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**Changing Learning Conversations:
An Action Research Model of Reflective
Professional Development**

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2007

**Changing Learning Conversations: An Action Research Model of
Reflective Professional Development**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Education**

**Massey University
Albany
New Zealand**

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2007

ABSTRACT

A growing body of international research has indicated that teacher effectiveness is the most important factor affecting student achievement. At the heart of effective teaching and learning are learning conversations, in which teachers play a pivotal role in mediating learning by orchestrating discussion with students. This action research study had a dual purpose, firstly to investigate the effects of teachers' knowledge and thinking on their ability to mediate students' learning in classroom learning conversations, and secondly to provide the participating teachers with opportunities to investigate and develop their professional knowledge and practice. The action research approach allowed the collection of substantive information about teachers' thinking and practice, while at the same time informing and developing that practice through cycles of data collection, analysis, and reflection. The study involved two New Zealand primary school teachers in four cycles of action research. Information was gathered about the teachers' knowledge, thinking, and practice through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals. Observation transcripts were analysed, coded, discussed, and reflected upon during reflection days at the end of each cycle.

The initial findings of the study revealed that although the two teachers were very different in their teaching styles, there were strong similarities in the fragmented nature of their knowledge of learning and assessment theory. Discrepancies were found between the teachers' espoused theories and their theories-in-use. In addition, the teachers' practice was strongly influenced by implicit beliefs and routinised behaviours, which had a powerful and often detrimental effect on the quality of their interactions with students. However, the process of examining the evidence in their own lesson transcripts enabled the teachers to develop awareness of weaknesses in their practice. This was a catalyst for reflection that resulted in change and improvement. After an initial regression both teachers made small but incremental changes in their interactions with students. By the end of the final cycle both teachers had appreciably improved the quality of their classroom learning conversations. The study demonstrates the effectiveness of classroom-based action research as a model for reflective professional development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis has been a long journey of learning. I am indebted to the many people who have accompanied and supported me along the way.

Firstly, thanks to my supervisors, Dr. Jenny Poskitt and Dr. Alison St. George, who have patiently challenged, encouraged, and supported me during this research. Their rigorous and exacting feedback during the writing of this thesis has helped me to develop as a researcher, scholar, and writer.

Thanks also to “Anne” and “Ruth,” the teachers who made this study possible, for accompanying me on this journey of action research, and for the learning that we shared along the way.

Thanks are due to many of my colleagues, who have supported and encouraged me in numerous ways. Thanks in particular to Dr. Gavin Brown, for his advice and tutelage concerning the statistical analysis of the research data.

My appreciation and thanks to The University of Auckland for the Amalgamation Scholarship that released me from my teaching responsibilities and enabled me to break the back of writing this thesis, and for the Tertiary Grant that covered the expenses related to the study.

Thanks to my mother and my children for believing in me.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband Roger, for encouraging me to embark on this journey, for supporting me, for the sacrifices he has made along the way, and for believing that one day this thesis would finally be completed.

Approval for this study was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (PN Protocol No: 02/143).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	xi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Focus of the study	3
1.2 Significance of the topic	4
1.3 The case for action research	5
1.4 Structure of the thesis	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review	9
2.1 Two theories of learning	9
2.2 A knowledge base for teaching	19
2.3 Learning conversations	24
2.4 Reflective professional development	32
2.5 Conclusion	38
Chapter Three: Action Research Theory	41
3.1 Postmodern paradigm influences	42
3.2 Action research	45
3.3 Working in collaborative action research partnerships	51
3.4 Challenges associated with collaborative action research partnerships	52
3.5 Common methods of data collection	56
3.6 Data analysis in action research	61
3.7 Issues of validity, reliability, and generalisability	62
3.8 Conclusion	64

Chapter Four: Embarking On The Research Journey	65
4.1 An action research approach	65
4.2 Approaching the school	67
4.3 Ethical considerations	69
4.4 Delimitations of the study	71
4.5 Specific methods of data collection	71
4.6 Data analysis	74
4.7 A brief overview of the four cycles of action research	76
Chapter Five: Cycle One	77
5.1 Teacher interviews	78
5.2 Classroom observations	85
5.3 Teacher reflection	102
5.4 Researcher reflection	105
5.5 New questions	106
Chapter Six: Cycle Two	107
6.1 Classroom observations	108
6.2 Teacher reflection	122
6.3 Researcher reflection	128
6.4 New questions	131
Chapter Seven: Cycle Three	133
7.1 Classroom observations	135
7.2 Teacher reflection	148
7.3 Researcher reflection	154
7.4 New questions	155
Chapter Eight: Cycle Four	157
8.1 Classroom observations	159
8.2 Practical significance of the research findings	169
8.3 Teacher reflection	171
8.4 Researcher reflection	179
8.5 Conclusion	180

Chapter Nine: Conclusions and Implications	183
9.1 How did the teachers' knowledge and thinking initially influence the quality of their learning conversations with students?	184
9.2 An action research model of reflective professional development	192
9.3 What changes occurred in the teachers' knowledge, thinking and practice as a result of reflective professional development?	200
9.4 What changes occurred in learning conversations as a result of reflective professional development?	201
9.5 Implications for teacher education and development	203
9.6 Limitations of the study and implications for further research	208
9.7 Concluding comment	211
References	213
Appendices	239
Appendix A: Letter to Principal	241
Appendix B: Letter to Board of Trustees	243
Appendix C: Consent Form: Board of Trustees	247
Appendix D: Information Sheets: Participants, Parents, and Caregivers	249
Appendix E: Consent Forms: Participants, Parents, and Caregivers	259
Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement	267
Appendix G: Interview Questions	269
Appendix H: Excerpt from Observational Fieldnotes	271
Appendix I: Excerpt from Reflective Journal	273
Appendix J: Glossary of Terms for Hierarchy of Classroom Interactions	275
Appendix K: Excerpts from Analysed Observation Transcripts	277

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Basic beliefs and positions of alternative inquiry paradigms	43
Table 5.1	Summary of teacher responses to basic interview questions	79
Table 5.2	Hierarchy of Classroom Interactions	88
Table 5.3	Categorisation of teacher utterances in Cycle One	92
Table 6.1	Categorisation of teacher utterances in Cycle Two	110
Table 6.2	Teacher utterances at each level of the hierarchy in Cycles One and Two	111
Table 6.3	Specific Level Two teacher utterances in Cycles One and Two	113
Table 6.4.	Teacher utterances related to administration in Cycles One and Two	117
Table 6.5.	Teacher utterances related to behaviour management in Cycles One and Two	117
Table 6.6	Teacher interactions with individual students in Cycle Two	119
Table 7.1	Categorisation of teacher utterances in Cycle Three	136
Table 7.2	Teacher utterances at each level of the hierarchy in Cycles One, Two and Three	137
Table 7.3	Teacher utterances related to behaviour management in Cycles One, Two, and Three	140
Table 7.4	Teacher interactions with individual students in Cycles Two and Three	140
Table 7.5	Instructing, telling, and explaining in Cycles One, Two, and Three	142
Table 7.6	Questions asked in Cycles, One, Two, and Three	143
Table 7.7	Feedback given in Cycles One, Two, and Three	146
Table 8.1	Categorisation of teacher utterances in Cycle Four	160
Table 8.2	Teacher utterances at each level of the hierarchy in Cycles One, Two, Three, and Four	161
Table 8.3	Instructing, telling, and explaining in Cycles One, Two, Three, and Four	163

Table 8.4	Questions asked in Cycles One, Two, Three, and Four	165
Table 8.5	Feedback given in Cycles One, Two, Three, and Four	168
Table 8.6	Comparison of proportions of teacher utterances at each level of the hierarchy in Cycles One and Four	170
Table 8.7	Comparison of proportions of question types in Cycles One and Four	171
Table 8.8	Summary of teachers' written reflections on Cycle Four readings	173