diagram 22: Participants' perceptions related to the way power is exercised in the context of the secondary school		
Participants' experience people in 'authority' exercising power in the way they:	*Participants consider they (RTLB) exert 'power' in their work contexts in the way they:*	*Colleagues of (RTLB) participants consider they (group members) use power in the way they:*
Use their title - the way they use their 'presence' / position	Lead – (as agents of change) providing new paths, opening up fresh or 'new' knowledge	Use their 'professional' role
Make (uninformed) decisions and by doing this often over-ride other people's 'work in progress.'	Relate to and collaborate with others: teachers, students, families, support personnel	Align themselves with people perceived to be in authority (management)
Refuse knowledge – in their NOT wanting to know	Share their knowledge	Share their knowledge
Listen but do NOT hear	Support teachers and management staff	'Engage' with students
Lack tolerance for differences	Advocate for Students	Have an understanding of special education
	Be someone or do something that 'grounds' them	
	Look after themselves	

Balancing this perspective were the celebrations during group meetings, when participants related stories of the teachers who exercise power in the way they relate positively to students, engage in reflective dialoguing, and consider new ideas. These teachers have a focus on further developing effective teaching strategies that meet the range of diverse needs in their classes.

THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE GROUP
The impact for participants in the work context

It was not surprising that the unanimous agreement that the energy or 'power' of the group as a whole originates in the common values, attitudes and beliefs to which all the members subscribe. The group had spent a large part of the first three meetings developing a common vision. Someone said, and they all agreed that *this is a group of people with a shared integrity - we all have a passion - a shared vision.*

(KNOWLEDGE: Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1992
BELONGING: Brendtro et al 1998)

Comments during the individual interviews reinforced those made during the group discussion. There was also a clear recognition, by all the RTLB participants, of *the collective wisdom of the group* and an understanding that the *'power of the group' was in the combined commitment and the group working together as 'a group'.* There was a general appreciation that working in the group gave participants much needed time to find out *where we're at and to reflect – both on the relationships and on professional development (PD), our own and the PD we provide for teachers.* Some participants commented on the importance for them of the group process. Comments reflected recognition of the *importance of modelling values, attitudes and beliefs and how this has been experienced in the group.*

(REWARD/ LEGITIMATE: Arrow, McGrath & Berdahl, 2000;
Engleberg & Wynn, 2000;
Beebe & Masterton, 2003;
Tubbs, 2004
INTERPERSONAL LINKAGE: Harris & Sherblom, 2005)

One of the most important impacts for participants in their work context was the opportunity the group gave them *to celebrate their achievements.* This provided *affirmation* and *validation of the work* they were doing. The *shared vision* and working with people who subscribed to *common beliefs,* had the effect of *strengthening (their) belief in inclusion* and provided ongoing *stimulation,* and

support in *keeping the 'passion' (for their work) alive.* They found that the *shared learning, the sharing of common issues* and the *help with reframing* these was not only valuable *professional development* but also helped them keep a *positive balance* in their perspectives. This later aspect is particularly significant for people whose work tends to be submerged in problem solving and supporting others to address issues and concerns.

The impact for participants on their personal lives

Some of the aspects, about the power of the group, that participants identified as having an impact on their lives outside work are the same or similar to those they saw as being relevant in the work context. The importance of these aspects for participants was demonstrated in the way they made a point of explaining how they also affected their lives outside of their work. These aspects also highlight the difficulty there is for many of us in separating our work and personal selves.

(ALIGNMENT: Wenger, 1998

BELONGING: Brendtro at al, 1998

STABILILISING / COLLEGIAL: Wenger, 1998)

There was a general agreement that the power from the group extended outside the group – that there is *power from the personal relationships* and the *strong friendship bonds.* There was also an appreciation of the reciprocal *respect and acknowledgement* and *the level of caring within the group that doesn't happen elsewhere.* Kara made the comment that *the notion of caring starts to develop...* and another member said *what this groups has given me is a way of being myself* (Anon).

This group provided the type of caring that indicates this is the *'Gemeinschaft'* *[sense of community] that "exists in three forms: Gemeinschaft by kinship, of place and of mind" according to Tonnies* ([1887] 1957, p.42) cited by Sergiovanni (1994, p.6) and Brendtro at al (1998). In this context the 'kinship' comes from the sense of belonging provided through membership in the group, the 'place' being the common work contexts, and the 'mind' being the bonding created by the sharing of common goals and values.

(STABILILISING / COLLEGIAL: Wenger, 1998

BELONGING: Brendtro et al 1998)

Three of the four RTLB expressed appreciation for the timing of the fortnightly meetings, in that they were almost always on the Friday, at the end of the working week. This provided opportunity for people to use the forum of the group for *getting rid of the 'negative baggage' (of the week)* and *to keep things in balance.* This was significant enough for three members to talk about going home from meetings on a *'Friday' high,* finishing their week *feeling less stressed* and no longer needing to *'dump' (their) work concerns on partners or family.* One member went as far as to say her family said that (since coming to the meetings) she was *much nicer to be* around on a Friday.

(KNOWLEDGE: Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1992)

Some saw the power of the group in the energy it created. For three people, who were not already involved *in further personal study,* the group had *re-kindled an interest in and energy* for this. Two people identified that *the energy came from the shared passion and the excitement about the possibility of changing kids' lives.* Another attributed the energy to the *guidance, perspective and insights gained during the meetings.* Several people also commented on the *'nourishment'* aspect of *getting input as well as putting out* – this was particularly significant for one member who felt this was in direct contrast to a previous group to which she had belonged.

(KNOWLEDGE: Hunter, Bailey & Taylor, 1992)

In spite of the positive focus of the group members during the discussion about power I was acutely (and at times quite painfully) aware that the relationships were not as 'power-free' as described by the RTLB participants. It was not unusual, during meetings or when working with RTLB in the school contexts, for comments to be made that inferred Wilma or myself had 'power by [our] association' with MOE. One participant often commented that her association with us increased her credibility in the school. This bureaucratic, 'stamping of approval' 'power status' was further proven when, on several occasions, she expressed appreciation for the fact that GSE fieldworkers *'going into the school and giving the same message – talking the same language (as she does) "* gave credibility to the work she was doing in the school.

It was almost the end of the year before there was some discussion about power from the perspective of any possible imbalance among members. I shared with the group my personal perspective that the RTLB participants allowed themselves to be more vulnerable and to give more of their personal 'selves' to the group by way of

the revelations in the sharing that sometimes took place. There were two responses. The first was a discussion about the way they (RTLB) feel they: *come in and off load, dump, purge our souls all over you [two GSE members]*, the *safety in that*, the acceptance and *hearing* they get and, the *'measured'* responses: *...you [GSE members] give everything we ask such careful consideration*. The second response was yet another instance of 'sharing' that moved the group to an even deeper place that resonated with a feeling of 'Ya Ya Sister-hood'. This was a poignant reminder that to be part of the 'bonding' of this group is a huge privilege.

POWER IN THE ROLE OF FACILITATION

Participants' perceptions

Participants were deliberately not asked in the individual interviews for opinions or thoughts about facilitation of the group as this could easily have been misinterpreted as coercion. During the mind-mapped discussion there had been reference to the power *in the mix of professional and personal energy and passion that was used in pulling it (the group) all together,* but otherwise facilitation was not discussed during the year except at times when the group re-visited the group process.

There were however a number of comments relating to facilitation during the final conversation at the end of the year. The group was asked what they perceived my role had been – in addition to that of researcher and convenor of the group. This led to a discussion about the difference between power and facilitation, acknowledgement that, in some cases facilitation or record taking might translate into power but, in this case the *facilitation and the support role of the two GSE members* had been factors that had *contributed to the success of the group*.

Participants were also quick to point out that both Wilma and I had, on each of the occasions the group re-visited the process, attempted to *share the power* of facilitation by persuading participants to rotate the role of facilitator and, on several occasions, participants had agreed to take turns. The next comment by a member *Sorry but we weren't interested* brought gales of laughter from everyone. They explained that this aspect was not their priority at the time. The group cited factors that indicated there had been 'facilitation' rather than exertion of power. These factors were: *Recognition [by the facilitator] of the need to be careful not to exert power* and *subtle, guiding and supportive [facilitation], leading from behind while at the same time motivating and challenging.* I assumed this comment included both GSE participants because this was the role I also perceived Wilma had also taken.

Facilitator's perceptions

Key factors that contributed to the success, and therefore the power of the group, were reiterated during the individual interviews and the final group discussion. Most dominant among these were *the connections, the relationships, trust that developed through these relationships and resulted in the group becoming a safe place in which participants felt free to reflect and share honestly*. I believe one of the factors underpinning all these attributes was the time spent, during the establishment of the group, in identifying the commonalities and developing the vision of the group.

Ironically, I also was acutely aware of the implications in the precedence set in the first six or seven meetings by every group member coming to every meeting. While this was very positive and desirable in terms of the vision being 'owned' by everyone in the group, it also set up the expectation that all decisions would be made by the whole group. This was not significant as long as each person was working on their own project and using the forum of the group to support them in developing ideas, strategies and plans. However, when we moved to the more collaborative project of planning a workshop for the group to deliver, the potential power implications in the decision-making stance became evident.

The group had become so used to ensuring whole group involvement in and ownership of all decisions that there was a danger of the group not having the workshop ready in time. Members expressed reluctance to go ahead with planning if any of the members were unable to attend a meeting. Although it did not happen in this instance, it is conceivable that a group member might exert power in a group, as much by their absence as their presence, and such a situation could become a 'block' to a group trying to move forward, especially when there are varying levels of commitment among members. This highlighted for me the complexity of possible power relations within a collaborative group, as referred to by Frey 2002, and the interdependence between group processes, relationships, trust and commitment and external factors that influence members ability to sustain commitment to collaborative tasks.

Members voiced surprise about their own behaviour in the group, *the depth of sharing* that had taken place, *the shared empathy* they had experienced and that people in the group had been so *genuine and willing to 'give'*. There was also a degree of surprise, recognition and appreciation of the potential for this group to make a difference. *It's actually changing how we are. It enables me to go and sit in*

school and look at all that stuff and hear it and come back to the group and process it (Serena).

Other factors that surprised the group were; the *transparency of communication processes, the lack of egos* evident in group interactions, the *reciprocal, collegial support* and finally the trust and safety that created *a feeling of being 'held'* and *a space to be vulnerable in – to take risks*.

Recognition of and appreciation for what this group has meant for its members was summarised very aptly by Kara who said that the group had provided her with a greater understanding of *the concept of 'oranga' [well-being]* and Serena who said,

> *Although we're very different, there's a commonality there that sort of pulls. You can actually share things that say a lot about things that are really hard and things that are really good in a safe place...because we're who we are and I think that is really good.*

Converting the concept of 'learning community' into practice can do much to foster a culture based on the kinds of experiences that will provide people with a frame of reference that enables them to perceive the definitions (of power) in a positive light.

SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the second layer of learning that resulted from the investigation. Power in the context of learning was discussed in relationship to learning communities and classrooms. Participants' perceptions about the power, in this group and its impact on their work and personal lives, were examined and compared with the literature to highlight the implications for effective learning communities. This chapter also examined facilitator and participants' perceptions about power in relation to the role of the facilitator

The third layer of findings is discussed in chapter seven. The themes that dominated group discussions and activities revealed the complexities of working in a special education role in secondary schools and highlighted the potential to grow the role of RTLB in these schools. The parallel between these and what the literature says about learning communities is discussed, keeping in mind the potential for growing the role of RTLB in these contexts.

Chapter eight provides an overview of the whole research process, summarises the research findings and discusses the possibility of small learning groups becoming a catalyst for growing a wider culture of learning community.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
THIRD STRAND - THE COMPLEXITIES OF (RTLB) WORKING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The dialogue of this group became a mirror that reflected participants' perceptions about the celebrations, issues and concerns related to the complexities of working in a special education context in secondary schools. Nine dominant themes were identified in the discourses and activities of the group. Two of these themes - the growing of a culture of learning community (in relation to the RTLB group) and the power of participation in a learning community were presented, in chapters five and six respectively, as the first two layers of findings arising from the investigation.

The remaining seven of the nine dominant themes are the substance of the third layer of findings from the investigation and are discussed in this chapter. They are also compared with relevant literature particularly in relation to the context of local, urban, multicultural secondary schools. The parallel between these themes and what the literature says about teaching and learning communities is also discussed, keeping in mind the potential for clarifying and growing the role of RTLB and growing a culture of learning community in secondary schools.

THE THEMES THAT DOMINATED GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Chapter three described the way the discourse of the group became a mirror that reflected the collective experiences and beliefs that inform the way group members – particularly the RTLB - do their job and highlighted the complexities of their role and their work contexts. What was reflected 'in the mirror' was the thick, textured 'fabric' of the mat on which sits secondary education in New Zealand. The 'warp' or main threads of this mat were the issues and concerns related to working in that context. These were interwoven with the 'weft' of the complexities of the role of the RTLB and further coloured and patterned by the various issues related to 'special' education and celebrations when the RTLB found a way to work successfully within the constraints of the complexities.

This mat lay not just under the discourses that occurred during group meetings. It was ever present. It was the mat on which members sat even for social occasions. It was underlying every coming together and 'being' of the group. There was a

distinct and repetitive pattern in the carpet that reflected the ongoing celebrations, complexities, questions and concerns RTLB expressed in relation to their work. The themes are directly related to and often have a constraining influence on the perceived effectiveness of the role of the secondary RTLB:

> *I think it is about working at secondary too and the complexity of that. Unless you're actually there you have no idea what demands are made of you ...and how complex it is and how it's such tiny wee steps.*
>
> (Pamela)

One of the functions of the "professional learning community is to change the understandings and practice of individuals so that they better serve their student populations. Dialogue typically forms the medium through which the learning takes place" (Timperley, 2004, p.6). The themes of group discussions are presented here as the third layer of findings in recognition of the intention in the vision and goals of the group that the reciprocal support in the group would further enable members to *build bridges into the adolescent world and their learning communities.*

The seven themes in the findings, yet to be discussed are:
1. The importance of relationships in learning groups and in effective teaching
2. Expectations - in the context of the classroom and on the role of RTLB
3. Expectations related to the role of RTLB in secondary schools
4. The need to include RTLB in school systems
5. The potential for further development of systems in classrooms and in (secondary) schools
6. The potential for shared professional development and learning among RTLB and school staff
7. The potential for further developing partnerships among RTLB, school staff and GSE.

The importance of relationships – in the context of learning

The importance of relationships underpinned almost all discussions – even the final group conversation:

> *...and it's all about relationships that you can't get any gauge on... It's just about chipping away and building relationships slowly and it just takes forever.*
>
> (Pamela)

Relationships were key to both the functioning of the group and the effectiveness of the RTLB in the schools. The theme of 'relationships', either in the context of the group or the secondary school, featured in fourteen of twenty group meetings. They were recognised by all the group members as being key to the successful

functioning of the group. It is no surprise that this is confirmed in the literature – especially that related to learning communities, effective teaching, responding to diverse needs, special education, inclusion and participation in groups. Apps (1996, p.9) is one of a number of authors emphasising not only the importance of interaction in teaching relationships but also the relationships we have with ourselves and the importance of relationships in learning communities:

> *Education is a series of relationships: learners relating to their own intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual selves; teachers relations to learning; learners relations to each other; learners relations to knowledge; teachers and learners relating to contexts and communities."*
>
> (Apps, 1996, p.9)

All the relationships referred to by Apps were present and important in this group. The impact of these relationships provided members of the group with first hand experience of the interdependence of the social and academic elements in the learning process (Alton-Lee, 2003, p.3 & 30). Although this was a belief to which all group members subscribed and aspired prior to the project, the personal experiences within the group highlighted and confirmed the integrated nature of personal and professional relationships and importance and validity of the:

- "Caring, inclusive and cohesive learning communities" that were identified as the second of the ten characteristics of quality teaching in the Best Evidence Synthesis (Alton-Lee, 2003, p.3)
- Second of six findings in the Hill and Hawke (1999) AIMHI research that "Forming the right kind of relationship with teachers is, for AIMHI students, a prerequisite for learning to take place". (Hill & Hawke, 1999, p.30)
- First phase of the Te Kōtahitanga professional development programme which "involved establishing and building the relationship between the researchers and teachers" (Bishop et al, 2003, p.123)
- "Fourth major finding in the Te Kōtahitanga research and professional development project that "identified a number of factors that limit the achievement of Māori students within classrooms. These generally focussed on problems in classrooms in terms of: student – teacher relationships." (Bishop et al, 2003, p. 29)
- Quality of relationships in a school. "Without quality relationship schools have no meaning. It is the quality of relationships that bonds work and stimulates learning" (Hough & Paine, 1997, p.175).

The RTLB participants recognised that an integral factor contributing to their perception that the learning group provided a 'safe' place was the degree of trust

they experienced in the quality of the relationships among the members of the group. Denise said:

> I think, as the group has got to know each other better we all feel safer. It doesn't matter if there are some negative responses – in conflict with what I'm doing – hearing them from the group is really OK. Because I trust the group and I know the group is coming from that sort of supportive stance. Whereas, I think if the group hadn't been developed together and the relationships developed, there wouldn't even have been the possibility of putting them into that forum.

The quality of these relationships is the result of a number of factors associated with the establishment and process of the group – the group systems, the understandings and expectations that developed through these.

The importance of relationships in the adult learning community is summarised by Fullan, (2001, p.65) in the statement:

> New relationships (as found in a professional learning community) are <u>crucial</u>, (emphasis added) but only if they work at the hard task of establishing greater programme coherence and the addition of resources.

However, "relationships are not an end in themselves" (Fullan, 2001, p.65). A number of additional factors are necessary for learning communities to result in positive affects on student learning. Among these is the (positive) disposition of the teacher. This will be reflected in the positive expectations that the teacher has of the students and the students in turn have of themselves and each other (Fullan, 2001, p.65).

Expectations - in the context of the classroom

A recurring theme in the group discussions was that of the importance of expectations. This was in relationship both to the achievement of the students referred to RTLB and to the perceived effectiveness of the work of RTLB. The RTLB were frustrated by the repeated evidence of low expectations manifested in low achievement and inappropriate behaviours of students. Research has firmly established the defining influence expectations have on the achievement of students and the relevance between this and low achievement levels of students in low socio-economic and multi-cultural high schools.

> The impact of teacher expectations on the achievement of students in schools located in low socio economic communities is well documented in the international literature. 'High expectations' is the first of eight effective teaching and instruction school factors identified.
>
> (Timperley, 2003, p.73).

The PISA report (OECD, 2005) cites eight school factors identified by Scheerens & Bosker (1997) as "important in educational effectiveness research" and key to effective teaching. *High Expectations* is the first of the eight factors listed. *Teacher expectations* has also been identified as a key factor contributing to both student engagement in learning and students' achievement by a number of New Zealand research projects such as: The Best Evidence Synthesis, (Alton-Lee, 2003) Te Kōtahitanga, (Bishop et al, 2003); AIMHI, (Hawke & Hill, 2001).

Engagement of students and their success in learning is also significantly affected by the expectations they have of themselves. Recent, evidence-based research projects are repeatedly confirming that these expectations are intrinsically linked to the expectations that family, teachers and schools have of students.

> *Central to students' learning and achievement are the expectations teachers have for their students and whether they see themselves as responsible for the learning of all students in their classrooms.*
>
> (Hulston, 2000; Udvari-Solner,1996,
>
> cited by MOE in Springboards to Practice, 2005c).

Expectations are the result of beliefs and assumptions. The summary of the final report for the "Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools" research included the following comment:

> *Deeply held beliefs about the limitation of some groups of pupils can prevent the experimentation that is necessary to foster the development of more inclusive ways of working... The studies point to the impact of developing the capacity of [those] schools to reveal and challenge deeply entrenched deficit views, which define certain types of pupils as 'lacking' something.*
>
> (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2003, p.4).

This was further confirmed in Te Kōtahitanga in which Bishop et al (2003) used students' narratives to develop *The Effective Teaching Profile* (Bishop et al, 2003, p.97–118). First among the characteristics identified by students as being indicative of the effective teacher is the positive expectations that teachers hold about (Māori) students. This is in contrast to the deficit theorising that locates the blame for lack of achievement with the student and is a defining factor in determining whether the culture of a school is inclusive or exclusive.

Similarly, the role of the RTLB and their own and schools' perceptions of their effectiveness are significantly influenced by the expectations of the teachers, students, families, school and community. "School culture includes collective understandings among members that are related to their particular roles." (Dyson,

The teacher's own
learning experiences

Parent expectations

Beliefs and attitudes that underpin

Impact on the effectiveness of
any (RTLB +) support offered
and or provided to the teacher

Teacher ability to
read, interpret
and follow-up on
data

Teacher Expectations

Impact on the culture
of the classroom.
High expectations of the
teacher for the students'
academic and behavioural
outcomes sets the climate
of the room

**Expectations in
the context of
the classroom**

The environment:
-School culture
-Decile rating
-Urban / rural
-Socio economic
-Diversity
-Resourcing
-State of buildings

Student Expectations

Impact on the behaviour
of the students

Academic achievement of
individual & groups of
students

Diagram 23: Expectations in the context of the classroom

1992; Sebba & Ainscow, 1996; Ainscow, 1996; Carrington, 1999; Carrington & Elkins in press, all cited by Carrington & Elkins, 2002, p.51). These expectations differ from school to school and between primary and secondary schools.

The integrated nature of expectations and the underlying frustrations related to the difficulty in raising expectations for students was often a theme of group discussions. This was linked to the considerable frustration RTLB feel when perceptions about the effectiveness of their work in the context of classrooms are determined by the expectations of teachers, students, their parents and relevant school staff. However, they also recognise that these (expectations) are shaped by a number of variables that create considerable difficulty in evaluating the efficacy of the RTLB.

One of these discussions was recorded in the form of a mind-map later converted into a computer diagram. On this occasion the discussion focussed on expectations in the context of the classroom, the integrated relationship between the variety of influencing factors and people's perceptions about the effectiveness of the work of RTLB. (See Diagram 23).

In addition to the reciprocal nature of student, teacher and parent expectations of each other, a number of factors influencing the expectations of each of these groups were identified. These factors were seen as environmental, cultural, academic, social, behavioural and experiential. An example of is the importance of the school environment, including the culture of the school and the socio-economic status of the wider community. These were seen as influencing expectations generally but also as having an effect on teacher attitudes and beliefs. Another aspect recognised as significant and directly related to the role of RTLB, was the teacher's beliefs about student ability. This in turn is influenced by the teacher's ability to read, interpret and follow up on assessment data. The RTLB see considerable potential for their role to include the provision of meaningful support to teachers in processing assessment data and using this to ensure the wide range of students' needs are met within the classroom. However the ability of RTLB to capitalise on this potential is currently constrained by the need for clarification of the role of the RTLB.

Expectations - related to the role of the RTLB

The variance in expectations and the lack of clarity around the role of the RTLB are the cause of considerable frustrations for the RTLB. They expect to be 'agents of change'. They have high expectations of themselves and the changes they might be able to bring about. This agentistic stance creates expectations both within themselves and the school community. The degree of threat this poses to a school largely depends on the school's willingness and ability to reveal and challenge the 'deeply entrenched deficit views' (Ainscow et al, 2003).

The variance in expectations of RTLB is further confused by the dissonance between a number of official documents and reports. One example is evident in the contradiction between the Best Evidence Synthesis (Alton-Lee, 2003) and Education Review Office (ERO) expectations as reflected in their report: "Evaluation of the Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour Service, (2004)". The RTLB group members were saddened, frustrated and disillusioned by the ERO report.

> ERO are looking at something out of a totally different window... the ERO window is: "What have you measured? What have you gained?"
>
> (Denise)

> I'm not doing any of that stuff ERO's talking about because ... I don't see the job like that – the way they've measured it. So I just thought that's really interesting, because it actually is that other side of just trying to move along with the school - where it is. Changing what is happening for kids in those different cultures that they're being exposed to in the school.
>
> (Serena)

The ERO report (ERO, 2004) appears to evaluate the effectiveness of RTLB on the basis of perceived improvement of student achievement as a result of the work of RTLB. The host of variances in factors contributing to improvement in student achievement make it very difficult to reliably attribute improved achievement to any one factor or to the work of one particular person. This report does not seem compatible with the underlying message in most extant literature relating to the effective practice of collaboration among a number of people especially when working with students that are intended to be the focus of the work of the RTLB.

In responding to the ERO report Ryba says: "It is troubling to think that the whole of the [RTLB] service could be judged by the focus in this report on selected individual student improvements in achievement." (Ryba, 2004, p.8). It is also troubling to ponder on the negative effect this report must be having on the expectations teachers and principals have of RTLB and their perceptions of the effectiveness and credibility of the people in these roles. The report not only

highlights the need for a more formative assessment of the work of RTLB but also the timeliness in the current (MOE) RTLB project in which there is a concerted effort on the part of the MOE to clarify expectations around the role of RTLB. This confusion around the role of RTLB has been a concern since 2000 as evidenced in reports by Wylie, (2000) and Bourke et al, (2001).

The focus of the ERO report is also extremely restrictive in comparison with the role of RTLB as it is prescribed in the Ministry of Education Guidelines for Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) Clusters. Among the key tasks listed in the Guidelines (MOE, 2001a) as examples of "Expectations of [the] RTLB who is working effectively" are a number of systemic supports that include specifying that the RTLB will:

- *assist teachers to develop inclusive classroom environments support special education initiatives within the school*
- *facilitate collaborative problem solving*
- *support systems analysis, review and development*
- *promote effective parent/caregiver / whänau and appropriate community involvement*

(MOE, 2001a, p.5:2)

The MOE Guidelines also provide a number of case studies as examples of effective practice for RTLB. There are six relating specifically to RTLB work in secondary schools. All six examples demonstrate the effectiveness of a systemic approach in addressing the problems illustrated in the examples. (MOE, 2001a, p.6:14 – 6:29).

In contrast to these guidelines and further adding to the confusion around the role of RTLB is the dissonance between understandings of effective practice and various MOE documents. One example is the contradictions within the *Enhanced Programme Fund (EPF) Guidelines*, (MOE, 2005b). Schools are required to identify the numbers of students with moderate needs by "determining who is covered by the fund" (MOE, 2005b, p.7) according to a series of bullet pointed criteria. The most relevant to the RTLB role is the number of students who "have current resource teacher: learning and behaviour (RTLB) involvement or have been referred in the past two terms" (MOE, 2005b, p.7).

The dissonance is reinforced further by a requirement that the school provides "evidence that identified students have regular IEPs" (MOE, 2005b, p.17). An IEP is an individual education programme. A plan and associated programme that; identifies barriers to a student accessing the curriculum, details the student's current abilities and outlines a teaching programme, strategies and resources that

will be implemented by a support team. Ideally, the plan is the result of a case conference involving the student and support team of a number of people such as: the teacher, teacher-aide, school learning support coordinator, parents/caregivers and relevant specialists. "It is expected that schools receiving EPF have at least 10% of their roll receiving additional support to meet special education needs" (MOE, 2005b, p.7). In the case of medium size urban secondary school of 1200 students this would mean coordinating at least 120 case conferences and individual programmes every year. It is an unrealistic expectation for any but a special school (with a 1-4 or 1- 6 teacher-student ratio) to have the resources and personnel to enable planning and implementing IEPs for 10% or more of their students.

While the number of referrals to RTLB might well be regarded as a meaningful indication of the number of students requiring significant additional support to access the curriculum, IEPs in the context of the secondary school are not likely to make effective use of RTLB support. While they recognise that there are some students for whom provision of an IEP is essential in order to meet their needs, the group members also recognised the urgent needs to support schools to further developing systems that will negate the need for many IEPs. A strong outcome of many of the meetings of the RTLB group was convincing evidence that RTLB time, is more effectively spent supporting these schools with the development of systems and assisting teachers to develop class programmes and effective teaching strategies that enable them to respond more effectively to the diverse range of needs within the school.

> The Ministry of Education, Group Special Education needs to rethink the Special Education 2000 Policy in order to shift from eligibility determination of individual cases through to ecological ways of working that strengthen the capacity of schools to improve the achievement of a diverse range of students.

> (Ryba, 2004, p.8)

Further, the purpose of the (EPF) fund is to provide schools (that have disproportionate numbers of students with moderate special needs) with support to increase teacher capability to meet the range of 'special' needs of students and further enhance school capability to implement inclusive practices. However, by focussing on how many and which students fall within a required (deficit) range of achievement, the criteria reinforce the deficit theorising that is currently considered contrary to effective teaching practice. By locating any need for change with the students and by encouraging the labelling of students according to individualised support they receive, the criteria also ignores any possible need for whole school reform. This is in direct contradiction to the purpose of the fund.

This reinforcement of deficit theorising not only creates confusing expectations around the role of RTLB, but also creates a barrier to the inclusive paradigm RTLB are trying to foster in schools. Additionally it is in opposition to the results of extant evidence-based research. The Understanding and Developing Inclusive Practices in Schools research highlighted

> the impact [on developing inclusive practices] of developing the capacity within schools to reveal and challenge deeply entrenched deficit views of difference, which define some pupils as lacking something" and that "deeply held beliefs about the limitations of some groups of pupils can prevent the experimentation that is necessary in order to foster the development of more inclusive ways of working.
>
> (Timperley, 2003, p.73)

Another of the outcomes of the group recognised by the RTLB members and related to expectations is the support they have had in establishing realistic expectations of themselves.

> I have had a major change in my approach to my work and this has been a direct result of the group. I look at things I can do, NOT the problems that I can't really change. It's OK to take small steps now. I have lowered expectations of myself and now see my role more realistically. I feel a lot more optimistic as a result. I don't feel buried in problems now. I feel like I am taking small steps in building and changing systems. This is a far more effective approach.
>
> (Pamela)

The need for systemic change in secondary schools

A common feature of the RTLB belonging to this group is that they all work in schools identified as having disproportionate numbers of students with special needs. Quite aside from the effective practice perspective, the numbers of students identified by these schools as needing significant support to access the curriculum are too great for the RTLB to be working at an individual level. Their time is much more effectively spent in working with teachers at a class level and supporting the schools in further developing and sustaining systems for identifying and responding to the diverse needs of their school community.

The increasingly diverse nature of the student and teacher composition of secondary schools (Hart, 1996) and increasing acknowledgement of the importance for effective teaching of "Pedagogical practices [that] enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive and cohesive communities." (Alton – Lee (2003) has resulted in recognition by many schools that they need to review and further develop their whole school systems to ensure they are creating and capitalising on every possible opportunity to respond to the diversity. "Support at policy level is frequently in place, however the gap between policy and practice is a

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continuing challenge." (Carrington & Elkins, 2002, p.51). There needs to be a cohesiveness in these communities that ensures all members are working collaboratively.

The role of the Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour and the potential to include them in school systems

Each of the themes discussed so far has highlighted aspects that illustrate considerable potential for growing the role of RTLB. It was clear from the themes repeatedly arising out of the group discussions that the RTLB felt they were under utilised in secondary schools. The group identified that this could be due to a combination of any number of the following factors:

- Lack of awareness and knowledge about the support available under the special education and other funding policies - *Nobody really knows what I do...* (Pamela)
- Misunderstandings and misperceptions about the role of the RTLB - *RTLB haven't got a clear ...role with the high schools they're in. In fact they've had to develop credibility and a role that didn't sort of exist before.* (Wilma)
- Lack of effective systems within in the school resulting in:
  - o Students with diverse needs not being identified until cases reach crisis stage:
  - o Non identification of trends, issues and concerns requiring systemic or programme support
- The large numbers of students with special needs resulting in schools having a reactive rather than proactive approach for responding to needs arising from the diversity within the schools
- Lack of inclusion by the school of the RTLB in the processes
- The dissonance between the literature relating to effective practice and understandings and expectations about the role of the RTLB. The participants have all experienced considerable frustration about the gulf between espoused theory and theory in practice - particularly in relationship to special education in secondary schools.

> *In our office we still have individual cases...but all of that is meaningless - unless you're dealing with the teachers you don't have the means to effect a change...you need to change systems and get commitment from the school management to have some sort of affect.*

(Anon)

The role of the RTLB in some secondary schools – particularly larger urban schools - differs from that of the RTLB in primary schools. Referral numbers, the structure of the secondary school programme and the number of teachers working with any one

student often means that systemic or programme support at a class level is a more effective way of addressing issues and concerns. Frequently it is the only way of responding to the sheer number of referrals.

RTLB are ideally placed to have a key role in supporting these schools to review, reflect on and further develop their systems. They have the training and skills to contribute positively to further development of both class and school systems. Inclusion of the RTLB in the review process will enable the RTLB to provide the school with ongoing support to implement and sustain the initiatives identified during the review. The RTLB brings an important perspective and valuable knowledge to the review process. They are usually able to identify patterns in the referrals from the schools and to support schools in identifying class, faculty, year level and school wide trends related to these patterns. Ideally the review process and ongoing systems will capitalise on this knowledge and perspective. In many cases the relationship between RTLB and school staff can be enhanced by their inclusion in this process.

Professional learning of both Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour and school staff

Every meeting of the group was a forum for shared learning. Participation in the group, building the common vision, developing the group process, sharing and comparing school experiences, keeping up to date with recent developments were all part of the inherent and significant learning that came with membership of the group. As the members were sharing ideas and strategies and planning professional learning activities for school staff they were themselves learning. This was in itself some of the 'nourishment' that fed the passion each member has for new learning.

The first half of the year was about 'growing' the group, developing the relationships and engaging in reflective practice, engaging in dialogue which developed new group understandings but also supported each member with analysing and interpreting the individual school situations. The second half of the year focussed more on the collaborative project of developing a workshop that would provide opportunities to share learning with RTLB and teacher colleagues. Group participants provided reciprocal support to design workshop topics and activities that reflected the learning each member had experienced in relation to one of the projects they were developing and sharing with the group during the previous year.

The professional development and learning aspect of the group highlighted the multi faceted value of participating in a learning community and the benefits for both participants and the people with whom they work. The RTLB consider one of their key roles to be that of facilitating professional learning activities in the schools. Each of the key themes identified in the group discussions is related to and can be addressed in professional development and learning activities involving both RTLB and school staff. Facilitation of learning communities within the schools would provide ideal forums for raising awareness and developing dialogue about these factors. This also has the potential to enhance teacher - RTLB relationships, develop reciprocally positive expectations, demonstrate and further clarify the role of the RTLB and in doing this increase perceptions about their effectiveness.

Effective professional development and learning

One of the aspects identified in the group discussion about expectations in the context of the classroom was the influence teachers' beliefs and attitudes have on their expectations of students and RTLB. The provision of effective professional development is one possible way to begin to reframe these beliefs and to further develop school capability to respond to the range of diverse needs within their community.

In discussing the sequence of events involved in professional development that results in teacher change, Guskey (2002) suggests that professional development activities "frequently are designed to initiate change in teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions.... On the presumption that this will bring about changes in their classroom behaviours and practices, which in turn will result in improved student learning" (p.381). Guskey suggests an alternative model whereby the professional development brings about a change in teacher's classroom practices that result in a change in student learning outcomes causing a change in beliefs and attitudes of the teacher (p.383):
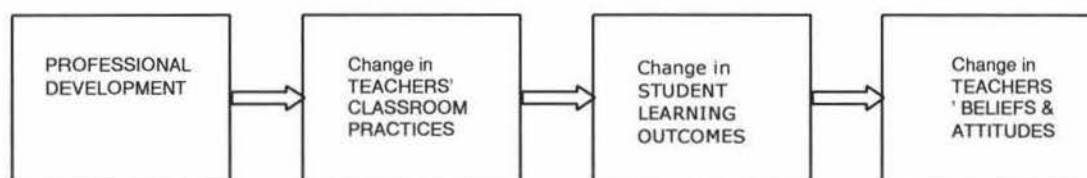
Diagram 24: Guskey's model: (Copied from Guskey, 2002, p.381)

However, group members have experienced teachers as reluctant to try new classroom practices unless they believe they might be more effective, than their current practices, in changing outcomes for students. Guskey's theory is partially relevant in that "the crucial point is not the professional development per se, but the experience of successful implementation that changes teachers' attitudes and beliefs" (p.383). Members have also discovered that: "practices that are found to work – that is, those that teachers find useful in helping students attain desired learning outcomes – are retained and repeated" (p.384). However, there are three additional elements key to successfully encouraging changes, both in teacher beliefs and their practices. The shared learning of this group affirmed the efficacy of these elements. The following is an adaptation to Guskey's model that includes these three elements.

According to Guskey's model, the key element for significant change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs is the clear improvement in the learning outcomes of their students. His theory is that teachers "believe it works because they have seen it work, and that experience shapes their beliefs" (Guskey, 2002, p.383). However, particularly in the context of a secondary school, the findings in the group confirmed that, before teachers will try (what for them is) a new strategy they need to first have opportunity either to experience and enjoy it from a students' perspective or to hear colleagues talk about the strategy's effectiveness in enhancing students' outcomes. Sometimes a video might inspire the necessary confidence or motivation (to try a new strategy). But actual personal experience or opportunity to observe the strategy being modelled is even more effective in beginning the process of change (in beliefs and attitudes) that is necessary for before teachers invest the necessary time and energy to risk trying something new.

The other two factors key to determining whether the new practice will become part of the teachers' regular repertoire of classroom practices are ongoing support from colleagues and opportunities for collegial reflection while developing the skills and knowledge and trialing the process.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT That models the strategies, giving teachers the opportunities to experience them & the motivation to try them in the classroom	Change in TEACHERS' CLASSROOM PRACTICES If there is ongoing collegial support & opportunity for reflection	Change in STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES Will affirm teachers' efforts and increase their confidence in their credibility	Change in TEACHERS BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, confidence & motivation related to using the new strategies

Diagram 25: Adaptation of Guskey's model to include ideas discussed above.

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No matter how convincing the professional development and no matter how much teachers enjoy it, if they are feeling under pressure when faced with a class of students, they are more likely to revert to their usual practices unless there is already a change in their beliefs about the new practice. "Given the centrality of teachers to effective school reform, there is a pressing need to place teacher professional practices – pedagogies and assessment practices linked to desired students outcomes – at the core of professional communities" (Lingard & Mills, 2004, p.66).

There is potential for RTLB to facilitate effective professional development using a model such as this in secondary schools. The RTLB members recognized that the group had provided a safe place for them to develop skills and strategies that would give them confidence to facilitate similar learning in the schools.

> *We are working on skills that we need to be developing with our schools and with the teachers that we're working with. So we're developing a level of working as a group and as a team that we need to develop in our school. And that's a level that nowhere, in the ERO report, is it talking about. This stuff and this is the imperative stuff. It's really crucial and schools - high schools in particular - have no idea how to do that. They don't understand how to process and give people the space to talk about what their issues are or what needs to happen or what they'd like to change and it's actually the same. It's the same 'lines' for kids.*
>
> (Serena)

THE PARALLEL BETWEEN THESE LEARNINGS AND THE LITERATURE

A number of the key features related to effective professional development, that were identified as being important for RTLB and school staff, have been discussed in chapters five, six and seven. All of these features are key factors contributing to the effectiveness of learning communities. To summarise, to add to the credibility of the key findings and to highlight their importance they have been tabulated (in bold) in the diagram below with authors cited or quoted listed alongside them:

Developing effective relationships: Alton-Lee, (2003); Bishop et al, (2003); Hawke & Hill, (2001); Senge, (1999); Hough & Paine, (1997); Sergiovanni, (1994)

Identifying common attitudes, values and beliefs: Senge, (2003); Beebe & Masterton (2003); Hough & Paine, (1997)

Modelling espoused theory: Ryba, (NZRTLB Ass.) (2005); Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, (2002); Janney, & Snell, (2000); Louis, Kruse & Marks, (1996)

Providing opportunities for reflection: Harris & Sherblom, (2005); Distad & Brownstein, (2004); McEntee et al, (2003); Mc Alpine & Weston (2002); Dunne, Nave & Lewis, (2000)

Making meaning through dialogue: Timperley, (2004); Frey, (2002); Mc Alpine & Weston, (2002); Brockbank & McGill, (1998); Senge (1990); Bohm, (1990)

Relating professional development directly to the work of the 'learners': Timperley, (2004); McGill & Brockbank, (2004); Mc Alpine & Weston, (2002); Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, (2002); Louis, Kruse & Marks, (1996)

Professional learning being facilitated by colleagues, among colleagues: Harris & Sherblom, (2005); Hord, (2003); Guskey, 2000

Sharing knowledge and resources: Dettmer et al, (2002); Snell & Janney, (2000); Rainforth & York-Barr, (1997)

Learning in caring, cohesive learning groups: Alton-Lee, (2003); Fullan, (2001); Stoll & Fink, (1996)

Diagram 26: Summary of key findings and relevant references

SUMMARY

The efficacy of RTLB in their work is closely linked to their ability to establish effective relationships. The quality of relationships the RTLB have with staff and the degree of their inclusion in the schools' systems is an integrated process. RTLB ability to establish effective relationships is influenced by the expectations people have of them. This, in turn is influenced by perceptions and misperceptions related to the role of the RTLB. Perceptions related to the role of RTLB are very much dependent on people's knowledge of the support available under the special education policy and their values attitudes and beliefs related to disability.

Opportunities to work in small learning communities have the potential to create effective forums for reflective practice and ongoing learning that has benefits for both the immediate members of the learning community and the people within the wider community where they work.

Chapter eight provides an overview of the process and identifies some of the limitations of this investigation. A summary of the findings is presented to highlight the potential for RTLB to have a role in fostering learning communities in secondary schools. This raises a number of possibilities for further researching concepts proposed in this investigation.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

BRIDGES INTO THE ADOLESCENT WORLD

INTRODUCTION

This chapter completes the circle by relating each of the three layers of findings to the contexts that set the scene (in chapter one) for the investigation – the role and practice of RTLB in secondary schools. The chapter starts with a summary of the research process and identification of the limitations of this project. The learning from each of the three layers is then summarised to demonstrate how participation in a small learning group might prompt participants to establish more learning groups in the wider education community.

The summary includes findings related to the potential for RTLB to have a key role in learning communities in secondary schools. A case is also made for reframing the current paradigm of special education and immersing it in a broader context of the celebration of diversity. A summary of the findings informs the conclusions, further reflections and ideas for further research.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This investigation arose out of a concern about the need to find a way to respond to the increasing diversity of secondary schools so that all students are included and meaningfully engaged in the social and learning life of the school. A belief that the concept of learning community could provide a means to this end and that there is potential for RTLB to have a key role in the process, underpins these research questions:

> *Is the concept of learning community one answer to the dilemmas inherent in responding to diversity in secondary schools?*

And

> *Might a small learning group become the catalyst for growing more learning communities?*

A small learning group of four RTLB working predominantly in secondary schools and two GSE fieldworkers who had support roles in the same schools became a vehicle for investigating the possibilities in the proposal. The discourses of twenty meetings during the first year in the life of this small learning group of six women yielded multiple sources of a wide range of data that provided the findings and subsequent learning from the investigation.

Originally the small learning group was considered an appropriate and manageable focus for the investigation. The quantity and quality of data this group generated was not expected. Analysis and interpretation of the data from nine main sources resulted in a convincing convergence of data that produced nine dominant themes:

1. The 'growing' of a culture of learning community
2. The power of learning, working in learning groups and sharing knowledge. Power in the context of the classroom
3. The importance of relationships in learning groups and in effective teaching
4. The role of RTLB in secondary schools
5. The need to include RTLB in school systems
6. The potential for further development of systems in classrooms and in (secondary) schools
7. The influence of expectations on learning outcomes and on the role of RTLB
8. The potential for shared professional development and learning among RTLB and school staff
9. The potential for further developing partnerships among RTLB, school staff and GSE.

Analysis of these findings produced evidence, relating to the complexities of the role and work of RTLB in secondary schools, so convincing that it deserved to be included. This resulted in three layers of learning with some of the nine themes having relevance to all three layers. Each layer of findings, including the participants' voices has been presented in a separate chapter of this report and is discussed there in relation to literature and evidenced-based research reports. A summary of these findings and resulting conclusions is provided below.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Limitations of this investigation include the time frame, the contexts, the methods employed, the number of group members and the roles of the participants involved. Each of these limitations highlights possible areas for further investigation. Some of these will be described later in this chapter, in the section "Further research".

One year is a comparatively short time frame in the ongoing life of a learning group. Although this group reached a state of cohesion in a relatively short time frame the data gathering period of one year did not appear to have been long enough to allow the group to progress through all the developmental stages associated with establishing groups. Apart from placing on record participants' appreciation of the frequency and regularity of the fortnightly meetings, both

factors created by and planned in response to participant needs, there has been no attempt to discuss this aspect further. Some groups may choose to meet more or less frequently and this may also have a bearing on the effectiveness of the groups.

This was primarily an 'RTLB' group – addressing RTLB needs. The concept of learning community as a solution for, or response to making secondary schools both more inclusive and more effective need not be dependent solely on RTLB participation. The concept needs to be explored as a within-school strategy involving different kinds of groups. These might include groups of teachers from the same faculty, groups of teachers (from different faculties) with the same (year level) classes in common, groups of teachers with an interest in developing particular teaching strategies and whole classroom communities. The concept also deserves further investigation in the wider educational context.

Low socio-economic, urban, multicultural secondary schools were the working contexts for all the participants in the learning group. These schools were the focus and primary source of the participant perceptions that informed much of the data. Although there is significant evidence both in the literature and New Zealand evidence-based research projects indicating these findings are generic and could apply to all schools, there is a need to investigate whether additional or different issues might also be relevant to the special characteristics or features of dissimilar schools. There is room therefore to extend the sample range into schools in rural areas, those drawing their student body from high socio-economic populations and those that have a lesser range of diversity in the community.

The closed borders of this group also placed considerable restriction on the potential for the group to model to people outside (the group) the sharing, collaborative strategies and processes within the group. Any school based group intending to model inclusion and effective collaborative teaming and problem solving would need to adopt a more transparent and inclusive approach. This would, in turn, influence the type of work the group did. The original learning community concept was not intended to 'double' as group supervision. However, there were times when some participants regarded it as such and used the group to fill this need. If a learning group is intended to be a catalyst for growing a culture of learning community within the school, the closed border aspect would not be a desirable feature to replicate.

There was a clear understanding that the purpose of the group was about sharing ideas and resources and developing inclusive strategies. The culture of the group

very quickly embraced this element. The RTLB all working in different schools was both extending and limiting. The multi-school aspect in the focus of the group work provided opportunities to examine, compare and contrast a number of school-wide systems. However, the one-year data collection period did not provide sufficient time to develop relationships to the point where participants could easily and unobtrusively provide practical support to each other within the schools. Within-school groups that include teachers are likely to have a more intensive focus on teaching strategies. This would facilitate opportunities to extend the sharing to include observing teaching strategies in the context of the classrooms.

This learning group consisted of women and the data was approached primarily through the perspectives of the work of RTLB. Although the findings were compared, and found to be compatible, with data from local evidenced-based research projects that included teacher and student voices, there is obvious potential to explore this particular concept from a range of teacher, student, male, faculty and (within school) role perspectives.

SUMMARY OF THE THREE STRANDS OF LEARNING
Multi dimensional learning

In the early stages of this investigation it became apparent that one of the impacts of participating in this group was created by the capacity the group had for providing a context for multi dimensional learning. First there was the learning that resulted from discovering the essence of the group and the features that contributed to participants' perceptions of its effectiveness. Contributing to participants' perceptions about the features and functioning of the group was the impact of the power of the group and how participants experienced that power. These findings provided the basis of the second strand of learning. The third strand of outcomes was the themes arising from the analysis of the group's discourses. These themes not only reflected the complexities of RTLB work in secondary schools but also informed and reinforced all three layers of learning.

Strand One: The group

The first strand of learning focussed on findings related to the features and processes of effective groups. Participants' perceptions were compared and contrasted with the literature and teased out to extract the factors that contributed to the success of this group. Because many of the findings were relevant not only to this group but also to the efficacy of teaching and learning, they also had relevance for inclusive and effective classroom and school learning communities.

Prominent among the findings was confirmation of the importance of groups demonstrating espoused theory in their practice by modelling the values, attitudes and beliefs inherent in the learning community. The group highlighted the potency in providing participants with personal experiences that affirm, inspire, encourage and develop group members' confidence to replicate the model in the context of their work.

The two recurring themes of relationships and expectations were evident in each of the three layers of findings. This demonstrated their importance as factors that have a significant influence on teaching relationships in classrooms, in schools, among educators with working contexts in common and within learning groups. This not only had relevance to one or more of the research dimensions but also to the focus of the work of the group, building bridges into the adolescent world and their learning community.

A number of features cited by participants as being indicative of an effective group also contributed to the effectiveness of the group as a vehicle for exploring issues common to secondary school education. They were the:
- Opportunities for reflection that provided participants with insight into what was happening in their individual work contexts
- Support to analyse and identify patterns in what was happening in the schools and guidance with how to process this
- Linking to, and building on what participants had already accomplished and identifying the next step in the process, through scaffolding
- Stimulation and motivation to research, read, link in with and take account of the latest research.

The findings also identified factors considered to be indicative of effective facilitation of learning groups. Dominant among these factors were the strategies used to establish group processes and to develop foundations that provided structure and direction for the group. This direction included guidance and positive perspectives resulting in the reframing of issues and concerns as opportunities for further development. Significance was also seen in having people other than RTLB facilitate and able to contribute an outside perspective.

Some of the findings were directly related to the complexities of the role of RTLB in secondary schools and highlighted possible strategies to support RTLB in this role.

Among them were the benefits of RTLB being able to group (for supervision and/or support meetings) according to the individual needs of the RTLB rather than the arbitrary cluster arrangements. Among the special needs identified were those related to the (primary, intermediate or secondary) sector and special characteristics of the schools in which the RTLB worked.

The size of groups proved to be a particularly relevant factor. The number preference was directly related to the focus of the work the group. This group felt that five or six schools was the limit that one group could effectively keep in focus when members were supporting each other with project work, like developing specific programmes, as was the case in this group.

One of the strongest findings was related to the difficulties created by differing perceptions about the role of RTLB. This concern was accentuated for RTLB working in more than one school and highlighted the urgent need for clarification, consistency and transparency around the role and subsequent expectations of RTLB. This clarification and transparency needs to include the use of RTLB funds. This latter concern is sometimes accentuated in secondary schools where the attached RTLB is under the direct control of one principal. In this case the funding may come under the control of that school – sometimes one person. This is in comparison with RTLB who work in teams where the funding is usually controlled by a management committee and is therefore subject to team moderation.

The work of the group highlighted several contradictory contexts in which RTLB and GSE need to find a 'middle' road to practice. The difference between espoused theory and theory in action in the classroom can often be managed by modelling a scaffolding approach. However the dissonance between policies, effective practice and expectations can create considerable challenges and tensions among those involved – especially when this includes preparing applications for one of the many special education avenues of funding.

The success of the group highlighted the reciprocal benefits and the need for further development of GSE and RTLB partnerships. There is potential for both GSE and RTLB to gain an insight into the perspectives of the other discipline and to enhance working relationships that will also benefit the schools. There is also potential for GSE and RTLB to be included in communities of practice in schools. This would not only enhance relationships with schools but also provide opportunities to increase the effectiveness of the work of both GSE and RTLB.

From a researchers perspective there were three particularly exciting outcomes. They were participants' recognition that:

1. The skills they were developing through participation in the group were the same skills that teachers needed opportunities to develop
2. There is potential for teachers and students to also benefit from participation in learning communities in schools
3. RTLB are in an ideal position to replicate the above two outcomes in the schools.

Strand Two: The power of the group

The second strand of learning focussed on power - particularly the power of the group. This was explored in relationship to:

- The impact the group had on the work and personal lives of the participants
- Participant perceptions about the source and influence of power in the group
- The power of knowledge and learning both in the context of group and the context of the classroom.

The findings related to the group were dominated by the benevolent aspects of power identified by members as being a feature of this group. The most prominent of these were the connections, the relationships and the trust that developed through these relationships. Participants concluded that this resulted in the group becoming a safe place where they felt free to reflect, share honestly and try out and develop new ideas. They also realised this was an essential element of a learning community, a vital factor for effective classrooms and the foundations for building bridges into the adolescent world and their learning community.

One of the factors identified as underpinning these attributes was the time spent, during the establishment of the group, in identifying the commonalities, developing the vision of the group, establishing group processes, planning actions and identifying how the work would be evaluated. This highlighted positive ways that students could experience power in the context of the classroom. The group concluded that this might pre-empt the need that some students have to find and exert power in less socially acceptable ways.

The findings related to the power of knowledge and learning were also regarded as essential elements for the classroom. There was recognition that the shared learning that took place in the group was energising, created a passion for education and resulted in stimulating participants to investigate and follow up with their own learning. This affirmed the belief all participants have in cooperative learning, effective teaching and strategies that include collaborative teaming and problem solving.

Strand Three: The complexities of working in a special education context in secondary schools

The third strand of findings, the complexities of RTLB working in a special education context in secondary schools were discussed in chapter seven. This discussion included drawing attention to the similarities between the findings of the investigation and those in recent and local evidence-based research projects. Five of the nine dominant themes that emerged from the data were related to working in a special education context in a secondary school.

One challenge for RTLB working in this context is in their isolation. They are expected to work independently, seldom, if ever included in faculty teams or management collaboration but also expected to achieve outcomes that require collaboration with staff and 'power' to make decisions. It was clear that the complexities of the secondary school context are also linked to the confusion around the role of RTLB. Whereas RTLB in primary schools are often able to assist teachers to find ways to meet their individual needs, except in rare circumstances the teaching, timetabling structures and curriculum can make this an almost impossible task in many secondary schools.

Many of the findings related to the potential for RTLB to have a role in supporting systemic development and professional learning in secondary schools. Almost all the themes of the group discussions highlighted and demonstrated the efficacy in a focus on providing support to further develop school systems rather than constantly being caught up in a reactive model that reinforces the paradigm of identifying differences as problems with the student.

SPECIAL = DIVERSITY

Underpinning everything this thesis stands for is the need to reframe the current deficit paradigm of 'special'. This requires reforms that include changes to funding mechanisms, school and community cultures, school systems and teaching and learning methods. Although well meaning in their intention to provide equity and quality, existing policies and practices continue to reinforce the misperception that a separate pedagogy is necessary for students identified as having special needs.

The values, attitudes and beliefs inherent in a learning community culture have the potential to set the stage for a positive paradigm that celebrates diversity. Their relevance for effective teaching and enhanced student learning highlights the importance of transforming schools from what Mirochnik, (2000, p.15) refers to as the traditional *'discovered knowledge'* organisations to inclusive *'knowledge made'* (ibid) learning community cultures. This is demonstrated in evidence-based research relating to what constitutes quality teaching. A culture of genuine learning community, in which diversity is celebrated and effective teaching and learning strategies are practised, would enable all   students and teachers to participate and contribute as valued members.

A POTENTIAL ROLE FOR RESOURCE TEACHERS: LEARNING AND BEHAVIOUR

Since this group began there has been a noticeable increase in learning groups within the Auckland (GSE) district. Some of these groups have been initiated either by participants from this group or people in close contact. Examples include:

- RTLB establishing groups of teachers within schools. These have been teachers with classes, subjects or year levels in common
- RTLB establishing a small learning group of RTLB from across clusters
- GSE members establishing and coordinating networks of support for schools' special education and learning support coordinators (SENCO)
- Some of these SENCO establishing small communities of practice or reflective practice groups of teachers within their schools
- A learning support network of RTLB, school SENCO and school managers.

There is a potential role for RTLB to participate in any of these learning support networks either on a regular or a casual basis, regardless of the school sector in which they work. The most relevant to the discussion in this thesis are the first two examples – RTLB establishing and facilitating reflective practice groups with teachers in schools and RTLB facilitating small learning groups of RTLB colleagues.

The RTLB works with a group of teachers of the same year level (from a range of faculties) who have a class in common. In facilitating the group the RTLB models strategies for teachers to use to respond to the needs of specific students with in their classes. A subsequent increase in student achievement creates school-wide interest and encourages the teachers to share the strategies with their faculties. This sharing initiates a 'community of practice' within the faculty.	The RTLB works with a group of teachers within one faculty. While facilitating the group, the RTLB models effective inclusive teaching strategies. The RTLB provides in class support to the teachers in this group to use these strategies. *(These strategies will have relevance for other subjects).* These teachers share the strategies with teachers in their respective year groups, and initiate communities of practice within these groups	The RTLB advocates a particular teaching strategy in the school and gathers together a group of teachers interested in learning this strategy. *(Eg: Reciprocal Teaching)* The RTLB works with these teachers to develop the skills, knowledge and resources to enable them to apply the strategy in their classes. The RTLB provides practical support to teachers to implement the strategy in class. Teachers share this learning by initiating similar groups within faculties/year level.

Diagram 27: Models of professional learning that might be facilitated by RTLB

The in-school support of (teacher) professional practice groups of teachers and RTLB might be facilitated in a number of different configurations. Diagram 27 provides three examples. Each of these creates opportunities for RTLB to contribute to the growing of learning community cultures in schools. However, for the full effect to be realised it is dependent on the structures of the school providing the time and resources for teachers to be able to meet on a regular basis in a number of different groupings such as year level, faculty and interest groups.

This option also makes it possible for the RTLB to facilitate factors identified in chapter seven as being essential to effective professional learning and development activities – they are the:

- Modelling of strategies that apply and demonstrate the efficacy of espoused theory
- Collegial support in classrooms to develop the necessary resources and initiate these strategies
- Support for teachers while they (teachers) build new strategies into their teaching repertoire

- Opportunities for ongoing reflection that includes evaluation and further development of teaching strategies.

The second of these options provides opportunities for reflective practice and reciprocal support with issues, concerns and professional practice related to the role of the RTLB. If there is the flexibility for these to be cross-cluster groups there is potential to capitalize on, and meet needs created by, particular characteristics of school contexts. The relevant example in this case is secondary schools.

GROWING A CULTURE OF LEARNING COMMUNITY

The diagram on the next page is one model demonstrating how possible ripples from one learning community, such as the learning group that is the focus of this investigation, might contribute to 'growing' a culture of learning communities in a school.

This flowchart illustrates how participation in a learning group might be instrumental in further developing the confidence and competence of group members to facilitate groups within their immediate professional community and or within the contexts of school. It also demonstrates how a small learning group might become a catalyst for development of more learning groups both within the school and the wider education community, and in doing so contribute to the 'growing' of a culture of learning community.

The desirable outcome of a model such as this would be a series of interconnected learning communities providing reciprocal support and fostering a wider education context of learning communities. Ideally professional communities of practice or learning groups would result in the establishment and ongoing support of learning community classrooms. (See Diagram 28)

Diagram 28: THE POSSIBLE RIPPLES OF A SMALL LEARNING COMMUNITY

The following model demonstrates how possible ripples from one learning community might contribute to 'growing' a culture of learning communities in a school.

One (host) professional learning community of RTLB & GSE:
- Providing reciprocal support among members.
- Sharing knowledge about responding to special characteristics of schools
- Modelling values, attitudes and beliefs (of the group) that are key to achieving the vision each has for goals in their work context.
- Developing 'models' to address school (student & teacher) needs
- Coordinating general and systemic (not individual case) support provided by RTLB and GSE

Dispersed learning communities established (by each of the participants in the' host ' group). These might be groups of:
- People in RTLB clusters
- RTLB from across clusters but working in schools with similar needs
- Members of GSE
- Networks of school learning support coordinators
- School leaders
- A combination of any of the above

A community of practice or learning community in a school
RTLB from 'host learning community or one of the participants in the 'dispersed' learning community establishes a Learning community in their school.
These may be in the form of
- Syndicate or teaching teams
- Curriculum faculties or departments
- Teams of teachers of specific year groups
- Teams of teachers of a specific class
- Heterogeneous groups of teachers united by a common goal to further develop their teaching practice
- Groups of teachers with a common interest in a particular project
- Groups of teachers seeking support for a specific reason:
- Eg: - to further develop formative assessment in the classroom
          - to address common issues regarding responses to challenging behaviours
          - to raise student achievement levels
          - to plan units of work / thematic topics
          - to learn a new teaching strategy
          - to participate in an action learning project

Classroom learning community
One teacher develops a culture of learning community in their classroom. This becomes a model for teachers. Positive results in student outcomes encourage more teachers to make the transition

Classroom learning communities
Are established by a number of teachers as a result of their participation in a community of practice and experiencing the modelled attitudes, values, beliefs & strategies.

A number of classroom learning communities
Are established as a result of changes in teacher values, attitudes and beliefs after:
- Observing the success of the 'model' and/or
- Outcomes of action learning project in schools demonstrating their effectiveness
- Hearing about the increase in student achievement in 'learning community classrooms'.

CONCLUSION

This research was prompted by a growing concern about the increasing numbers of students becoming disengaged and excluded from their school communities. The thesis was based on a proposal that the growing of learning communities would be one solution to the challenge of responding effectively and inclusively to the increasing diverse needs evident in many secondary schools. It was based on the premise that traditional methods of teaching are no longer relevant in light of the rapid changes brought about by the global development of technology, changes in theory about knowledge making and the challenges created by the increasing diversity of our communities.

Personal and professional experiences, literature and evidence-based research regarding effective practice had led to a belief in the concept of authentic learning community. A small learning group became the vehicle for exploring the validity of the notion that learning communities might be one solution for building bridges into the adolescent world.

Although the secondary school context was the focus of the work of this group the outcomes of this investigation apply to any school or education context.

In addition to the influence that participating in the group had on each group member's work and personal life, the work of the group provided an insight into and affirmed a number of possibilities for further development. Predominant among the outcomes were the conclusions that:
- The concept of learning community offers one solution to issues related to:
  o Special education
  o Diversity
  o Confusion around the role of RTLB in secondary education
- There is potential for a small learning group to instigate the growing of a wider culture of learning community in education contexts
- Smaller learning communities within the larger school-wide community could have the power to become the core of both intra-school and inter-school professional learning. The possibilities, in terms of composition of membership, focus of the learning, and ripples are limitless.

Inherent in, and underpinning these conclusions were findings that confirmed:

- That the 'special' in special education really needs to be about effective teaching and ensuring school cultures are truly responsive to diversity
- The values, attitudes and beliefs inherent in a culture of learning community could set the stage for reframing the current deficit paradigm of 'special'.

- Recognition of, and advocating for the key role that RTLB could have in reframing special education and developing learning communities will contribute considerably to building bridges into the adolescent world

- There is merit in the potential for RTLB to have a significant role in fostering, contributing to, and facilitating learning communities within schools

- Involving RTLB in learning communities could also assist in clarifying the role and expectations of the RTLB and enhancing perceptions about their effectiveness.

Some conclusions were specifically related to the impact for group members of their participation in the learning group. As demonstrated in this research, once established learning communities will be sustained through regular opportunities for:

- Sharing reflective practice
- Developing partnerships across organisations
- Experiencing facilitated shared learning and the stimulation resulting from participation in learning groups.

These factors would increase the probability of the small learning community becoming a catalyst for growing a wider culture of learning community.

To develop, nurture, and sustain a community of learners means creating a different culture that includes a shared vision, true collaboration, administrator and teacher leadership, and conditions that support these efforts.

(Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, cited by Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p.5)

FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings in this investigation identified a possible role for RTLB in initiating and possibly facilitating learning groups in schools. There is also considerable potential for a range of further research activities to identify the effectiveness of the concept as a strategy for responding to diversity and furthering inclusion. This study has been evidenced-based in relation to the RTLB group, in that it has included the voices of the RTLB. However, apart from the second hand reporting back by RTLB about teacher and student reactions, these two groups were not directly included. Possible future studies might be carried out in which the concept is explored within schools. Logically this would start with small learning groups of teachers. Ongoing monitoring could investigate whether these small learning groups became a catalyst for additional groups and whether they influenced teaching strategies and foster classroom learning communities.

Investigations need to include gathering evidence from teachers regarding the effectiveness, firstly of their participation in collegial learning and subsequently their facilitating a culture of learning community in their classrooms.

Similarly, for the research to be truly evidenced-based, student perceptions need to be examined. It would be important to determine whether students notice any difference in the style of teaching or the culture of the classroom. The impact of learning communities on students' learning and achievement might be evaluated by, surveying students' perceptions and examining relevant achievement data.

Numerous recent and current projects include the identification, examination and evaluation of inclusive teaching strategies. However, there is potential to further explore the concept of a small learning group or community of practice becoming a catalyst for a whole school culture of learning community. This would require a longitudinal study, as it would take considerable time to implement, monitor and evaluate the whole concept and the resulting change.

The secondary school is an ideal context in which to make comparative studies. Given that students attend a number of different classes with a number of different teachers it would be interesting to investigate student reactions about their enjoyment, degree of participation and perceptions about effectiveness in terms of how much they believe they have learnt while participating in both traditional method and learning community classrooms.

This investigation confirmed that a culture of genuine learning community, in which diversity is celebrated and effective teaching and learning strategies are practised, would build bridges into the adolescents' world and their learning community and enable all members to be actively engaged in an inclusive context.

If we accept communities as places where people really want to be
because of a sense of
kinship, place or neighbourliness,
and shared ideas and values,
the challenge then becomes to redesign school systems
so they are much more like communities and less like organisations.

(Hough & Paine, 1997, p.195)

APPENDICES

THE BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

The nature of my work in the field of special education has led to a growing concern about the increasing difficulties many secondary schools are experiencing as they face the challenges of responding effectively to the increasingly diverse nature of their school communities. Although my role is primarily focussed on supporting schools to meet the needs of students regarded as having special needs I approach the work from an inclusive perspective that effective teaching will be responsive to the full range of diversity. The term 'diversity' is used here as it is by Alton-Lee, (2003), in the full sense of schools needing to be responsive to *"many characteristics including ethnicity, socio-economic background, home language, gender, special needs disability and giftedness"*(p.v).

Coupled with my concern about the challenges inherent in responding to diversity is an awareness of the solitary nature of the work of RTLB in secondary schools. This has prompted a personal theory about the potential for the RTLB role to contribute to the growth of learning community culture in secondary schools. When I embarked on this project it was less than a decade since I had completed a seven-year period in the position of 'HOD (Head of the Department) Special Education', in a low decile secondary school catering for a multi-cultural community. In that role I discovered how it felt to be 'the face' of special education in a secondary school. The experiences I had during this time are still fresh enough for me to be able to relate to the isolation created in a school by a teacher's 'association' with special education. Although I was working in a friendly and supportive community the well meaning but patronising attitudes associated with intellectual disability, and the perception that teachers of students with special needs were in some way less able than mainstream teachers was still evident. In spite of - or maybe, because of - a recognition of and respect for the specialised nature of their knowledge and skills, this resulted in a degree of marginalisation of the special education teachers.

In the period since this teaching experience I have worked in advisory, research and professional development roles within the Ministry of Education: Special Education. These roles have accorded me the privilege of interacting with principals and staff of more than 350 schools across the greater Auckland area. During this time I have had both direct and indirect exposure to many very innovative and successful school programmes and teaching practices. However, due to the nature of my work and the deficit focus in the field of special education I have also become acutely aware of the urgent need to demystify and reduce the fears inherent in the concept of 'special' in relation to students whose needs require a change in the general teaching practice of many teachers.

Column headings

NZ SPECIAL EDUCATION | **Early Intervention** | **Moderate-High Needs** | **Moderate Contracts** | **High-Very High Needs** | **Additional Provisions**

NZ SPECIAL EDUCATION

Reforms based on 5 Basic Principles
- EQUITY
- QUALITY
- EFFICIENCY
- EFFECTIVENESS
- ECONOMY

Official Statements
- 1989 Ed. Act
- Human Rights Act
- Nat, Education Guidelines
- NZ Curriculum Framework
- 2000 Amendment to Education Act

Special Education Policy
Aims to:
- Improve opportunities and outcomes
- Provide funding guidelines
- Ensure equity of resourcing
- Provide flexibility and choice

Wylie recommendation to add an aim to ensure acceptance of all students, in all Schools & to ensure their inclusion in all activities.

Early Intervention

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Birth - 6yrs or until student transitions to school.
Multi Discipline Teams working with:
Parents
Caregivers
Whanau,
Early childhood facilities
other Agencies

Also:
Maori Child Fund
Maori +
Pacific Nation Participants

Compulsory Schooling

Usual School programme with accommodations and support for all learners

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Moderate-High Needs

Resource Teachers of Literacy (**RTL**)
Resource Teachers of Maori (**RTM**)
Resource Teachers of Literature (**RTLit**)

School Based Resources

Resource Teachers of Learning & Behaviour (RTLB) Provide itinerant & in school advice, guidance & support to teachers for students with moderate -high learning and/or behaviour needs. Employed by one BOT on behalf of a cluster of schools.

Special Education Grant (SEG)
Provided to improve learning behaviour. Funding based on roll number and decile rating
Schools:
- decide how money is spent
- ensure it makes a difference
- create their own decision making process

Moderate Contracts

Physical
- Delivery of OT + PT therapies to children in the compulsory sector.
- Advice, guidance, support for students not on ORRS
- A number of facilities and service providers
MOE developing protocols

Hearing
- Resource Teachers of Hearing Impairment *(RTHI)*
- Regional Co-ord. x RTHI
- Advisors on Deaf Children *(AODC)*
- Van Asch & Kelston - Deaf Education Centres
- Cochlear implant programme

Vision: Birth ->end of schooling
- Homai = Regular State Special School
- Resource Teacher of Visually Impaired (RTVI)
- Host schools receive attachment + travel grants
- Vision Education Agency

Regional Hospital Health Schools (RHHS)
(Auckland, Wellington, Chch).
- Co-ordinate IEP between parents/home/school/hospital school and, sometimes, correspondence school.
Caters for students:
- with 6+ hospital admissions in 1 year
- with chronic/psychiatric illness
- in transition back to school
- convalescing at home

High-Very High Needs

High & Complex Needs
Intersectoral service collaboration

ORRS - Ongoing Reviewable Resourcing Scheme
Individually based funding for:
- Students likely to need support throughout their schooling
- 2 levels =Very High & and High
- Needs-includes Funding for
- .2/.1 x teacher, Specialist
- Support, Therapies & T.Aides.

SLS: Supplementary learning Support: Specialist teacher and TA support for studentswith high needs who do not meet criteria for ORRS

Speech Language Initiative
Support for homes, schools, clinics to; assess + develop programmes, provide therapy, ,monitor progress And train teachers.

Severe Behaviour
Funding for Teams to work with students, family, whanau + school. To support students whose behaviour risks physical safety, limits access to curriculum and interferes with social acceptance, sense of well being, progress.
Centres of extra support
Itinerant support or short term placement for students needing intensive support

School High Health Fund
To provide: Paraprofessional care & supervision for students with high health needs so they can attend school safely. (Assistance to provide for health care needs not direct assistance with lng).

Additional Provisions

Special Schools

Local, regional and national special day and/or residential schools to cater for students with very high needs Corresponndence School

Other Initiatives
- Traumatic Incident support
- Health Camps
- Alternative Education *(Secondary)*
- Suspension Reduction Initiative
- Training Schemes *(Secondary)*
- Truancy Initiatives
- ESOL –
- Refuge Funding and Support
- SWIS - *(Social Workers in Schools)*
- Special Attached Units
- Iwi Liaison
- Pacific Island Liaison

- **Early Identification & Intervention** (particularly for moderate needs)
- **EPF** support for schools with disproportionate numbers of special needs
- **Research** (ongoing monitoring of the Special Education Policy provisions and EEPiSE project.
- **Assistive Equipment** - Specialist Technology Teams and/or funding to provide assessment and/or assistive equipment to remove barriers to accessing the curriculum
- **Transport (**Funding to provide transport for students needing assistance to travel to and from school

Massey University
WELLINGTON

Human Ethics Committee: Wellington

6 May 2004

Diane Mary Guild
16B Seccombes Rd
Newmarket
AUCKLAND

Re: MUHEC: WGTN Protocol - 04/16
The impact of shared learning on the practice of resource teachers of learning and
behaviour working in secondary schools

Thank you for the above protocol that was received and considered at the Massey University Human
Ethics Committee: Wellington meeting on 5 May 2004.

The protocol was <u>unconditionally approved</u> with the following comments:

SECTION C
Q33
- The response to this question would not normally be considered an adequate precaution in a case
  where a significant possibility of harm existed.

INFORMATION SHEET and CONSENT FORM
- It is suggested that the Albany campus number be given for the Supervisor as an alternative (09)
  414 0800, and the extension, as this would save a toll call.

The Committee congratulated the researcher on a well-prepared application.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of
this letter, a new application must be submitted at that time.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please
advise the Secretary of the Committee.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents: "This project has been
reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, WGTN Protocol 04/16.
If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Mr Jeremy Hubbard,
Acting Chair, Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee, telephone 04 801 2794 ext
6358, email J.J.Hubbard@massey.ac.nz.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Hubbard (Acting Chair)
Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee

Cc: Dr Marg Gilling, Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education

Te Kunenga
ki Purehuroa

The Impact Of Shared Learning
On The Practice Of Resource Teachers Of Learning And
Behaviour Working In Secondary Schools.

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research project. Please read the following information carefully and feel free to ask if you have any queries. I need you to sign the consent form prior to your participation in the project and before I can include your contribution in the project report.

Researcher: Diane Guild   Phone: (09) 529 4225

Nature of the project: This study is undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education, (Adult Education).

Employment status: The researcher is currently employed by the Ministry of Education: Special Education, Auckland City District.

Purpose of the project: This project will capture the story of a group of six colleagues who meet together fortnightly for mutual support and shared learning. The group consists of four resource teachers of learning and behaviour (RTLBs) and two Ministry of Education: Special Education employees, one of whom is the researcher. The four RTLBs all work in separate secondary schools. Their roles differ widely from school to school depending on the needs of the school. I want to investigate how participation in the shared learning group influences what happens for each participant in their work context.

Participation in the project: Participants will be free to choose the extent of their participation in the research and the manner in which they contribute to individual data collection. Members will be invited to participate in the group reflections at the end of most meetings and to contribute their own stories in whatever format they prefer. The progress of the group will be tracked and reflected both in narrative and graphic form. Based on observations of the progress of the group and the stories of the individual participants, theory will be developed and examined alongside relevant literature.

As the purpose of the project is to track the progress of one particular learning group, participation will be restricted to members of this group. They have already expressed an interest in the project and discussed the possible nature of their involvement with the learning group.

Participant rights: It is anticipated that this project will not place participants in any kind of 'at risk' situation. You are under no obligation to accept this invitation.   If you decide to participate, you have the right to:
  • decline to answer any particular question;
  • withdraw from the study at any time:
  • ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
  • provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
  • be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

You also have the right to:
- identify and ask for particular information discussed or disclosed at any time during the group meetings, not to be included in the project
- ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Project procedures

Data will consist of information collected in the form of meeting minutes, observations, personal interactions, emails, flowcharts, graphic representations, computer models, diaries, vignettes and any other means nominated by participants. Information gathered in this way will be presented in the form of narratives tracking the group story and the individual stories of the participants' journeys through the process.

The research report will be written up on my computer. All electronic data will be stored in files to which only I will have access through a password. Hard data will be stored in a secure and confidential filing cabinet in my home. At no time will the names of the participants be included in the data. Any draft data submitted by participants will be returned to them

Consent forms will remain private (viewed only by myself and my supervisor) and will be destroyed after a period of five years. This is a Massey University Human Ethics Committee requirement

Participant involvement

If you agree to participate in this project the time involvement will be 20-30 minutes at the conclusion of most learning group meetings and possible participation in a one to one and a half hour taped interview with me at the end of the year.

Support Processes

If at any time before, during or after participation in this research you have any concerns or matters you would like to discuss further please contact either myself or the supervisor.

Researcher: Diane Guild   Phone: (09) 529 4225
Ministry of Education: Special education
P. O Box 26 408
Epsom
Auckland

Supervisor: Dr marg gilling   Phone (04) 801 2794 x 6662
College of Education (Adult Education)   or
Massey University, Wellington Campus   (09) 414 0800 x 6662
P O Box 756   *(toll free)*
Wellington

Committee Approval Statement

"This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, WGTN Protocol 04/16. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact
Mr Jeremy Hubbard, Acting Chair, Massey University Wellington Human Ethics Committee, telephone 04 801 2794 ext 6358, email J.J.Hubbard@massey.ac.nz.

The Impact Of Shared Learning On The Practice Of Resource Teachers Of Learning And Behaviour Working In Secondary Schools.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent from will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I wish/do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.

I wish/do not wish to have data placed in an official archive.

I agree to not disclose anything identified in the group meetings as confidential to the participants the group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name - printed

Researcher: Diane Guild   Phone: (09) 529 4225
                    16B Seccombes Rd
                    Newmarket
                    Auckland

Supervisor: Dr marg gilling   Phone: (04) 801 2794 x 6662
                    College of Education (Adult Education)   or
                    Massey University, Wellington Campus   (09) 414 0800 X 6662
                         P O Box 756   *(toll*
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                    Wellington

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