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TEACHING AND LEARNING RESEARCH EXCHANGE

Towards a Culture of
Continuous Deliberation:
Professional Development
through Professional
Dialogue

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Dedication

This research project
is dedicated
to the teachers involved in the study,
who worked together
to nurture a sense of possibility.

Coming to the Research

*Barth, in
Learning By Heart, said:
“You can’t lead
where you haven’t gone.”
Although neither of us had ventured before
To the learning connections we came to know,
We shared a vision
Driven by passion and a moral imperative.*

*A notion coalesced:
...Teachers joined together
Celebrating their learning,
Building their practice
In a safe place...*

*“How can a principal and teacher
achieve with colleagues
a learning community that honours
knowledge
creative spirit
and teacher passion
to shape a powerful learning system?”*

*We mused.
We postulated.*

*We pondered,
Never doubting there would be a way.*

*... And Fullan whispered,
“It is the walking that beats the path...”*

And we all stepped forward.

The Research Position

The sciences of the 20th Century have brought us a profoundly new vision of how the universe works. Individual parts have definition and meaning only by virtue of the relationships between them. It is no surprise then that we find dialogue and community building at the forefront of organizational change efforts. Both are about creating cultures based on understanding relationships – relationships between people, structure, processes, thinking, and results. (Gerard, G. & Teurfs, L. in Gozdz, K., 1995, p. 143)

Educational organizations are currently restructuring to improve learning outcomes for students, to support teachers in complex and demanding teaching assignments, and to adopt collaborative models that embrace cultural diversity. *The renewed English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Elementary Level (K-5)* (Saskatchewan Education, January 2002) and the publication, *Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth* (Saskatchewan Education, 2001), offer a curriculum-embedded matrix through which to extend professional development initiatives. In this research project, cycles of professional conversation and thought are conceived as part of and endemic to actual teaching-learning cycles that include developing appropriate and effective units and lesson plans, selecting and orchestrating the application of objectives, materials, and activities, and accessing appropriate and timely assessment and evaluation strategies.

Central to this research is the position that teacher-learning is embedded in culture and is a cultural activity. Professional development, from a constructivist stance, assumes that knowledge is not disseminated or transferred, but that it is actively re-constructed and re-invented by learners, who bring unique foundational beliefs, diverse background experiences, skills, abilities, and points of view to the meaning-making task. Professional development of this type necessitates an active role on the part of each teacher-participant, as each explores, shares, collaborates, and reflects on assumptions, practice, and guiding frameworks employed in the process. Each teacher participant takes control of his/her learning. While latitudes for discussion are integral to the research process, specific structures are embedded in the research experience to ensure that focus is maintained, current research and recommended curriculum publications inform the process, and moral purpose — improved student learning — guides and shapes the engagement.

The Research: Goal, Purpose, Question, and Objectives

The nature of teachers' language through this research experience shapes the study. Teachers have had too few opportunities to experience deeply focussed give-and-take conversations with colleagues about teaching practice. If teachers do discuss teaching strategies and methodology with one another, the talk usually focuses on the efficient planning and delivery of programs; however, this kind of talk may not function as an effective agent for change. With the face of education changing rapidly, language structures that support teachers in implementing change are worthy of examination. Illuminating a distinction between the function of language forms, and the nature of thought, Gerard and Teurfs in Gozdz (1995) write:

One useful way to describe dialogue is by contrasting it with discussion, a much more familiar form of conversation. The roots of discussion are the same as those of percussion and concussion, signifying a "breaking apart" or "fracturing" into pieces. The intent of discussion is usually to deliver one's point of view, to convince or persuade. Since points of view may differ widely, discussion often leads to divisiveness and polarization in groups. Opinions tend to be rigidly held on to and defended. In contrast, dialogue asks us to "suspend" our attachments to a particular point of view (opinion) so that deeper levels of listening, synthesis and meaning can evolve within a group. The result is an entirely different atmosphere. Instead of everyone trying to figure out who is right and who is wrong, the group is involved in trying to see a deeper meaning behind the various opinions expressed. Individual differences are acknowledged and respected. What emerges is a larger, expanded perspective for all... (pp. 144-145)

The kind of conversation sought by this study, and central to community building, is "deep dialogue" that builds a shared, constructed meaning. Building a learning community within a school requires a safe environment that celebrates teachers' learning. In this study, meanings were built through cycles of personal and collaborative reflection, inquiry, and experimentation. These processes moved towards **the overarching goal of this project — to foster an emerging learning community of K-5 teachers.**

The term "learning community" is defined in this study as a collaborative cluster of K-5 teacher-participants, situated in grade-alike groups, for the purpose of becoming confident and competent language arts teachers. We are reminded that "Community is a verb, a process, not an end state" (Trudy and Peter Johnson-Lenz in Gozdz, 1995, p. 250). Curriculum **reflection, inquiry, and networking**, three organizers specified in the *Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth* (Saskatchewan Education, 2001), merged in this study. The holistic structure of this research design facilitated all three interconnected components of professional development over time, supporting teachers to consider the unique ramifications and applications of thought and dialogue within their authentic work environments. While the three components of reflection, inquiry, and networking are delineated as separate avenues of professional development within the *Classroom Curriculum Connections* (Saskatchewan Education, 2001) document, teachers came to

understand how these growth processes function synergistically as teacher-professionals critically and creatively shape their philosophy and practice through action research cycles. Throughout the process of the study, teacher participants and research leaders sought answers to the research question: **What cultural conditions, structural components and learning outcomes inform the formation of a K-5 teacher learning community as a model of professional development?**

This research project specifically:

- Fostered collaborative professional development that involved sharing and celebrating strengths through an inquiry model
- Encouraged teachers to use language to reconstruct and re-envision the teaching task, while actively implementing renewed ELA curriculum
- Supported teachers in various practical stages of implementation (awareness, exploration, synthesis, and refinement) with the renewed K-5 English Language Arts Curriculum
- Encouraged personal goal-setting and ownership
- Built personal efficacy in the process of professional development
- Fostered cycles of action and reflection throughout curriculum implementation, and thinking about the teaching-learning relationship
- Through collaboration and authentic dialogue, developed a deepening awareness of teachers' diverse perspectives, assumptions, and beliefs, and accessed this diversity to reflect upon foundational beliefs and teaching practices
- Actively engaged teachers in the research process; teachers as researchers, within the classroom in concert with teacher-peers

Structures Facilitating Community Building: Setting; Action Research; Facilitator Roles; Guiding Frameworks and Processes

SETTING: DESIGNING FOR DIALOGUE

To foster an emerging learning community of K-5 teachers, participants were provided with an environment fostering professional development through dialogue and experimentation, wherein teachers could:

- actively construct their own collaborative model(s) for professional development
- set targets for personal growth
- negotiate new philosophical understandings about teaching, through the vehicle of a renewed language arts curriculum, informed by provincial documents regarding professional development

The site of research was a classroom designated as a collaboration room. True to the tenet of “form follows function”, the space was designed to encourage dialogue, collaboration, and to display the products of group meaning-making. Circular tables were placed in the centre of the room, and refreshments were provided. Walls were covered in coloured paper and coordinating borders, and six bulletin boards were labelled with the headings of six English Language Arts (hereafter referred to as “ELA”) strands: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing. Fresh colours, inspirational quotations, floral arrangements, and print materials from publishers made the environment fresh and pleasant. Parker Palmer (1998) identifies six paradoxical tensions that can be built into pedagogical design. The research room, and the interactions within it were designed to accommodate the “paradoxical tensions” of which Palmer writes.

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and “charged”.
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honor the “little” stories of the students and the “big” stories of the disciplines and tradition.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

(Palmer, 1998, p. 74)

BOUNDED AND OPEN SPACE

The room's physical layout made clear the expectation to interact and collaborate around the renewed English Language Arts Curriculum. Bulletin board headings focussed discussion. Current and recommended print and non-print resources were displayed throughout the room. Leading questions and research questions from meeting agendas positioned the dialogue in each session. Informative charts from Saskatchewan Learning about renewed curriculum were posted throughout the room, reminding teachers of good practice, guiding principles, and the structure of curriculum documents. Teacher-participants brought their curriculum guides and introductory handouts for reference. Simultaneously, openness existed in changeable physical arrangements, and in the plan to post evolving ideas, pertinent information, and student work samples on readied bulletin boards. Charts were generated by participants throughout the year-long research experience, and products of group synthesis became part of the room display as "thought shots" in the evolving research site. A "question wall" was designated where participants could post queries (anonymously, if desired) relating to their curriculum inquiry. Teachers were expressly given the latitude to divert discussion from suggested itineraries when issues arose that were deemed pertinent to individuals and groups.

HOSPITABLE AND "CHARGED" SPACE

Refreshments, colourful displays, circular tables, and teacher ideas/charts welcomed participants. Posting teacher-participant comments and ideas affirmed these contributors. Teachers were welcomed upon arrival. The tone of the room was informal, but focussed. The physical environment was charged in its clear ELA direction, but also by numerous quotations posted around the room about research initiatives — the nature of investigation, and the importance of taking risks. The room communicated an expectation for good things to happen, and inspired thinking about ELA and how people learn. Teacher interaction contained positive energy and an expectation for good things to happen.

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP VOICE

Teacher participants were provided with personal journal notebooks to use as they wished. Individuals posted ideas on bulletin boards. Small groups provided intimate social spaces in which more reticent participants could enter conversations and be heard. Collaborative methods, including "think/pair/share" enabled the voices of individuals to merge with others, and then become woven into group dialogue. The "group voice" emerged as collaborative groups synthesized ideas and created charts that were displayed as part of the research site. As time went on, there was benefit to participants in other grade groupings from reading/viewing other groups' ideas prominently posted in the room. Individual contributions and student work samples were meshed to form group "thought shots", posted to inform and inspire other grade groups. The research site therefore became a depository of many voices and representations of thought around English Language Arts curriculum issues and processes of professional development.

“LITTLE STORIES” AND “BIG STORIES” MERGE

A year-long research design enabled participants to build meanings over time. Meanings built and shaped over time essentially contained narrative structures. It is fitting, therefore, that many kinds of stories undergirded and informed the active processes of teacher participants. “Little stories” were present in student work samples, teacher anecdotes about incidents in the classroom, and the exchange of personal information, as teachers shared their lives and experiential knowledge with other teachers. The broad range of conversation revealed many perspectives, beliefs, experiences, and understandings. The “Big Stories” of language forms and functions, subject disciplines, and research were ever-present in curricular documents, charts, time-honored literature resources, and in the accumulated knowledge of experienced teachers. Of particular interest in this study was the power of teacher “craft knowledge”, including evolutionary information about philosophy and pedagogy around ELA, curricular content and structure, instructional strategies, and resources and knowledge synthesized from other professional development opportunities.

SUPPORTING SOLITUDE AND SURROUNDING IT WITH THE RESOURCES OF COMMUNITY

While talk was encouraged, elicited, and supported, there were opportunities throughout the research cycle for teachers to spend time in reflection – writing, viewing the room, reviewing resources, etc. Teachers involved in the research project shared that classroom teaching is often a very solitary activity in that teachers typically “close their door and do their thing”; therefore, the research framework designed to elicit talk around English Language Arts instruction, became a welcome forum, encouraging teachers to participate in conversations around their professional practice.

Teachers continued to teach independently throughout this study, but through the collaborative sessions, solitary thoughts were shared (teachers took conscious and deliberate risks in making personal meanings public), and these ideas were received by peers, informed by resources, and meshed with the broad and extensive components in the ELA curriculum. The resources of this K-5 learning community, teachers found, were students, other teachers, shared craft knowledge, and current resources including internet sites. While resources of community are information sources, of greatest importance to teachers were collegial, emotional supports. Teachers were acknowledged, affirmed, encouraged, inspired, supported, challenged, and celebrated within bonds of friendship, trust, and acceptance.

A SPACE OF SILENCE AND SPEECH

An important component of the research process was reflection, i.e., personal query and questioning beyond the domain of public scrutiny. Silence does not mean an absence of thought, belief, or commitment. Places of silence were preserved because the complexity of teaching demands inner negotiation space, and time in which to think. In groups, participants posed, and reflected upon questions. Participants posed vital personal questions that led to action plans, experimentation in classrooms, and transformation of thinking and classroom practice. On the other hand, the decision to speak — to risk making meanings public — was central to the process, since public utterances inspired the

space of silence and reflection for individuals and ensured the issues at the centre of conversation were genuine, authentic and relevant. As participants conversed, shared meanings evolved and grew. The nature of talk evolved from “safe” statements to sharing problems and hard-to-resolve issues, and then to sharing partial solutions and negotiating meanings in paradoxical spaces.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A DESIGNATED RESEARCH ROOM

I have something I want to share with you ... And, I know that the metaphor will not agree with you, but I was reading an article that mentioned a “war room”. The more I think about it, it seems that the components that supported thinking in this strategy room could be reshaped to serve our purposes in our learning community research! (Trudy Capes, administrator and researcher, personal communication)

As the “war room” was described, any notions of conquest or defence were clearly irrelevant to the positive potential of designing a space where teacher-professionals could purposefully and thoughtfully build confidence and competence in ELA instruction. Over time, the room became a place of focus, a signifier of the importance of the issue at hand, and a location where resources were accessible to support thinking and practice. Beyond a conscientious site design acknowledging that human beings react physically and emotionally to their physical environments, designating one specific site for professional development around language arts was a clear message to teacher participants that they were professionals who deserved a learning space. The importance of designating a classroom for the purpose of this research project cannot be understated. **Teachers appreciated and respected this space and understood that amidst all the public spaces they shared in their schools, the research room was designed to facilitate meaningful professional learning.** Many teachers came to use the room after school, or stayed after their group meetings to review resources, reflect upon their practice, or plan units and lessons. With the curriculum guides and recommended teaching materials present in the room, and products of group collaboration posted on the walls, the space displayed and inspired negotiations of meanings, and effective classroom practice.

Not only research participants made use of the room. Other schools, not involved in this research project but implementing the renewed ELA curriculum, asked to use the room for meetings, planning, and review of curriculum resources; however, they left the room as they found it so as not to affect the research site. Those who accessed the space remarked on the wealth of insight and inspiration within the room, and several comments were made about the content and nature of thought shaped by teachers, posted on the bulletin boards.

ACTION RESEARCH; FACILITATOR ROLES

There is a trust in grade alike staff working in an informal setting that is loosely structured as they accomplish what they need to do in order to work effectively with their class. (Teacher Participant)

ABOUT ACTION RESEARCH

The methods employed in this study constitute action research in that the engagements were ongoing and cyclical in nature, and the ultimate destination was open-ended. The flexible and responsive nature of the group sessions was developed very much in a “form follows function” structure, with a perspective explained by Sergiovanni (1996):

Adopting a constructivist perspective inverts this form-function equation. Instead of beginning with a form of schooling, and trying then to fit what we are trying to do into the categories provided, we begin with what we know about teaching and learning, and what we want to accomplish for children and parents. With these as the framework, we then design outward, seeking to create forms of organizational structure, curriculum, and teaching and learning that fit the functions... at the root is the simple idea that children and adults construct their own understandings of the world in which they live. To constructivists, the metaphor “learning community” provides a conceptual frame for this design work...Constructivists’ principles point to how adults learn. And for this reason they are helpful in sorting out issues of collegiality, action research and teacher development as well as issues of teaching and learning for children. (pp. 38, 39)

The research design was clearly set in and through the language arts curriculum and feedback structures offered. The sessions themselves were concerned with making sense of information, processes, and classroom results. As information was shared, action plans were generated by individual teachers and grade-alike teacher groups, and feedback was collected. Through group interaction, teachers analyzed plans, structures, processes and results, and formulated plans that included plans for their classrooms, and plans for their own professional development. Through the cyclical research project there was an emphasis on authenticity and dialogue, an emphasis on reflecting upon classroom practice and re-shaping instructional directions, a movement towards less imposed structure (facilitators background to a supportive role), an emphasis upon invitational structures, and an emphasis upon relationship-building and fostering collaborative culture.

The perspectives in this research are varied, revealing subjective and shifting meanings from the individual participants, records of evolving group thought (charts), and anecdotal records provided by researchers. In this research project, diversity of perspectives is acknowledged to more accurately convey the complex nature of meaning-making.

FACILITATOR ROLES

Maslow’s influential hierarchy of motivation suggests that, as people satisfy lower-level needs for food and physical safety, they move to higher-level needs for self-esteem and self-actualization. Human resource theorists such as Argyris and McGregor note that traditional managers often treat employees like children,

satisfying only their lower-level needs. Such techniques as participative management can satisfy higher-level needs and tap higher levels of employee motivation and capacity. (Bolman, Lee G. & Deal, Terrence E., in Jossey-Bass, 2000, p.69)

Leadership creates the conditions for individual and organizational development to merge. (Fullan, 2001, p. 132)

As researchers with different professional positions (Trudy Capes as principal and researcher, and Deborah Mann as teacher and researcher), separate perspectives informed this research design. Active research roles were different and broadly shaped to develop contexts and optimize experiences for participants. Research roles were conceived in general terms of direction and efficacy, but remained flexible to access rich data and the authentic perspectives of teachers.

It became clear through the year-long research process that we, as research colleagues, were learning greatly from each other — that our personal and professional development journeys were as informed by our different perspectives as by our shared experiences. The nature of the principal-teacher relationship expanded as our focus remained on the task of maximizing the professional development experience for teachers. We learned to take a fluid stance with each other, suspending judgement to take a broader view of the motives and perspectives of each other, and to allow each other opportunities to lead and follow. This in no way extinguished our understanding of the innate “power” differences in our job-assignments and day-to-day responsibilities; rather, it built a greater appreciation and respect for each other and the challenges we faced throughout the research process as partners and stake-holders, as researchers and educators. (Deborah Mann and Trudy Capes, Shared Reflection)

While it was an explicit goal of this research for teachers to “own” the experience, this did not mean a lack of organizational structure, for:

Freedom does not mean the absence of structure — letting employees go off and do whatever they want — but rather a clear structure that enables people to work within established boundaries in creative and autonomous ways. (Kanter in DuFour and Eaker, 1998, p. 154)

Several leadership styles emerged in the research model, including authoritative, affiliative, democratic, and coaching styles (Goleman in Fullan, 2001, p. 35). These proved to be most effective in supporting change in complex and demanding circumstances. Researcher roles fluidly accessed aspects of different leadership styles, remaining responsive to the evolving needs of research participants and the pulse of demands in the school year.

TRUDY CAPES: RESEARCH POSITION AS ADMINISTRATOR- RESEARCHER, CONVENOR, AND CONTEXT-DESIGNER

As a school principal, issues of leadership are endemic to my involvement in any initiative. Although leadership is not the only factor in determining how the features of a learning community emerge, it is clear that principals continue to be in the best position to guide members in the evolution of a learning community. Sergiovanni (1996) writes:

Principals need to be learning leaders. Learning communities need a leadership that enhances meaning and that helps people solve the problems schools face. For a group to begin to understand its sense of group, someone must articulate what the experience has been and what it means. Such articulations are a crucial component of what we call leadership and can be understood as an act of culture creation if the process imparts meaning to an important shared emotional experience. (p. 107)

A learning community approach to education for students and teachers helps to eliminate redundancy and complacency in the teaching profession, as everyone involved ends up benefiting from exposure to the vision and styles of others. Louis and Kruse (1995) mention the need to base professional community upon “an intellectual and practical grasp of the knowledge base and skills underlying the field” (p. 38). Knowledge, current research, and expertise shared among teacher colleagues (including actual classroom practice), informs the construction of new knowledge throughout an entire school. Louis and Kruse (1995) state that specifically in a school characterized as a community, three key features operate. The features are:

A common set of activities that provide many occasions for face-to-face interaction, with the potential for the development of common understandings and value, plus expectations for acceptable behaviour to evolve... specific organizational structures to promote this, such as time and expectations that people will gather and talk, and small, stable networks of teachers, etc...and, a core of shared values of about how students should behave, and the shared aims to maintain and promote the community. Central to a school community is an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students, and administrators. (p. 160)

As an administrator I have often wondered how to format a practical and simple structure within the traditional framework of contemporary schools. How is it possible to engage teachers in meaningful, ongoing professional dialogue regarding current curriculum and recommended practice? I sought a structure that would support teachers to discuss important issues in their hectic days and forge a common vision of informed practice that exudes caring, trust, and interdependent contributions to student learning.

With these understandings clearly in mind, my role became that of the pragmatic planner — shaping a research model and seeking to bring it to fruition — protocols, meeting dates and budgets, and dealing with any and all issues to create the conditions that would allow positive relationships and authentic dialogue to flourish. The cyclical process in this research design meant that group norms and cultural processes developed at the same time that knowledge-sharing and curriculum inquiry continued. To encourage teacher ownership, sessions were more structured at the beginning of the research process and became more teacher-directed over time. The itineraries deliberately included issues of concern to particular grade group and were of a guiding, flexible nature. (See Appendix A.)

As an educator, I have deliberately and actively pursued opportunities to offer leadership supporting meaningful conversations about learning and teaching to colleagues in their workplace, thus extending a learning community environment to students. One such opportunity was the invitation as an administrator to become a teacher leader with Deborah Mann in the Elementary English Language Arts Curriculum Renewal initiative. A few months into this series of

workshops, I noticed an advertisement calling for research applications for a Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation research grant. Deborah and I, who attended the Saskatchewan Learning workshops around the English Language Arts Renewal together, saw an inquiry process around renewed curriculum as an opportunity to bring to reality the idea of grade alike K-5 teachers engaged in meaningful dialogue about their teaching practice. What followed was a series of idea sharing and meetings with the following colleagues in four neighbouring schools. As an administrator and context-setting capacity, it was necessary to meet with:

- Teaching colleagues in our school in informal meetings, to assess initial reactions
- Principals in four schools (located in close proximity with similar student bodies), to inquire regarding interest, cost and support in sharing such a research project
- Co-researcher meetings, to build a shared vision and draft the proposal
- Principals in participating schools, to examine the draft proposal
- Principals and staffs in four schools, to formalize individual staff interest and commit to voluntary involvement
- School staffs, to get input for the research
- Superintendents, to provide understanding of inquiry processes that four schools were hoping to explore

With proposal approval, I discovered that my co-project leader and I needed to continue to meet formally and informally to:

- Discuss a format for the project introduction date, as we had to change this date from May to September
- Design “loose” agendas
- Develop a research room, which was not part of the original plan
- Debrief after rotational meetings and sharing of ideas to be cognizant of teacher comments, charts, and indicators informing ways we could facilitate the research experience for our colleague.
- Meet with the McDowell Foundation representatives to become informed about research ethics, limitations, pitfalls, and timelines.

In addition to meetings about the actual research process itself, there were ongoing contacts and meetings with consultants and publishers as the research room and resources took on a supportive position. Interim meetings with principals in participating schools were necessary to gain insights as to how the process was working for their teacher participants. Meetings with central office staff were necessary to organize research grant funds and the distributions of funds to release teachers for rotational meetings.

DEBORAH MANN: RESEARCH POSITION AS TEACHER-RESEARCHER, PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER, AND WRITER

As a classroom teacher with an interest in curriculum inquiry, I was situated to experience the same research cycles as other study participants, but as a qualitative researcher, I took on another role as participant-observer. Glesne (1999) writes that the role of participant-observer “ranges across a continuum from mostly observation to mostly participation. It can be the sole means of data collection or one of several” (p. 44). I had a unique opportunity to take “an

insider's view" as the research cycles evolved, and to move flexibly between roles when necessary. I was not able to be present for all grade-group meetings, but I participated and observed in a number of grade-group interactions. Due to the large number of participants in this research project, my interaction in the process was insignificant to the overall scheme, and I was careful to take a more marginal, observational role when meaningful conversations were underway. In addition to direct observation and conversations with participants, data was collected from all grade-groups through analysis of charts produced by grade-groups, feedback on questionnaire forms, and written responses to questions and information. In addition, participants brought student work samples and talked about how the work products evolved, and they reviewed photocopied pages from the *Classroom Curriculum Connections* (Saskatchewan Education, 2001) handbook highlighting it and writing comments and notes in the margins. (See Appendix B.)

• **Introducing the Curriculum Structures**

Originally, my role as a participant-researcher was to be part of my grade-group throughout the year-long research cycle: supporting teachers, facilitating dialogue, and chronicling the meaning-making journey of my specific grade-group (through observation and anecdotal notes). However, my position changed in the course of the research due to unforeseen circumstances related to preparing teachers for the research experience.

When planning the initial session, my research colleague and I considered it important to offer all participants a thorough curriculum overview by an external party. The structure of the curriculum document, its content, the connections between components, and the philosophical underpinnings, as an informational session would offer teachers "common ground" for discussion and an opportunity to read and think about the curriculum document prior to the first grade-group meetings. Unfortunately, an external party was not available to present an overview of the curriculum, so I offered to present, having been a member of our school system's English Language Arts renewal team. I did so knowing that this choice had the potential to adjust my role within the research process. Taking an authoritative role (Goleman in Fullan, 2001, p. 35), I presented an "overview" of the renewed curriculum documents to all teachers in the study. Due to time constraints, the presentation was in lecture format, with hands-on opportunities for participants to identify and mark sections of the document, and opportunities for some participants to share current resources.

• **Initial Participation in a Grade-Group as a Researcher**

The physical setting and process agendas provided in this research were designed to encourage discussion and relationships central to learning community culture. A classroom teacher who was, at the time, teaching a grades one and two combined classroom, I welcomed the opportunity to be part of a collaborative process specific to my grade assignment, experience, and interests. Since the number of participants in the first grades two and three session was large, participants were sub-divided into grade-alike discussion clusters. An itinerary was developed to allow for affiliation, stimulate discussion, and cluster ideas in chart form (a "plus, minus, interesting things" brainstorming session).

Several times during the initial discussion, participants asked me about "right" and "wrong" ways to do things, and I realized that I was perceived as an

authority figure and/or “someone with the answers” — a perception most likely due to the curriculum overview session I provided for participants. While I realized that at the early stages of developing collaborative processes, “magic bullet” solutions and “quick answers” to questions may quell anxiety, they do not move participants to engage in deep dialogue leading to authentic, transformational thought. The questions revealed a desire for participants to meet perceived (not actual) performance standards, rather than to engage with others in active processes to jointly and creatively construct meanings. So, while I answered questions, I elicited the opinions of participants, and I encouraged participants to post pertinent questions on the question wall. It was necessary to foster ties of acceptance and affiliation, yet to actively deconstruct any notion that I was an “expert” if teachers were to come to trust in the power of group process and engage in building meanings that would be pertinent and useful in specific classrooms. I sought to become “one voice among many others”. Glesne (1999) writes:

Learning to be an effective participant observer takes some doing. Begin by asking what there is about your identity or persona... that might affect your access and data collection. Are there ways in which you can monitor yourself to gain more information. Second, before entering a setting as a participant observer, investigate the scene or use collaborators to discover normal attire and acceptable behaviours... be on the lookout for ways to adjust or accommodate yourself so that you “fit in” in a manner instrumental to gathering data... be aware of the different groups in the setting and carefully consider whether or not to become aligned with any one group. (p. 65)

The realization that I had been ascribed power by my peers led to a discussion with Trudy Capes, my research colleague. The decision was made that I would remain a marginal participant, but I needed to position myself strategically in such a way as to be most effective in gathering rich and meaningful data. I needed to focus on observation, listen for genuine and authentic questions, and chronicle aspects of the cyclical process of inquiry. Although I was familiar to participants, and I could participate in group activities, I made sure my presence was incidental to group processes, and I was often “judiciously silent” (Glesne, 1999, p. 66), so that my voice did not supercede or divert the dialogue from teachers’ legitimate and authentic concerns.

I was affirmed as I read:

Leaders in a culture of change realize that accessing tacit knowledge is crucial and that such access cannot be mandated. Effective leaders understand the value and role of knowledge creation, they make it a priority and set about establishing and reinforcing habits of knowledge exchange among organizational members. To do this they must create many mechanisms for people to engage in this new behaviour and to learn to value it. Control freaks need not apply. People need elbow room to uncover and sort out best ideas. Leaders must learn to trust the processes they set up, looking for promising patterns and looking to continually refine and identify procedures for maximizing valuable sharing. (Fullan, 2001, p. 87)

My role in shaping the action research cycles was that of a thoughtful co-planner and context-setter. The most meaningful interactive role was that of supporting and responding to participants. My role as data-gatherer positioned me along a shifting continuum between participant and observer, and the role of writer presented the daunting task of representing the meanings of participants as

accurately as possible. As Palmer (1998) writes, “The community of truth, far from being linear and static and hierarchical, is circular, interactive, and dynamic” (p. 103). Palmer also suggests learning in community as “a course in a way more engaging than engorging, countering my tendency to inundate [teachers] with data, and allowing them instead to encounter the subject, each other, and themselves” (p. 133).

• **Later Sessions: Moving In and Through Various Grade-Groups as a Marginal Participant and Observer**

In subsequent sessions I became an observer, and a participant with others in private conversations or marginally in grade-group discussions. My role became affiliative (creating harmony and emotional bonds) and democratic (inviting and forging consensus through participation – “what do you think?”). My contributions became no more or less important than those of others as I participated in grade-group discussions, took notes, observed, and collaborated.

A late-year grade one session was meaningful to me, as I observed, recorded ideas, and summarized main points.

Participants eagerly shared teacher-made classroom aids, ideas for activities, and delved into deeper issues including philosophies around classroom practice. The discussion included laughter, congratulations, affirmations, and openness as particular teachers shared very sensitive issues including social vulnerability, accountability to students and parents, and revealing self-perceptions. A quiet delight was clear, as teachers expressed their joy in teaching children to read — that socially and academically, “no other year in a child’s life is as transforming as the first grade”. Teachers had deeply invested themselves in their professional conversation, and the direction and power of their revelations superseded anything I could have offered or posited. The meanings were owned by each group member, but shaped a palpable unity – “the group”. (Deborah Mann, observational notes)

The sense of wholeness pervading the grade one teachers’ discussion revealed the power of educators sharing authenticity around their practice. As the teachers grappled with the issues of teaching language arts, sharing their knowledge, and implementing a curriculum, another deeper and more essential change occurred. The teachers in this group jointly built a sense of vision and mission, and it resonated like a cadence, joining them meaningfully and genuinely to each other, affirming them as informed and inquiring professionals.

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS AND PROCESSES

In the course of this research, several adjudicating “on-lookers” questioned the value of repeatedly clustering teachers in groups “just to talk”. Clearly, what is not understood is the vital role dialogue plays in shaping ideology, building awareness of specific content, and shaping learning to be context-embedded. Gerard and Teurfs in Gozdz (1995) write:

We are seeing that [dialogue] can serve as a bridge or how-to for community building and organizational transformation. Dialogue can help organizations create climates that lead to greater collaboration, fluidity, and sustainability. Its practice can provide the environment and skills necessary for creating a cultural shift toward high levels of trust and open communications, heightened morale, and alignment and commitment to shared goals. (p. 144)

Dialogue is a process framework through which a multitude of pragmatic goals may be achieved. However, beyond specific content, language reveals belief systems and various underlying assumptions and leads to reflection and inquiry. To listen beyond mere facts or content requires one to suspend judgement, understand perspectives and foundational understandings, and develop critical thinking skills. These thinking skills remain embedded in relationship and provide an access point from which to build shared vision and mission. Shared language is a powerful dialogic matrix — a vehicle that sustains change efforts and reshapes school culture.

The notion of situated knowledge or situated cognition focussed attention upon knowledge creation and use, setting the direction of this research study. In the past, models of professional development assumed that exposure to and thought about new ideas, i.e., the transfer of knowledge, was adequate to lead to implementation and change. The more recent epistemology of situated cognition suggests that perception and activity precede conceptualization, and all such mental activity is referenced to particular learning circumstances and contexts. Situated cognition, as an epistemology, informed this study because the cultural superstructure around teacher understanding became a priority in research design. Attention was paid to developing supports and allowing participants to build authentic relationships, patterns of information exchange, and creation of shared meanings, while using real classroom contexts as references to the inquiry experience and the learning outcomes.

Methodology: The Methods and Activities Used in Gathering and Analyzing Data

The research format evolved as follows: after the initial meeting with K-5 teacher-participants and their school administrators during school opening, a series of rotational meeting dates was set where teachers met for afternoons in grade-alike groups to dialogue about their actualization of the renewed ELA curriculum. Half-day meetings were held over designated weeks six times in the calendar year. Including the introductory overview session, teacher participants had a total of seven opportunities to meet throughout the school year. The initial grade-group agendas guided teachers to establish learning community norms for their particular group. The following agendas were shaped around a format that built in time for individual reflection and writing, resource sharing, new learning, dialogue pertaining to teaching practice, and establishing the agenda for the next meeting. Chairpersons for afternoon sessions rotated through the four participating schools.

Itineraries provided structure and suggested areas for discussion, but teachers could divert from the agenda if they wished. Each session presented teacher participants with one structured activity that provided some form of feedback for the final research report. Data-gathering drew from a broad pool of sources, including:

- anecdotal records from researchers as observers
- teacher-generated charts
- feedback/interest/needs sheets from participants
- teacher reflection, talk, and critique around student work samples
- teacher-generated models of their thinking, including anecdotes, doodles, jot notes, concept maps, webs, and visual models of individual and group thinking
- questions posed by research participants
- teacher talk around unit and lesson plans, instructional strategies and language arts strands, and teacher-constructed learning aids and activities
- teacher responses to questions about the research experience itself
- teacher feedback and remarks about professional learning documents

Analysis was ongoing. Because this action research project was broad in scope and close to fifty teachers were involved, this document focuses on major patterns and meanings, addressing key objectives outlined in the research proposal. Patterns, anomalies, serendipity, and action plans for professional development are included in analysis. Whenever possible, the words and meanings of participants are included in conjunction with analysis. A decision was made to include teachers' verbatim responses in italicized type, but to keep the teachers' identities anonymous. Where the grade assignment assigned to a teacher statement provided contextual meaning to the message, teachers' grade assignments were noted. While many teachers eagerly signed response sheets, others returned feedback sheets anonymously, preferring to remain "one voice among others".

Analysis/Emerging Patterns

A LEARNING COMMUNITY FOSTERS A COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT INVOLVES SHARING AND CELEBRATING STRENGTHS, REFLECTION, AND EXPERIMENTATION.

A CONSTRUCTIVIST RESEARCH DESIGN

This research design allowed for strategic, task-oriented collaboration, but also fostered an overarching stance of inquiry, reflection and experimentation. This adaptable framework allowed for pragmatic, task-oriented, “top-down” and objective-driven learning episodes, while the inquiry cycle accommodated, drew from, revealed and challenged diverse knowledge funds, experiences, beliefs, and perspectives through the process, and allowed for divergent thinking.

INVITATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR A NEW CENTURY

DuFour and Eaker (1998) write: “Unfortunately, the tradition of teacher isolation is still so entrenched in schools that fostering meaningful collaboration is a significant challenge” (p. 118). Clearly, to face the daunting task of implementing a set of cultural norms so antithetical to patterns of isolation took careful thought and planning. Invitational components were woven into the fabric of the research experience, but not pseudo-invitation, such as gratuitous verbal postures or wishful sentiment. Authentic invitation was intentionally situated in organizational structures that supported, sustained and enhanced participation and engagement over an extended time period. In other words, “invitation” meant not just asking for involvement, but making the benefits clear to participants and offering them many ways to enter into and sustain the process. Affirmation, acknowledgement, and celebration of participants’ contributions and their orientation towards excellence, as well as ongoing responsiveness to participants over time, led to sustained, authentic involvement throughout the year-long process. Essential to the structure were issues of relationship, such as building and maintaining trust, developing a comfort zone, orienting participants to inquiry and multi-situated questions, encouraging innovation and classroom experimentation, and fostering individual growth while accessing and applying personal knowledge to build group-thought and products of group-thought. Since this research design evolved over the course of a year, participants were situated to develop long-term thinking, relationships, and interests. Ongoing processes of collaboration shaped the research as a shared meaning-making journey. While targeted to the specific purpose of professional development around language arts, what also occurred was broad and deep dialogue leading to conceptual development, exploration of related ideas, and transformational change.

Participants wrote:

Professional development is not just presentations and attending workshops. We all have a wealth of knowledge and can provide professional development for each other. (Teacher Participant)

Professional development can occur in a small, intimate group where leadership and expertise is shared among members. (Teacher Participant)

Vision and excitement comes from each other's tried and true lessons. (Teacher Participant)

OPTIMAL GROUP SIZE

Because group discussion centred around grade-groups, participants from each of the participating schools expected at least four participants in each group, but some groups had many more participants due to the need to cluster grades two and three, and grades four and five on common afternoons. This meant that the combined grade-groupings (grades two-three, and four-five) were less intimate and initially more intimidating than the smaller grade clusters (kindergarten and grade one, which each had five or six group members). Combined grade-groups sub-divided for grade-specific discussions, but it took longer for these groups to enter into deeper levels of dialogue, and information exchange was most frequently the first kind of conversation offered. However, over time, as teachers within larger clusters (ten to twelve members) began to reveal their philosophical positions and decision-making processes, the nature of information exchange became more in-depth, selective, and interactive.

Close attention to group size and the impact of group size upon dynamics was an important consideration in planning the working context. Within smaller groups, all voices are heard, acknowledged, and responded to more quickly, and within the experience of this study, smaller groups moved through the implementation process suggested in *Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth*, (Saskatchewan Education, 2001, pp. 80-81) with greater ease in less time. While an active stance was maintained (actively listening and thinking), there were expectations to contribute when it was timely and appropriate to do so, and structures encouraged sharing and questioning. Larger groups moved through the implementation process, too, but the building of relationships and trust took longer in the larger group context. Designing this research project over a year-long time period became critical when seeking "deep dialogue" language interaction within larger groups. One grade five teacher wrote:

I've learned that we can learn from each other regardless of grade disparity. I was able to use a grade four item/concept in my class that worked wonderfully. It was also interesting to hear what other teachers are doing in their classes at the same grade level.

The structure of the study remained sensitive/responsive to the dynamics and developmental needs of particular grade-groups. Participants acknowledged that classroom contexts are as different as teachers, and a variety of strategies, knowledge, and resources are needed to meet needs in complex learning environments. Improved student learning impelled the study forward as a

moral directive, as teachers articulated their authentic needs to each other, making teacher-learning immediately relevant and valuable.

SHARING STRENGTHS, REFLECTING, AND EXPERIMENTING

What I do can inspire new ideas when I share it with others. (Teacher Participant)

Collaboration built upon trusting relationships, in a welcoming setting, with non-competitive agendas (sharing, not a “brag-in”, no grandstanding); non-threatening methods (everyone welcome, and everyone heard); and a non-evaluative environment (“I am a valued professional, here to learn — nobody is getting graded..”) led to a qualitatively different kind of dialogue. Participants shared:

We experienced sharing, support, and a non-competitive exchange of professional information. (Teacher Participant)

How different, though the same curriculum... It is good to hear diversity. (Teacher Participant)

The research process allowed participants to articulate present assumptions, knowledge, and perspectives, providing **time** and **the classroom** as matrices in/through which to explore possibilities. The extended time period for this professional development model allowed teachers to reflect more deeply upon their practice, while experimenting in their classrooms. Teachers wrote:

I was more likely to try new things and take new risks because we had shared our “tried” ideas in the group. (Teacher Participant)

I've gained the confidence in my teaching and the courage to try new things. (Teacher Participant)

I reflected – I'm more willing to take risks — time for reflection. (Teacher Participant)

TOWARDS “INCLUSIVE INQUIRY”

Key to community in both classrooms and schools is a commitment to inquiry, and a commitment to learning as the basis for decisions about structure, organization, sources of authority, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, and other school issues. (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 147)

Inquiry methods have been used and applied to meet a broad range of objectives in many areas of society. Inquiry methods have been employed by military strategists and quality production specialists to shape efficient “means to ends” strategies. While inquiry methods can be successfully aligned to specific “results oriented” agendas, and current demands for public accountability in the form of standardized test scores make a case for school divisions to align with these types of agenda, this application of inquiry methods takes a partial and selective view of the power and potentials of inquiry. Test scores select certain kinds of knowledge and ignore other types of understandings less amenable to testing devices. Applied as ongoing learning processes — as an epistemological orientation — inquiry methods powerfully sustain and guide long-term thinking processes, support divergent and inductive thought, and shape lifelong learning.

The type of inquiry enacted in this study accommodated critical and creative thinking, synectic thought, and the re-framing of knowledge and concepts, while fulfilling the explicit directive to implement a thorough, objective-driven curriculum. We propose the term “Inclusive Inquiry” to capture the model we adopted, for our inquiry included diverse emerging questions from everyone about all facets of the task, including:

- questions about the entire curriculum document content and structure, in particular, the new curricular strands of “Viewing” and “Representing”
- questions about teaching strategies and processes leading to metacognition — “thinking about thinking”
- questions about core curriculum components such as gender equity, multicultural education, special education, aboriginal content and perspectives, and the adaptive dimension (culturally embedded concerns, their power, importance and impact on delivery systems in classrooms)
- questions about assessment and evaluation, and bridging issues of authentic assessment to align with local report card indicators
- questions about communicating methodology, content, and processes to parents, and how to include parents and community in supporting language arts engagements
- questions about sustaining high-energy instruction and individual programming in classrooms with diverse student needs

Further, “layers” of questions were posed from various positions within the research experience. These layers, which occurred simultaneously throughout the research, were interlinked:

- questions posed by researchers (the what, where, why, when, and how; requests for feedback, requests for different kinds of feedback — visual arrays, discussion, journal entries, think/pair/share, making charts, etc....)
- questions posed by colleagues in grade-groups (“the we” — shaping the grade-group norms of learning communities and the process and content of each meeting)
- questions posed privately by individual teacher participants (reflection on the “I” and informed choices in a workspace, and questions about each teacher’s position in the research experience)

The research sessions became an afternoon of respite, valuing teacher thinking, and “throwing open the doors”. Teachers identified issues that resonated with each other and enjoyed the opportunity to speak candidly with other professionals. Teachers wrote:

Teachers really do think alike — the same ongoing questions, and problems to solve... (Teacher Participant)

I have made some friends and ... I am not afraid to ask questions. I do not have to have all the answers. Just BRING THE QUESTIONS! (Teacher Participant)

Situating the research process over an extended time period made it clear that there was a “timeliness” to questions. As the research structure was ongoing and collaborative, the questions posed were immediately relevant in the real-life teaching situation and sensitive to the changing concerns within the teaching year. In this situation, cycles of inquiry could be linked to practice — plan, test,

reflect, share, adjust, plan. This long-term process aligns with perspectives of DuFour and Eaker (1998), who write that the strongest form of professional development is “situated knowledge in real-life context” and, most effectively, the “context of staff development is job-embedded” (p. 272).

In “Inclusive Inquiry” there are no “wrong” questions; rather, it is clear that learners do not engage deeply unless their legitimate “self-in-context” questions are made public, acknowledged, and understood. In fact, the only “wrong questions” are the ones not asked. Tight time frames and highly positioning, strategic agendas that expect immediate specific performance outcomes have the potential to silence and ignore context-embedded, authentic and legitimate personal questions. With curriculum objectives clear, and group process issues established, “Inclusive Inquiry” opened the doors to an array of questions and performance indicators as multi-faceted and diverse as the participants themselves. Interaction was not restricted to means-ends discussions — a matter of “A” or “B”; rather, teachers discussed “A” **and** “B” *and perhaps* “X”.

One Teacher Participant wrote:

The idea to sift through and share ideas on a new/revised curriculum was a novelty — much appreciated! With a “loose” structure, we could use valuable time to gain so many more ideas from the knowledge of others. Our group has a wealth of experience to draw from and we were allowed to do so.

Appreciating the interactive format, another Teacher Participant wrote:

We are not good passive learners.

Inclusive Inquiry honours teachers in their professional development, because even when legitimate questions lead to divergent thinking, or do not have verifiable answers, raising the question within a group inspires new ideas, and query around the question. With an inquiry orientation, teachers realized that with no one method or strategy successful for all students or teachers, it was important to be open to myriad possibilities. One Teacher Participant writes,

I have allowed myself to question and be open-minded to others’ ideas.

This statement represents a qualitative shift in perspective. This participant made a conscious decision to let go of self-imposed boundaries, to **allow** him/herself the liberty of critical thought and openness to others. The response reveals an ideological shift from autonomy towards collegiality to inform thinking and classroom practice. Roland Barth (2001) discusses this issue as he writes, “A belief commonly held by many who work in schools is that one’s knowledge, skills, and successes are a private matter, best kept behind a closed door” (p. 58). Barth posits, “I wonder how many *children’s* lives might be saved if we educators disclose what we know to others” (p. 60, italics in original). The benefits of participating in a learning community include offering support, freedom and choice to teachers who have previously struggled under the yoke of “going it alone”. To question and to consider others’ ideas means surrendering to possibility. Opening is an act of hope.

The following poem by Robert Frost seems to capture the essence of “mediating curriculum” for students. Perhaps the appropriate metaphor is less of a “currenre” or “race”, and perhaps the more accurate interpretation of the Greek “currenre” is the form that means “to flow”. More akin to a joyful, mystical, flowing movement, learning in community becomes a dance of improvisation, of innovation, of many joyful rhythms.

The Secret

We dance around in a ring and suppose
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.
(Robert Frost in Palmer, 1998, pp. 105 ff.)

A LEARNING COMMUNITY ENCOURAGES TEACHERS TO USE LANGUAGE TO RECONSTRUCT AND RE-ENVISION THE TEACHING TASK, WHILE ACTIVELY IMPLEMENTING RENEWED CURRICULUM

Teachers re-envisioned the task of teaching English Language Arts through the introduction of two new strands in the curriculum: viewing and representing. Participants actively “viewed” and “represented”, then discussed their engagements to develop understandings of these two literacy strands and shape a renewed conceptual model of literacy. This study design employed parallelism, for as teachers used six language arts strands in their collaborative sessions, they prepared to teach students within the same six strands. Parallelism is also embedded in the research process, for as Marilyn Evans in Sergiovanni (1996) writes, “The premise is that if teachers are to build learning communities in their classrooms, they must first experience being part of a learning community” (p. 146).

Language Functions (Halliday) within collaborative groups were varied, and included interactive (social), informative (facts), personal (likes and dislikes, etc.), instrumental (language for action), imaginative (possibilities, brainstorming), and heuristic (problem-solving) language forms. While teacher talk utilized differentiated language functions, what the study revealed was the necessity for heuristic discussion around curriculum implementation. Teachers repeatedly spoke of themselves as unrecognized founts of knowledge, and as the active mediators of curriculum documents — that teachers were themselves the unwritten resource. One teacher wrote:

A collaborative sharing was wonderful instead of just listening to someone present. I become more familiar with Kindergarten teachers and their ideas of curriculum as a resource. It made me think that we should maybe be spending more time with these teachers in our schools.

TEACHERS AS RE-CONSTRUCTORS, ANIMATORS AND MEDIATORS OF CURRICULUM

Teachers wrote of themselves and their teacher-peers as **mediators** and **re-constructors** of curriculum:

The curriculum is user friendly and well written, but it doesn't/can't exude the enthusiasm and support that our group discussions offered. It also doesn't "help" with specifics — unique children and situational challenges — in the way our group discussion did. (Teacher Participant)

The small group allowed for excitement, risk-taking collegiality, as well as the opportunity to learn about the curriculum in view of the challenges of our own specific classrooms and unique students' needs. (Teacher Participant)

Teacher talk over time and through the workday offered support, and I am more likely to try things and take risks. (Teacher Participant)

I have learned the value of professional development through discussion with teachers at the same level and with the same concerns. (Teacher Participant)

I've learned that valuable insights/ideas/information can be gained from fellow colleagues. We all have years of experience which can be very beneficial in learning about curriculum. (Teacher Participant)

We often discussed very practical, logistical concerns. For example, many people found "Writers Workshop" or "Literature Circles" more successful when at least two staff members were team-teaching. (Teacher Participant)

Curriculum documents include explicit objectives, instructional strategies, assessment and evaluation tools, and recommended resource materials. However, teachers identified that what was missing from curriculum documents were "*teacher expertise, the variety of student learning, and the range of teacher diversity*". (Teacher Participant)

The real classroom is not static or dispassionate. Teachers identified that "*teachers bring the curriculum 'alive'*" (Teacher Participant), and "*Curriculum [as a written document] is lacking in the emotion and the range of individual differences in children that we teachers experience*" (Teacher Participant). One Teacher Participant eloquently captured the sentiment of many others as she stated that teacher discussions included "*lots of interpersonal, emotional information*". Goleman (1995) reminds us that emotion plays a major role in focussing attention, shaping, and sustaining quality learning engagements. He elaborates:

...channelling emotions toward a productive end is a master aptitude. Whether it be in controlling impulse and putting off gratification, regulating our moods so they facilitate rather than impede thinking, motivating ourselves to persist and try, try again in the face of setbacks, or finding ways to enter flow and so perform more effectively — all bespeak the power of emotion to guide effective effort. (Goleman, 1995, p. 95)

Undoubtedly, teachers involved in professional conversations harnessed emotion to shape their own meaning-making engagements. Within their classrooms, teachers face the daily prospect of orchestrating ways to engage both intellect and

emotion to maximize learning for their students. Clearly, the personal, informative, and imaginary language functions need to be carefully considered in an inclusive classroom, as much as the more “structuring” language functions, such as instrumental, heuristic, and informational forms.

Viewing actual student work products proved to be a very meaningful exercise. Teachers agreed that “*Curriculum tells you what to do, but you don’t see the end product/examples*”. (Teacher Participant) Effective language arts teachers apply a vigorous teaching-learning cycle, connecting prior learning engagements to subsequent ones through ongoing assessment and feedback. Therefore, sharing and deconstructing student work was vital in identifying the learning objectives and strategies inspiring the activities and work products, determining appropriate evaluation strategies, deciding how work products informed follow-up planning and the teaching-learning cycle, and improved learning outcomes. **Outside a learning community structure, the process of living and working through these critical cycles is left for teachers to negotiate in private.** The research project allowed teacher thinking around student work to be public, shared, and re-conceived.

“What is not included in curriculum documents”, wrote one Teacher Participant, “is mostly the practical aspects of the document. How do you take the ideas presented in the document and put those into day-to-day activities — for example, learning about ‘representing’ as one of the strands? How do you evaluate, and how do you balance all strands in the curriculum?” As the groups implemented curriculum over time, there were growing interests in meshing language strands and assuring that students were making meaningful connections between communication forms. Issues of balance and the sequence of instruction emerged as teachers discussed the strands so clearly (and separately) delineated in curriculum documents. However, even as teachers became familiar, adept, and creative in constructing language engagements for students, there was a realization that “The curriculum is something you have control over — the students themselves are more fluid. There will always be surprises that they bring to the learning/teaching process that are never written up in the curriculum!” (Teacher Participant) As a result of their dialogue, teachers agreed that collegial support throughout the implementation period built familiarity with curriculum inclusions in the light of the pragmatic ramifications in the classroom. However, multiple perspectives informed classroom actualization, because no two classrooms are alike, and classroom contexts are ever-changing. Teachers stated:

I have the realization that the new curriculum can be adapted to meet my needs and the needs of the students in the classroom. (Teacher Participant)

The sharing of ideas with others on a regular basis – I’ve tried some new things and modified old ones. My experience has given me an opportunity to filter ideas that I know would work or would not work for me personally based on my teaching style, comfort level, student needs, etc. (Teacher Participant)

I will be able to use the new curriculum at my own grade level... being able to use some ideas from the curriculum and apply them with meaning. (Teacher Participant)

It was important to have time to browse the curriculum and get to know what was in there. It helped inform me of trends in the ELA thinking. I think time set aside for reflection and interactive discussion will be important for me now. (Teacher Participant)

Over time, the nature of the talk meshed public and private experiences of teachers. There was an evolution of content in the conversations from information to more complex issues including:

- curriculum content (what is in the documents, the girth and organization of information)
- issues of time (how to use meeting times effectively, how classroom learning and effective strategies are developed over time, and how thought and learning are dependent on time)
- issues of process (what strategies, methods are to be employed, and what processes are to be used by the group)
- issues of balance (how to manage the learning circumstances in such a way as to link different resources and curriculum components in meaningful ways for students)
- issues of synthesis (after sharing ideas, how to construct well informed ideas that apply to the classroom, how to connect ideas to form concepts, bringing information and processes together)
- refinement (what adjustments, meanings, processes, structures, and resources shape and ensure an informed and balanced ELA program in the classroom)

A LEARNING COMMUNITY SUPPORTS TEACHERS IN VARIOUS PRACTICAL STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION (AWARENESS, EXPLORATION, SYNTHESIS AND REFINEMENT) WITH THE RENEWED K-5 ELA CURRICULUM

Implementation of the renewed K-5 ELA Curriculum was mandated by the Saskatoon Public School Division and Saskatchewan Learning. Any such mandated renewal necessitates accommodation on the part of teachers — essentially, teachers must deal with demands of change. One Teacher Participant writes,

I continue to believe that, as teachers, we must always leave ourselves open to change. Change is easier to accept when you have support systems in place and time to digest each change that takes place. I personally have enjoyed the support from other teachers in this project.

It is important to note that when given the choice, participants chose to collaborate through the implementation process rather than to work in isolation. As a mandated curriculum, the document is complicated and thorough, providing a common framework and purpose — an explicit “scaffold” for the process of collaboration. Teachers were diverse elements. The process of collaboration revealed teacher diversity and passion for the profession and harnessed this energy to sustain learning. Teachers came to understand that they were at the centre of a learning process — that making a curriculum document “come alive” necessitated knowing its structures, but information alone was insufficient. Teachers invested themselves in the task — it was a human endeavour. While implementation is sometimes conceived as “just doing what is in the curriculum”, constructivist methods remind us that thought and practice are never directly transmitted, but that each idea and action is conceived through each learner, who builds unique mental constructions. When seen this way, implementation is every bit as active and creative as curriculum

development, for teachers construct and reconstruct as they conceive, negotiate and shape their classroom practice.

I gained insight into each strand, and got new ideas to use for each, especially the two newest strands. I developed new evaluations and assessment ideas, i.e. rubrics. (Teacher Participant, grade assignment same for several years)

I've had opportunities to problem-solve — primarily in language arts, but for other teaching issues as well — openly and honestly in a non-threatening atmosphere. (Teacher Participant)

Because this is my first year as a Kindergarten teacher, it was especially beneficial to be able to meet with experienced teachers at this level. After each session I returned to school with new ideas that I know worked for other teachers. (Teacher Participant, new grade assignment)

(The following section, “Section D”, includes teachers’ professional goals collated under the practical stages of implementation identified in *Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher’s Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth* (Saskatchewan Education, 2001): awareness, exploration, synthesis, and refinement.)

A LEARNING COMMUNITY ENCOURAGES PERSONAL GOAL-SETTING AND OWNERSHIP

As each participant took responsibility for his/her own professional learning through exploration, experimentation, and reflection, participants identified areas of strength and need. Participants each moved along a personal growth continuum in a caring atmosphere of encouragement, support, challenge, and inspiration offered by the learning community grade-group. This learning community professional development model, based upon inquiry, required participants to identify areas of interest. Because the groups were grade specific, the dialogue was grade appropriate, and each grade-group could ask for support with areas of particular interest. For example, kindergarten teacher participants investigated phonics as part of early literacy, grade one investigated emerging reading, grades two and three reviewed writing processes, and grades four and five focussed on learning in writing processes and accessing authentic assessment through rubrics.

Teachers, when confident, and after trust was established, identified their own strengths and weaknesses, and all participants shared directions for their individual professional growth plans. Further, deep-dialogue “spilled-over” into other areas of curriculum, including language and content in science, social studies and mathematics. Due to overwhelming support of this model, a request was made to structure same groups in the future, building knowledge about English Language Arts, and addressing other subjects and areas of concern.

Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher’s Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth (Saskatchewan Education, 2001) contains a “Stages within the Implementation Process” chart (pp.80, 81) that demonstrates a recursive, not linear process. As teachers reflected upon their professional growth plans, their responses were classified into each of the four stages: awareness,

exploration, synthesis, and refinement. Teacher responses were broad and dimensional, and several professional growth targets bridged subject areas, process issues, and issues of personal philosophy. The following response clusters include all participants' submissions near the end of the research process.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANS (APRIL, 2002)

Awareness

- I would like to learn about assessment tools.
- ELA — There is so much more to learn.
- I would like to spend more time exploring the resources.
- There are so, so, so many ideas.
- I want to know more about assessment and evaluation and reporting and consistency and record keeping and...
- Learning more about the program and materials offered by publishers will make life easier.
- Writing – growth — beginning of... I need more knowledge.
- Evaluation and assessment — I want faster, easier ways, as well as more of a variety
- Spelling strategies and methods.
- I will have grade two next year, and I need to become more familiar with the grade two curriculum as I have been teaching grade one for 6-7 years.
- Through discussions with other teachers at the same level, I learned that there are many ELA units that are not part of my yearly plan. I would like to learn more about these units, develop the resources, and include them in my classroom.
- I am still madly in search of many resources, i.e. a wide range of short, easy-read materials to catch a wide range of interests. I discovered these [Publisher] books — they are excellent, but lack similar resources at a grade four-five level.

Exploration

- I would like to continue to discuss strategies to help children with their language skills (speaking, pre-reading and writing) and to share resources.
- I am interested to share centres. It is such an important area of Kindergarten and everyone has their own ideas.
- I would like to add challenges for the more 'literate' students in my grade.
- I would welcome the opportunity to continue to work on English Language Arts in all areas. Language is certainly the core of any program, and should be a focus.
- We should continue with Language Arts next year.
- As a grade one teacher, I think language arts all the time, so I want to think of more ways to do what I do BETTER!
- Language Arts — it is what all other subjects are based upon therefore it is most important and I am willing to spend lots of time honing skills.
- At the grade one level, everything revolves around grade one language arts — just more about language and learning.
- Our group is still highly motivated/involved in exploring the issues of teaching in a grade one class — again, primarily language arts. We'll never reach the final destination!
- I'd like to explore writer's workshop.

- The strands of representing and viewing have an interest to me because I still feel I need more ideas for both lesson variety and evaluation criteria/technique.
- Writer's workshop. I'm always looking for good, interesting writing ideas.
- Using rubrics – I've started using/making my own now.
- Writer's workshop has sparked my interest. The information shared was interesting and it showed how students' writing skills improve.
- Continue to explore resources, activities, and instructional strategies.
- I plan to continue to expand these ideas shared at the workshops in all strands, especially viewing and representing.
- I would like to use specific "new" units, themes, and ideas to add to my present file of materials so that I can offer greater variety to students.
- I would like to discuss what units other teachers at this grade level use. This would be of benefit in order to "pool" resources and ideas.

Synthesis

- I would like to continue to have time to talk with other Kindergarten teachers about what they do in their classrooms, not just for Language Arts, but other subjects as well.
- The process could be extended to all areas of curriculum.
- Continuing to listen to others — seeing and hearing about what others have done makes it exciting as I plan for my students.
- The process could be done for all subject areas.
- Interests include visiting and taking part in math and other social rooms and groups that have been started, visiting one another's classrooms, and continuing this group if possible next year.
- Interest is fuelled by the value of "interaction".
- We need to have this for all subject areas — to become more familiar with all curriculums such as math, science, social studies. Teachers benefit from this experience.
- A room/site could be applied to other curricular areas.
- It would be great to see how class-grade groupings would work (process).
- I would like to continue with language arts and integrate social studies content.
- I'd like to develop adaptations for different levels.
- I'd like to learn more about units that teachers have used, created that have been effective in their classrooms. I'm at the point where I'd like to try some new, innovative units that will keep me and my students interested in the long run. Also, the video we watched about how to make students add more detail in their writing — I want to learn more about this as well as how to incorporate this in the writing process. It's a reoccurring problem that many of my students have.
- Continued new "group work" ideas.
- Using viewing and representing strands — they are new and are often high interest activities for kids.
- More use/development of rubrics.
- Development of group prepared units that fit the curriculum goals and objectives.
- Rubrics: I started to use this evaluation process recently and I liked it. I was able to gain more information in this area. As a teacher-librarian, this evaluation tool is very suitable to many projects I am involved in.
- English grammar — in order to teach it properly; I need to develop ways to incorporate viewing and representing; I need to implement better units that have all the strands.

- How to incorporate more viewing into Language Arts activities — expanding resources for language arts and developing more units.
- I found, in my own classroom, an incredible desire on the part of students to perform for others. They love the drama process and the creativity that comes with it. I'd like to explore that field much further as it meshes with English Language Arts.
- I need to explore more ideas to incorporate viewing and representing as they are quite new.
- Trying different instructional strategies in the curriculum.

Refinement

- I would like to watch how kids make sense of things and notice how their learning journey changes depending upon how I modify things.
- Viewing and Representing — I'm still getting a handhold on these areas, but I realize I do cover them well now in my teaching. However, I have gained new insight and ideas. Due to this, I want to keep working on more of a balance in the six strands of the ELA curriculum.

Other Remarks

- I appreciate having time during the day and not an expectation after school hours to participate in learning about new curriculum.
- Coffee and donuts are nice.
- I enjoy taking away hands-on ideas as opposed to theory.

A LEARNING COMMUNITY BUILDS PERSONAL EFFICACY IN THE PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

"Efficacy" can be defined as the power to produce a desired or intended result. DuFour and Eaker (1998, pp. 274-275) list many characteristics of staff development that foster individual and organizational renewal, including: **informed optimism, direction and empowerment, teamwork and trust, and causes and commitment** — specific components present in this McDowell research study.

INFORMED OPTIMISM

Using thorough curriculum documents, research approaches, and recommended resources, researchers explored instructional possibilities and developed a "group lens" about what worked, what didn't, and why. Teachers shared implementation tips and ideas, and a spirit of excitement and optimism infused the group with energy focussed upon what could be built together. As one participant writes:

Self-directing our own professional needs and working together as a group, giving input and receiving ideas... We made friendships that we have really appreciated. I feel more confident about my ideas. I tried new things I might not have before!
(Teacher Participant)

DIRECTION AND EMPOWERMENT

Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership. Information, of which we have a glut, only becomes knowledge through a social process. For this reason, relationships and professional learning communities are essential. Organizations must foster knowledge giving as well as knowledge seeking. We endorse continual learning when we say that individuals should constantly add to their knowledge base — but there will be little to add if people are not sharing. A norm of sharing one's knowledge with others is the key to continual growth for all. (Fullan in *Educational Leadership*, May 2002, p. 18)

The research design offered organizational structures to keep the process from becoming complaint sessions or consolidations of poor practice. Leadership approaches included modelling, emptying oneself, honesty, revelation about limitations, and posing challenge questions that focussed participants on the task of enhancing student learning. Teacher-groups developed personal skills of evaluating grade specific student needs and determining what lessons helped students maximize their learning — assessment/evaluation/rubrics — a movement towards authentic assessment. As students formulated assessment strategies, teaching was shaped and classroom practice integrated more inclusive methods and collaborative engagements around specific learning objectives.

Elmore (in *Educational Leadership*, May 2002) writes,

The schools that I have observed usually share a strong motivation to learn new teaching practices and a sense of urgency about improving learning for students and teachers. What they lack is a sense of individual and collective agency, or control, over the organizational conditions that affect the learning of students and adults in their schools.

That is, people in these schools believe that they can have little or no effect on the organizational conditions in which they work. Without a sense of control over their own learning, they are oblivious to the ways in which these conditions make it difficult or impossible to do the work that they are expected to do. It should not surprise us that students who are also workers in these organizations, emerge from schools with a low sense of control over their own learning. If the adults aren't modelling the learning process, how can the students know how to take control of their learning? (pp. 24-25)

Teachers, as learners-in-community, came to understand the power of collaborative learning for their students. Throughout the research cycles, teacher participants evaluated their own needs, experimented, reflected upon practice, and analyzed outcomes. The discussions led participants to identify what knowledge would help to maximize future professional learning supporting their particular students. One Teacher Participant eloquently wrote:

I feel validated personally and professionally. What I do matters.

TEAMWORK AND TRUST

Within supportive relationships, there was recognition of personal capabilities and strengths: belonging as a professional; celebration (affirmation); articulation and pooling knowledge (creating a base of shared knowledge); and bridging to

what was novel and innovative. As teams, teachers recognized skill areas needing practice, and they accessed both “craft knowledge” (accumulated “teacher wisdom”), and multiple forms of professional development to inform growth. In this project, professional development included lesson study, examining student work, engaging in cycles of action and reflection, analyzing teaching cases, inviting consultants to present mini-lessons, planning lessons with colleagues, consulting each other as experts, forming study/support groups, researching on the internet, developing display materials, mentoring colleagues, being mentored by colleagues, engaging in self-assessment, participating in a study group, keeping a reflection log/journal, viewing relevant educational videos, developing curriculum, reviewing new resources, and reading journals, educational magazines and books. Participants recognized that within group collaboration, an array of approaches can inform a circumstance or issue and different perspectives, thinking processes, and beliefs are assets to group interactions and enrich the group experience. Participants shared:

This is what professional development should be. I can't remember a time where we've ever had the time to exchange so many ideas and add to my repertoire. There could be a lot of tangents that a group could go on with this project. There was some structure, but we still had a good deal of opportunity and time to go our own way with this. (Teacher Participant)

This “real-learning” in a context, with a small supportive group with lots of sharing and the luxury of time to discuss, to digress, to philosophize was so much more valuable. (Teacher Participant)

I have been more a part of it — not just listening and taking down notes. I feel more at ease asking others for help. (Teacher Participant)

We were respected as professionals and many of our sessions were self-directed. (Teacher Participant)

We appreciate being responsible for topics. (Teacher Participant)

CAUSES AND COMMITMENT

We all had a common goal — to learn and implement the curriculum. (Teacher Participant)

Commitment emerges when people work together to create something they value. As we experience intensive mutual learning experiences, work toward shared ideals (implicit in philosophy), collaborate on needed tasks, or jointly face adversity and life's difficulties, we discover in others — and in ourselves — the resources, spirit, and energy that “move” us to stay engaged. (Brown and Isaacs, 1995, p. 72)

Professional development, like all learning, is not dispassionate. Emotion, passion, and commitment are important components in professional development — emotional resources to fuel ongoing conversations and link them to learning events in the classroom. DuFour and Eaker (1998) write, “Above all else, there is a basic human desire to live a life of meaning, to serve a higher purpose, to make a difference in this world” (p. 281). While teachers found meaningful engagement in their professional development experiences, they articulated a clear moral directive impelling this research forward — improved learning for students.

The research engagement over time made clear its impact as one Teacher Participant wrote:

I've personally found a new or renewed respect for colleagues and the amazing learning that takes place in the process of "talk" as colleagues share their individual strengths, information, and talents with each other in the small group. I feel better about my chosen profession. (Teacher Participant)

Efficacy is clear in the professional growth plans listed earlier in the study. In addition to the many forms of professional development accessed within this research, participants expressed future interest in peer observation, peer coaching, team teaching, study groups, seminars, professional networks, and model schools/program visits — collaborative and interactive forms of professional development that focus on job-embedded knowledge and processes.

A LEARNING COMMUNITY FOSTERS CYCLES OF ACTION AND REFLECTION THROUGHOUT CURRICULUM ACTUALIZATION AND THINKING ABOUT THE TEACHING/LEARNING RELATIONSHIP

One Teacher Participant writes:

Professional development is more than listening to presenters, and a one time look at an area, i.e. "Viewing". I find listening valuable... When you add the opportunity to meet with peers on a regular basis, the value escalates and the chance/opportunity to actually use new techniques and implement "old" techniques... grows exponentially.

Another Teacher Participant writes:

Sharing ideas around student work that fits into the strands of the curriculum — this is such a practical approach... What I'm already doing is okay.

"MAKING THE MEANINGS MINE"

Constructivist positions of knowledge, state that each learner builds understandings in unique ways from particular cultural positions. The success of group meaning-making is dependent upon building a culture of expectation, inspiration, and exploration. As products linked to situation and circumstance, meanings do not remain static, but evolve and change over time.

As research participants engaged in dialogue around curriculum renewal, there was a genuine sense of ownership and pride in the work being accomplished. One Teacher Participant writes that the major import of this research experience guiding his professional development in the future was the process of "taking new ideas and adding my own slant to make them my own". This process reveals a re-negotiation of material and a transformation of ideas shaped through the teacher's lens of experience, belief, and perceptions of the needs of students — a process dependent upon cycles of reflection. Roland Barth (2001) writes, "It is through reflection that we distill, clarify, and articulate our craft knowledge"(p. 65). Barth (2001) defines craft knowledge as "... a description of practice accompanied by an intentional analysis of practice..." (p. 57). To deal with the complex nature of teaching requires going beyond

particular content to the form just such an inner lens, a critical view, to inform teachers as they orchestrate the delicate and changing balance of learning opportunities for their students. Crafting knowledge to target the learner and hone the teacher's strengths requires transferring knowledge to wisdom. Sharing such knowledge in group circumstances strikes at the essence of community building, for Barth (2001) writes, "Under what conditions are educators likely to come to reflect on and to consolidate their craft knowledge, disclose it to others, and put it to work... reforming the school..." (p.61). Learning communities are one context in which teachers reflect upon and share craft knowledge as a focus of group process.

Teachers experienced the joy of working in a community with other teachers. Traditionally, the structures of the teaching profession serve the purpose of leaving teachers isolated from each other.

I know my teacher-colleagues down the hall would benefit from my support. I want to give and receive collegial support, but most days I have to admit that it is nearly impossible to connect with my colleagues in a vital way. **Yes, students and their learning come first.** But somehow, we must find and preserve the connections we have made with each other, because they inform and strengthen us, and enable us to provide better instruction for our students. (Teacher Participant)

The research process over twelve months was tied to the changing needs and rhythms of the school year, for the focus of discussion changed as different curriculum components became more or less relevant. As teachers tried new strategies and collaborated with others, they posed action plans that directed and enhanced learning for students.

Throughout the course of research, the learning cycles of teachers had direct relevance to, and were linked with, the learning cycles of their students. From the *Classroom Curriculum Connections* (Saskatchewan Education, 2001) teacher handbook, teacher participants commented upon the "Stages of Curriculum Inquiry: Overview" (p. 42), and offered a variety of responses to each of five "stages": committing, focusing, planning, acting, and reviewing. The following responses were received from teacher participants, revealing metacognitive activity in and through the curriculum inquiry process at the end of the research initiative.

Stage 1 – Committing: Why should I become involved in further implementation/renewal of Core Curriculum? How can Curriculum Inquiry support my personal-professional growth?

Participant Responses:

- This is an excellent way to learn — so much knowledge is there, but there is so little time to share it. This is a learning process that we can directly relate to our own experiences.
- This makes you aware in your present day of the new curriculum, and gets you thinking and accountable.
- We need to become involved in these initiatives to stay current, maintain focus, and acquire a sense of direction.
- This fits in so very well with the framework of the strategic direction for schools as a whole, and our new professional growth plan!

- I need to learn. I feel awesome when I share, and this feeling comes to my class. I need to take a closer look at what I am doing, and what I need to do.
- Any new curriculum needs to be tied in with groupings for professional development — needs to be system-wide. It opens minds, and broadens horizons. Curriculum inquiry supports personal-professional growth because it is generated from colleagues rather than so-called “experts” from outside. Educators are ongoing learners and change is good.
- I need to become involved in implementation and renewal because I have to teach it! There are commonalities across curriculums and grades. It makes me examine my own strengths and goals.
- I need to learn and implement the parts of the Core Curriculum. I need to expand my knowledge of subject areas.
- I find working with colleagues very educational and motivating. We have huge resources of ideas and materials that teachers can offer.
- I need to keep learning; get the “spark” back, and focus on making things interesting for children and for myself! Curriculum thinking changes, and so should teachers — strategies are changing, and we can be part of it.
- We need to gain a greater understanding of curriculum through how others implement strategies, and offer support, mentoring, sharing, and guiding.

Stage 2 – Focusing: What do I want to do? How can I select a manageable focus? How can I translate my focus into a concrete target?

Participant Responses:

- I need to stay focused on this year’s initiative, and I’ll continue to reorganize my current materials to help the process.
- This year I have chosen to work on resources that I like to use – getting rid of resources I’ll never use, and collecting ones that I am pleased with. I feel that is key to success with children. Strategies are important and I can apply what I learn at these meetings to the resources I am collecting.
- I need to choose a part of the curriculum and give it an in-depth look. I have been able to choose what professional goals I want, and go for it with support!
- Familiarity with language of curriculum helps. It helped bring key words such as viewing, representing, reporting, etc. terminology into focus — there is clarification through discussion.
- We are doing many things right. Our focus is very individualized depending on our class — taking some ideas from others to build on really helps. We focus on doing some things well rather than attempting to do everything well right away.
- It is important to focus on research which provides the basis for the curriculum.
- Curriculum documents are really helpful — objectives are very explicit in setting targets. Sometimes you can feel overwhelmed by the girth of the documents, so you need to pick one idea, and pursue it. Translating a focus to a concrete target isn’t difficult if student learning is your goal. Look at the student outcomes and work products in their many forms. Determine interests, needs, skills, areas that need enhancing. Consider books and resources... and work to balance areas for each individual class.

Stage 3 – Planning: What actions will I take? What behaviours, products, and feelings will indicate that I have achieved my target? What supports do I need?

Participant Responses:

- Planning is a never-ending process. What I need to maintain is an organizational procedure to be able to pull ideas I need, and apply them with students. I am working on developing mini-lessons I can use across the grades. I will know I've achieved my target by observing students and seeing if their work reflects the goals that I'm focusing on.
- Planning for our own professional development means we need to ask ourselves: "What do I need to improve on in my teaching?" Determine a target focus, then ask, "How do I do it?"
- I need to go through curriculum and make choices (I want to get better at enrichment). I need to provide a better ability range in the activities I plan. The supports I need are practical ideas, input from experienced teachers, and time to think!
- Discussion about new resources is invaluable. Aha! moments about resources that are already in our school libraries were really great for us, because not everyone was aware the resources were there, and now they have become indispensable.
- Planning is the easy part, but it is always a challenge to narrow our focus. Not all materials are available due to cost. Many materials suggest great ideas but there are unrealistic time commitments or other high-level constraints to implementation.
- I need to constantly examine the needs and levels of development of my students. The supports I need are colleagues and resources.
- I will use a variety of resources including the internet, LRC resources, and I will develop activities. I need to determine the performance indicators as I go — they will change depending on the mode my students are responding in. I need to explore supports beyond the classroom in the form of guest speakers, field trips, videos, etc.
- I need to be thorough and access all available resources to maintain a well informed and balanced view.

Stage 4 – Acting: How can I best implement my plan, record the results, and reflect on the process as it unfolds? How can I ensure that I recognize unanticipated or all relevant effects? How can I involve students in solving problems as they arise?

Participant Responses:

- As I implement my research, I am looking for students working independently. Many students I teach are not independent workers. Hopefully the planning I do implement will help them without my having to verbalize with student what I am doing.
- I've been keeping a reflective journal to record my thoughts and how I would like to try things in my class.
- I need to try... guess... reflect, and talk.
- Reflection becomes part of the teaching process.
- Sometimes it is easier to do things ourselves — setting small goals, picking one area because you can't do it all... You can't ever ensure that problems won't arise, and even if you try, you can't anticipate all of them.

- We will need to focus upon ongoing assessment of ourselves and our students. That means taking stock of things on an ongoing basis, and determining what is needed to get where we need to go. You have to learn to live with the unexpected, because you can't control it all, but you can make well informed choices. We will need to constantly check student interest, and be willing to pitch the plan if the plan isn't working. On the other hand, we need to take advantage of the "teachable moment".

Stage 5 – Reviewing: To what extent did I achieve my target? How was I affected by this achievement? What was successful, why, and for whom? What should change? How can I build on what I learned? Who else might be interested in/benefit from my experiences?

Participant Responses:

- Networking is beneficial.
- I personally overachieved what I expected for ELA – I can't wait to start something new! Everyone achieved and grew. To build on what I learned I will keep in touch with my network and continue to grow.
- Everyone in the group felt excited and positive about the experience rather than resentful. There were refreshing ideas.
- The momentum will continue, hopefully. Professional in-school time needs to be continued. There are contacts we've made need to be built. We need to continue to share ideas.
- To what extent do you ever achieve your target? You are always changing and revamping your practice, depending on your group. The job of teaching and learning is never done! Success can mean different things for different people/students. It is necessary to build-in many opportunities for students of varying abilities. Networking is a great way to share with other teachers, and perhaps arranging peer-visits would be beneficial. It is important to be connected to others to share what you have learned.

General Responses about the Curriculum Inquiry Process

Participant Responses:

- This process is very applicable for our personal professional growth plan.
- The bullets under each stage are very helpful and move teachers to reflect. I will refer to these when examining new curricula and when making my personal growth plans, and when I'm evaluating.
- The bullet was very helpful and useful. The curriculum inquiry approach gives us time to reflect and learn new idea. It broadens our learning and enables us to be more specific. I agree with this approach — it is a good base for professional development.
- I found the curriculum inquiry very beneficial to my teaching. I learned a lot of new strategies, plans, ideas, and resources that could be used in my classroom. I hope that we will be able to do more of this in the future.
- Curriculum Inquiry made me a better teacher. I learned so many new ideas and approaches — ideas that I will be able to use for the rest of my teaching career. The Curriculum Inquiry approach allowed time to share and implement ideas and reflect on them. It was extremely valuable.

A LEARNING COMMUNITY, THROUGH COLLABORATION AND CONVERSATION, DEVELOPS A DEEPENING AWARENESS OF TEACHERS' DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES, ASSUMPTIONS, BELIEFS, AND ACCESSES THIS DIVERSITY TO REFLECT ON FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS, AND TEACHING PRACTICE.

Patrick Slattery (1995) writes:

Educators must re-envision their relationships with students and with each other and begin to find ways to affirm and validate every voice in the school community. The dominant power position of teachers and administrators must be replaced by empowerment models. These models are not simply site-based management, authentic assessment, or cooperative learning groups. Rather, the very concept of the self in relation must evolve to a new realm of consciousness. This can be accomplished on all levels of schooling as teachers and students create empathetic, caring, holistic, and liberating practices. (p. 264)

Embedded within the ELA curriculum document lay the potential for major conceptual shifts in the minds of the teachers, as they came to build understandings about viewing and representing as forms of literacy. The forms of visual texts, what they meant, and how they were to be taught became a major goal of teachers in the research process. Teachers used visual representation to capture their group perspectives about the language arts curriculum and this professional development experience. The results contained visual metaphors that revealed the conceptual frames and understandings of teacher participants. (See Appendix C.)

A major area of curriculum that was central to teachers' interests was evaluation, assessment, and reporting. Broadening the teaching frame to six ELA strands necessitated an in-depth look at authentic methods of assessment, because evaluating viewing and visual representation required identifying the performance indicators, and the performance indicators were linked directly to selection of correlating objectives and activities. One participant wrote,

I found the session which preceded the March report cards to be the most beneficial. As teachers we each brought ideas of how we evaluated the students. We discussed the materials used, the goals of evaluation as well as how to schedule the individual evaluation into our day.

Discussion around viewing and representing were vital in establishing understandings about these areas to clarify and support communication with and reporting to parents. Taking a broader lens, discussion of the whole ELA structure included a variety of formative assessment techniques to inform planning for instruction.

Teachers wrote:

I have gained a network of teaching peers! We have supported each other emotionally as well as concretely. (Teacher Participant)

I've been making connections with other grade alike teachers in an intimate, non-competitive environment. (Teacher Participant)

Professional development is ongoing and continuous. (Teacher Participant)

I feel validated as a successful teacher with the freedom to explore new strategies within the realm of new curriculum. (Teacher Participant)

A LEARNING COMMUNITY ACTIVELY ENGAGES TEACHERS IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS – TEACHERS AS RESEARCHERS, WITHIN THE CLASSROOM, AND WITH TEACHER-PEERS.

I envision a school that is a community of leaders. (Barth, 2001, p. 85)

Leaders for change get involved as learners in real reform situations. They craft their own theories of change, consistently testing them against new situations. They become critical consumers of management theories, able to sort out promising ideas from empty ones. (Fullan in Jossey-Bass, 2000, p. 158)

In my view, teaching is an intellectual and scientific profession, as well as a moral profession. That means that schools have to constantly process knowledge about what works and that teachers have to see themselves as scientists who continuously develop their intellectual and investigative effectiveness. (Fullan in Sparks, 2003, p. 57)

For classrooms to be transformed, schools themselves must be transformed into professional communities within when

learning and teaching depend heavily upon creating, sustaining, and expanding a community of research practice. Members of the community are critically dependent upon each other... collaborative learning is not just nice but necessary for survival... This interdependence promotes an atmosphere of joint responsibility, mutual respect, and a sense of personal and group identity. (Brown, 1994, p. 10)

Teacher participants-as-researchers were positioned to be leaders for change, **for the research process placed them there**. Treated as professionals, they philosophized, digressed, and enjoyed the opportunity to re-conceive foundational beliefs about teaching and learning while they explored new possibilities in their teacher practice. Thoughts moved in and out, not in a logical-sequential basis, but as Arnheim (1969) states, through “accretion by amendment”. Old knowledge was connected to new, theoretical positions were tested through practice, and shared knowledge, informed by classroom practice and diverse group perspectives became group wisdom.

Excessive individual autonomy is antithetical to professional community. Rather, in professional community, teachers become empowered as groups to consider the impact of their collective actions and practice... and jointly arrive at decisions to limit individual freedom in order to promote the effectiveness of the group. Thus teachers in a school community of learning turn away from traditional autonomy, from operating as they wish within their own classroom, to consider the physical and social growth and development of their students as a school-wide issue. (Louis and Kruse, 1995, p. 37)

This project gave teachers the opportunity to think on their feet, “inventing their practice as they went” (paraphrased, Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 145). Sergiovanni (1996) elaborates,

The relationship between teachers and the knowledge base for teaching is understood differently in professional development than in training. Professional development assumes that teachers are superordinate to the research on teaching. Unlike technicians who are trained to apply research findings, professionals view research as knowledge that informs the decisions they make. Professionals create their practice in use. For them, the process of inquiry and the practice of their profession are inseparable. (p. 145)

As research participants, teachers were regarded as competent professionals, with a wealth of skills, understandings, and teaching abilities. It was assumed that teachers would take ownership for their own learning. Teachers were affirmed, as each personal perspective and conversation added to the body of shared knowledge about teaching and learning. Teachers understood that through research participation, they would actively contribute a wealth of knowledge to the teaching profession. Also, as an impetus to the research initiative itself, teachers’ questions went far beyond those in curriculum documents and/or objectives of the school division. Innovative, responsive to each other and students, flexible, and open-ended, legitimate teacher questions and concerns impelled the research initiative past its projected mandate, as teachers were adamant to continue meeting in grade-alike groups the following school year.

TOWARDS CYCLICAL INQUIRY

The positive import of positioning teachers as researchers is that theory informs and shapes classroom practice, and classroom practice, examined through personal reflection, group discussion, and many interpretive lenses, informs and shapes “theory” in the form of craft knowledge. This process parallels “praxis” from academic circles. In the learning community, practice is embedded in real classrooms, in real work environments, and ongoing collaboration occurs with peers throughout the process.

RESHAPING, IMPROVING, AND ENRICHING FUTURE TEACHER COLLABORATION

SESSIONS

As this year-long research process drew to a close, teachers shared their ideas about the possible limitations and unrealized potentials of the learning community model in their future professional development initiatives.

Research participants expressed the strong desire for grade-group meetings to continue. They revealed a willingness to take control of the structure and agendas for grade-group meetings, and looked forward to the freedom to choose topics for discussion. There was strong consensus that a structured agenda was needed; however, since many participants were eager to jointly construct agendas, this activity could become part of the group task. Many participants felt familiar with the curriculum documents, and felt that future meetings would be most beneficially spent in refining knowledge through group unit-planning. One Teacher Participant writes:

I feel it could be useful to have teacher collaboration time to develop specific units. All of the teachers could decide on the unit, bring their resources and develop the entire unit together, bringing home an end result.

Other suggestions for group interaction were also vitally tied to classroom instruction. Teachers suggested focusing on specific areas of the ELA curriculum, and including short times of structured teaching as part of the afternoon meetings. This could include mini-lessons, videos, and resource moments. One participant wrote:

I think additional specialist presentations on pre-chosen topics of interests would help.

Within the research process, video presentations and several presentations were offered. One participant shared that learning community discussion groups do not pre-empt the need for other forms of professional development, and indeed many forms of professional development are welcome within the learning community framework, providing a shared basis for discussion and reflection. While many teachers wanted to keep groups small, there was a suggestion that collaborative sessions between adjacent grade-groups or mixed grade-groups would provide different information and stimulate discussion. Groups agreed that having time to review recommended resources was valuable and that the learning community model was versatile.

I don't see limitations to the professional development process in this way. We could get any number of possibilities working. (Teacher Participant)

I think there are actually no limitations only more possibilities. We can network through email or specific sharing sessions where we pick a specific from curriculum and all bring ideas on how to implement it in the classroom. (Teacher Participant)

Suggestion: Set up a chat site, so that professional development groups can stay easily connected between sessions! (Teacher Participant)

Limitations of the process, as seen by participants were issues related to maintaining group focus. For example, one Teacher Participant wrote, *"Is the discussion caught in a circle? It depends on the participation."* Another wrote, *"We can lose focus, so agendas help."* Yet another Teacher Participant wrote, *"Specific sharing on specific skills and strategies would encourage us to continue to try new things."* Limitations to the process were issues related to planning and were issues that individual grade-groups could solve when constructing their own itineraries. One Teacher Participant shared the greatest limitation to this process as *"the barriers we put on ourselves"*.

Teachers examined specific curriculum documents, but also accessed essential paradoxes about teaching and ranges of inquiry, including initiating and responding, innovation and time-tested effective practices, inductive thinking and deductive thinking, divergent and convergent approaches, high and low level thinking, linear-sequential approaches and synergistic ones, and language-based and multi-modal thinking (embracing multiple modality and multiple intelligence theory). Teachers in one grade-group noted the nature of their discussion and remarked that *"Our discussion would be very different if we were teachers in inner-city schools..."* (Teacher Participant). Through the process, teachers had become aware of the situated nature of their group's understandings.

Clearly, the possibilities for dialogue are endless. How the learning community sustains itself without an explicit research mandate will reveal implications for the longevity and adaptability of this model of professional development.

TEACHER VIGNETTES: CLOSING COMMENTS

At the close of the research project, participants were given an opportunity to reflect upon the prior year and to summarize their “learning-in-community” experience.

- I was familiar with the rubric approach to evaluation but had been hesitant to try it. After our discussion in our grade five group, I came away feeling pumped and ready to put it into use. The way the other participants described their experiences and how positive they had been, my fear disappeared. I found the rubric easy to use and very straightforward for the students to understand once I’d given it a try.

Having professional development on new curriculum in the past was a matter of a half-day inservice to hand out the document. The document often went untouched for periods of time. This time I felt “in touch” with the curriculum as result of the interaction in our PD group. The dialogue was stimulating and provided me with a new insight and reflection on my existing methodology. I felt we were a community of learners eager to help each other improve, and giving each other confidence to try something new. The afternoons were designed not to add to our workload but rather to provide the atmosphere of relaxation and conviviality. (Teacher- Participant, Grade Five)

MY APPROACH TO FUTURE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (SEPTEMBER 2002-2003)

- After twenty years of teaching my approach to future PD could either be very positive or negative. I can honestly say that many teachers I know who have taught for a number of years do not see the advantage or need for professional development, and go fighting and screaming (mostly complaining), and get nothing out of the session except for a few sarcastic comments. I must say that I was heading — pulled along in — that direction, until last year.

My attitude toward PD days changed last year. Be it because of the number of days we had for L A, the group setting, the leaders, the fresh ideas, etc., or I’m sure a combination of all of the above, I became interested in PD again and look forward to other days where I can gain knowledge for myself and my students. (I’ve already attended one workshop this new school year!)

It’s a mind set, of course. After twenty years of teaching I search for what I need to get out of a PD day, I adapt to my needs, and I make sure I have not wasted my time. The MCDOWELL grant and PD afternoons gave me a chance to find a purpose in PD again, as I used to have in my much younger days. (Teacher-Participant, Grade Two)

- If I was to pinpoint the one main thing that has changed in my classroom, it would be ME! I feel that these opportunities to hear and share ideas have made me more willing and confident in trying new things. After many years of teaching it becomes easy to stay within your comfort zone. I've found the last year to be one where I took more "risks", accepted challenges, and tried new things. Has this benefited my students? Absolutely! They are experiencing different teaching styles, innovative techniques and a greater variety of activities. It's fun (and beneficial) for them as well as for me.

We tried the interactive calendar... for a month. My class found it very difficult to produce a daily calendar. We started out writing the synopsis at the end of each day together and then moved to pairs of students doing the writing. After the month we all agreed that it was very time-consuming and not that worthwhile for us. I still like the idea but need to work on revising it for our classroom...

I am amazed by the multitude of ideas and resources that teachers use every day. I always came away feeling a little inadequate and overwhelmed after PD sessions. I wanted to try everything and use all the resources. I'd think, "the kids in his/her classroom are so lucky!" So, for every simple little idea presented, often with the pretext of "You may already do this but..." there were always two or three people who responded with "What a good idea!" and took notes... I know I've adapted, changed routines and tried new things. Everyone had some new things to offer! (Teacher-Participant, Grade Two)

- When I think back to the research room, the six strands displayed there made me think about the sense-making my students experienced, and how important it was for me to vary my presentation to shape student learning and teach a balanced ELA program.

For example, a lesson could start in a listening mode, then students could read independently for specific information. They could share their information in discussion groups, and then create a visual representation of their meanings. That's using four strands and shifting information from language to a visual form. The next day, students could view the representations of others, talk about them, then write about major points.

On the other hand, students could begin their lesson in a visual mode — say, viewing, then move to listening and reading. Depending upon the needs of my students, I can design the modes of engagement, and help them to become adaptable, flexible thinkers. I keep those six bulletin board headings in my mind, and they guide me as I construct my lessons and choose appropriate objectives for my students. Effective ELA teaching is about making informed choices and creating an appropriate balance for the class I teach. I need to be thinking about that and making adjustments along the way. I am excited about the possibilities, and they only multiply when I reflect upon the ideas shared in the grade-group! (Teacher-Participant, Grades One/Two)

THE GRADE ONE TEACHER GROUP'S COLLABORATIVE SUMMARY:

- Glyphs! More experienced teachers shared with less experienced teachers, and (surprise!) less experienced teachers shared with more experienced teachers! (Usual PD presentations have the more experienced teachers doing all the sharing and presenting.) No boundaries! Mentoring, moral support, enthusiasm, encouragement, and understanding each other's successes and failures occurred

at each meeting. Even “old” grade one teachers have questions, and so did the resource teacher and teacher librarian who attended our sessions. Everyone had suggestions and answers. A huge positive effect for teachers and students came from the introduction of ideas and resources that had been tested in classes with a population similar to our own. Sessions allowed us to focus on **one** curriculum for a concentrated period of time, learning the language and understanding the strands. There was collective sharing of techniques that **work** for applying strategies presented in the curriculum.

Here is an anecdote:

A male student had not been heard to speak a word for the first eighteen days of school. The teacher is talking about how to make corrections and show them to her. The student waits patiently by the teacher during many interruptions by other students and a parent volunteer. The teacher is shocked and happy to hear, “Mrs. X, teachers are sure busy!” **Reminder: Be in the moment!**

Shifts in thinking include a greater awareness/knowledge of the terminology in language arts, a plan to categorize activities in the LA strands, a philosophy on which to base our teaching so that children are taught to think about their use of language. One teacher summed it up in the following statement:

“I used to think there was **one best way** to teach grade one, and now I know there should **not** be only one best way.”

An afternoon of research began with a common start/ focus on an LA strand, time for professional and personal reflection shared with a partner or the group, then there were responses to reflection. Resources mentioned at school staff meetings by teacher librarians connected to our LA sessions — practical application!

“Each session grew to where it needed to go.”

Shared moments were applied to the strands. Organizational ideas, authors, illustrators, specific titles, strategies for teaching, research skills, and vocabulary in science and social studies were shared. One teacher who previously doubted the success of writer’s workshop in grade one visited a class that is successful. We will choose action-oriented PD, grade-alike PD, and community-alike PD when possible. We have acquired a heightened awareness of how six strands specified in curriculum had already been in use and had been integrated in many grade one classes. The integrated teaching of the LA strands with other curriculums develops the vocabulary and thinking skills. Many teachers reorganized their teaching materials according to LA strands. We have one regret: we did not visit the Curriculum Materials Center to view resource materials that many of us are not making use of. (Grade One Teacher-Participants)

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ COLLABORATIVE SUMMARY:

- Children benefit from teachers’ new ideas and confidence. Teachers felt more effective and “in-tune” with new curriculum. Familiarity equals ease. New ideas have shown up in students’ work products. Some of us felt we gave our students more and varied opportunities to write and that students were involved more in writing and reading processes. The resource room teacher in our group observed that each kindergarten teacher had great ideas and incorporated them in different ways — noticed different styles and strategies. She commented on our eagerness to

embrace each other's ideas. Of great value was having a resource teacher in our group. She supplied a wealth of assessment tools, and she shared resources for our grade level.

Being a member of this group made it very easy to adjust the kindergarten report card comment bank to reflect the new areas of viewing and representing. Familiarity with the new curriculum (after discussion with group members) meant that colleagues and I could easily and quickly make the additions for all kindergarten teachers comment banks. (One Kindergarten Teacher- Participant)

Time management was an interesting topic for this group.

The relaxed atmosphere at PD afternoons meant time to discuss, share, and explore. There was time to view resources in the room. We felt encouraged to change, adapt, and take risks. We supported each other, and gained so many wonderful ideas from each other.

Website, literacy conventions information, samples of "tried and true" activities, evaluation and reporting strategies filled our afternoons. We will look for and demand, more grade-alike inservices. We like having control over the direction of our own PD. It's a good link to the new "Teacher Development Plan" put forth by our school system — that five year form. We like the time to do it!

One result in the classrooms were more "beefed-up" writing centres. More and varied writing tools are included. Teachers had more awareness of stretching the viewing and representing strands.

Note: We felt a contributing teacher-librarian would have been an asset to our group, to offer a wide range of resources and expertise! (Kindergarten Teacher-Participants)

- Ideas from colleagues made me aware of teaching/learning strategies — how varied and different they are and I use them on a regular basis. I use the strategies in the six different strands in the ELA curriculum. I created a log and materials of what worked well. I now have this binder of material at my fingertips. I was made aware of new resources and additional resources available through our library or personal selections from participants. Using these strategies increased individual student participation, building self-esteem. (Teacher-Participant, Grades Three-Four)
- I have revamped my Writers' Workshop approach with materials that were shared here. As a result of this opportunity, I have been exposed to some master teachers and their best practices. I am new with this grade level and have been grateful for the support. I have taken many ideas back — and USED THEM THE NEXT DAY!! I have been exposed to superb support materials in our LRC.

Metacognition: I used to think that teaching was a solitary and sometimes lonely calling. Often/mostly we are confined in a room as individuals who require instructions and guidance. This opportunity has made teaching "less lonely". (Teacher-Participant, Grade Five)

- Teachers have little time to "reflect" as so much happens in their day; there always seems to be pressure to do more. The ELA afternoon provided time for reflection. As other teachers shared, their ideas sparked ideas for me. Today alone, I have two great ideas that are just perfect for what I'm doing in my classroom. I will adapt them

to my situation. I love ideas that mesh with what I'm already doing — so I don't always feel like I need to start all over again. (Teacher-Participant)

- Last year I tried rubrics for the first time. I developed several rubrics for assignments in class. I don't think I would have approached that form of marking without the guidance and support of the group. The group opened my eyes to new resources. I also used the Writer's Workshop strategy to teach writing last year. Members of the group assisted me. As a result of the sessions I also tried to bring in more variety to my L A program (i.e. introducing more drama activities). I realized this was a very valuable form of professional development. I enjoyed getting to know fellow colleagues. (Teacher Participant, Grade Four)
- We were given the opportunity to share in a relaxed atmosphere. We had time. We did not have to live by the bells. We were not meeting at recess times to collaborate.

Colleagues offered information about Writers' Workshop. The resources on display were great because many of us used some of the recommended publications.

In my classroom, I use more variety in language arts classes, and fewer novel studies — more bite-sized things — novels, short stories, collections, pull from other resources, and from our networking experiences in this research project. (Teacher Participant, Grade 4)

- I think that my experience with the group meetings was positive in many ways for me and my students. I saw how other teachers were trying out new ideas and doing things that were exciting and interesting. That made me want to try new things and see how they could work. I also saw that there is a need to approach things differently as opposed to the same way all the time. Students need variety and because of the different ways that they learn different strategies need to be used. I think my students enjoyed trying to present things differently. It was challenging for them to try and see things from a different perspective.

Students really enjoyed doing reader's theatre. They loved having a part to read and threw in some acting just for fun...

A neat thing that happened was some of my students telling me that they enjoyed writing so much that they were writing at home. They brought their stories to school and shared them with the class.

I used to think that I had to do everything on my own but now I know there are a lot of people out there who are very willing to help me and lend me their resources. (Teacher Participant)

- This research experience has impacted positively on student learning in my classroom in: a wider variety of activities, resources — novels, stories, recording, etc. being used; a greater attention to "viewing" and "representing" sections of the curriculum; a greater integration of other subject areas with language arts; and, a more "balanced" program is being taught. As a result of the research, students seem to be more actively involved with language arts: "We missed our class", and "Can we write longer?", etc. There is more sharing about language arts amongst students, and L A related activities from the home — "Hey, I read a great story this weekend!"

Metacognition: “Change” is a major factor in what we do, and how we do things. Colleagues offered support, friendship, moral encouragement, and the encouragement to experiment and try new things.

How will I approach PD in the future?

PD in this format is critical. It has been the only PD in which I feel that I have grown and developed as a professional and as a person. (Teacher Participant, Grades Five-Six)

- Colleagues have tried and shared different strategies and activities that have worked. These ideas were taken back to various classrooms and used successfully. These ideas were valued because they were tested by others. It saved time because you didn't have to look through so many resources.

The research experience gave us all a “kick-start” to our year this fall. We were more confident in starting our programs right away. We realized the value of the recommended reading materials.

”Just being there” was a serendipity — having the time to share ideas during the day. We didn't have to come after putting in a full day with children. “Being treated like professionals” was good. We accomplished so much, even though we were unstructured some of the time. This reinforces that you are doing okay in your own room when you hear others share about their classrooms...

Metacognition: I used to think that grants and PD days were going to be a whole bunch of extra-curricular work. This was an exceptional experience. (Teacher-Participant, Grade Four)

- I was able to refine Writers' Workshop methods. It helped to find value in evaluation techniques in the non-traditional strands — viewing and representing. Having a room with all the resources was EXTREMELY helpful. I addressed the viewing strand by watching the Terry Fox film and had students try to define the different moods of the film without discussing it as a group. This research project offered a casual atmosphere where one could go off topic without feeling as though you were holding up the show. Not having to come after spending a full day teaching, and being treated as a professional was good.

The research experience was... relaxing, trusting, and non-structured (in that we didn't feel rushed, as though we had seven other things to be doing at the same time).

The craft knowledge that colleagues offered that inspired me was Writers' Workshop. (Teacher-Participant, Grades Four to Six)

- During my research experience, the two strands added to ELA — viewing and representing were focused on. The students' examples that are on display and discussed were used back in class. The craft knowledge shared by colleagues was sharing of materials, and new ways to solve problems, present, and evaluate — all practical, hands-on, ready-to-use ideas.

In the future, for PD, I want useful information that will help me to grow and help to keep my classroom ideas updated and fresh. Also, many tried and true ideas are still being used and it's good to know that these things are still valid. We don't have to reinvent the wheel and it's okay to keep doing what works in today's classroom.

My colleagues offered lots of support. We are all together; we all share the same concerns at different points and years according to our classes.

Having a chance to go through the curriculum other than evenings or weekends is a great benefit. What a treat to have quiet working time where the focus is on the topic, without interruptions. The displays and materials offered and available — again a chance to do this during a special time set aside...

This is an important part of our teaching and I certainly feel that it is treated as such, instead of put on the “back burner” to discover new ideas and skills ourselves. This project is a very professional way to approaching learning. (Teacher Participant)

- This research experience has impacted positively on student learning in my classroom through a great many new ideas to use: new book report ideas (greater variety, more student enthusiasm), new resources (especially picture books and poetry to use), excellent evaluation tools (rubrics, especially), new strategies that other teachers had found worked, and new techniques and a greater number of students were reached in more ways. That equals greater student learning.

Teacher colleagues encouraged me to try new techniques — everyone was enthusiastic and supportive. It was also encouraging because peer members thought my ideas were really useful!

I think this is the best form of PD I've ever had. It was **endlessly** practical, and at every single meeting I came away with a number of ideas that worked well in my classroom. (Teacher Participant, Grade Four)

OBSERVATION ABOUT THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GROUPS – STIRLING McDOWELL

- When I first started my teaching career I found support in how I taught my band students through various associations. The SIMTA (Saskatoon Instrumental Music Teachers' Association), a self-formed group that included band teachers from both the Catholic and Public School Systems in Saskatoon and associated with the SMEA (Saskatchewan Music Educators' Association) sponsored clinics, workshops, festivals and Summer Band Workshops. We all worked together and through this inter-support we shared teaching ideas, methods, as well as teaching materials. Later, the boards organized their own band teachers' groups. Our inter-contacts and supports of each other as instrumental music teachers still continue. Though I have been a grade 3, 4, or 5 classroom teacher for several years, my affinity and support for band teachers is still there. We still are clinicians for each other's workshops and empathize with teaching situations that are particularly peculiar to the teaching of instrumental music.

Since I have been able to observe and participate in many of the grade-alike sessions that have been the central focus of this Stirling McDowell ELA Project, I have been impressed with the intercommunication that has occurred throughout the year in each of the afternoon sessions. When I started teaching in the classroom several years ago, I found that I missed the support that my fellow band teachers had provided for me. I did a lot of asking, as much observing as I could find time and opportunity to do, and I begged, borrowed and bought teaching materials, but it was never the same as what our band groups had provided for me. Teachers sharing ideas, materials and methods on a face-to-face basis is truly a productive and supportive strategy to have in place for classroom teachers. It has been exciting to

have had the opportunity to be a part of this project. It shouldn't end here. The associations and sharing between classroom teachers needs to have continued support. (Teacher Participant)

- Collaboration made for quicker implementation because we actually had the time to look through the renewed curriculum, shared and discussed with colleagues. We tried new things in the classroom, especially after group discussions of what worked or didn't work. We adapted new ideas from group and combined these ideas with old ideas plus the curriculum suggestions to make more excited children in their work projects. I appreciated the unexpected gifts of resources. I was delighted with how well the children responded to the "Cinderella" ideas, and writing their own version. I used to think that novel studies were the way to go, but my eyes are wide open and I am doing much more integrated units. This was a fantastic experience! It would be nice if all PD were this interactive, positive and worthwhile. Money will always be a major stumbling block. (Teacher Participant, Grades Two-Three and Three-Four)
- Group sharing was extremely valuable. New "tried and true" ideas became available to use. Comments from colleagues who had previously tried new units were helpful to those who tried them later in the year. Professional development is far more inspiring, relevant, and useful when it is interactive, especially with teachers in grade-alike positions. Most often, lecture with handouts are soon forgotten. I took some "old" ideas, and modified them to fit the new curriculum. (Teacher Participant)

Conclusion

SUMMARY: TOWARDS A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS DELIBERATION

As the research concludes, feedback from participants overwhelmingly supports this particular learning community model for teacher professional development. Within a learning community culture established to develop ELA instruction and improve student learning, teacher participants experienced group practices including: reflection and contemplation; emotional affirmation and interconnection; inclusion of ideas, people, perspectives and information; group meaning-making through dialogue and processes of group-thought; and group processes fostering shared leadership.

The research experience moved participants towards a culture of continuous deliberation. Over time, discussion evolved from the sporadic, episodic, postured forms of discussion in pseudo-community, to authentic and genuine dialogue as trust, respect, value, and shared vision were shaped. Dialogue meshed official work objectives and intensely personal ones, whole and part, order and randomness, internal and external concerns, sameness and change, and task and process. These paradoxes created a dynamic learning tension within grade-groups, requiring participants to build new frameworks and conceptual understandings — to innovate, synthesize and grow. It was important to sustain dialogue over time, building towards “both-and” positions. The inclusion of information, people, processes and ideas gave rise to flexible thought systems leading to shared power, contemplative learning, a sense of safety and belonging. The result was a kind of contextually embedded respect that allowed differing views to be presented and examined gracefully, as all group members took part in shared leadership. This learning community research project built collective intelligence, wisdom, and a dynamic capacity to deal with change. Fullan (2001) writes, “In a nonlinear world, everything exists only in relation to everything else... interactions or relationships are the organizing principle” (p. 51). It was in the web of genuine relationships that teachers grew, fuelled by authenticity and a sense of mutual care.

Inclusive Inquiry embraces multiple viewpoints, methods, and beliefs. Inclusive Inquiry is supported by, and enmeshed within supportive ties of relationship in a community of teacher-learners, where the learning of each participant inspires and informs the learning of others. Personal needs and interests alone are not adequate to sustain the learning community engagement (personal needs and interests do not invariably lead to collaborative processes), but become substance informing the shape of shared knowledge and group thought within a dynamic learning community culture. In this professional development model, learning group interests are not separate from personal ones, but are irrevocably enmeshed so that personal professional development and the learning environment evolve synergistically — knowledge flows back and forth. The journey of teaching is not an ends-means endeavour, although teachers use specific learning targets and desired outcomes to shape the journey. Teachers-in-community build upon a continuum of process, shaping a culture of deliberation, reflection and experimentation. Patterns of interaction and dialogue are central to the process — indeed, **professional development within**

learning communities is iterative in nature, and the outcomes of the learning community dialogue are fuelled by collective interests. There were many forms of dialogue, and dialogue evolved over time.

Within a group of professional teachers sharing common goals, vision, and work positions, this learning community model of teacher professional development illustrates how “deep dialogue” around classroom practice shifts group culture towards new process norms of ongoing deliberation and inquiry, towards improved student learning. Conversation patterns around shaping and sharing knowledge are crucial, as information becomes knowledge through interactive group processes. Teacher participants did not only think about theory and ideology, but focused upon negotiating new knowledge that would directly inform, re-shape, and improve the learning of students.

GENERAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE STUDY

Learning community models focus upon shifting cultural norms. Fullan (2001) writes, “Leading in a culture of change means creating a culture (not just a structure) of change” (p. 44). Within this McDowell Foundation project, a culture of dialogue-as-process was formed that revealed, articulated, and remained mindful of substrata of knowledge, perspective, belief and passion, while negotiating towards desired learning outcomes for students. The more specific learning outcomes related to ELA renewal can be identified through DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) “team learning wheel” (p. 26) — a deep learning cycle based upon a foundation of shared mission, vision, and values, fuelling collective inquiry in four stages: public reflection, shared meaning, joint planning, and coordinated action. While shared vision, values, interaction, and learning cycles can be identified, DuFour and Eaker (1998) remind us that “focusing on culture *does not mean ignoring structure*” (p. 147, italics added). Indeed, within this research study, specific structures were consciously shaped to create the cultural conditions supporting and sustaining cycles of deep dialogue. Fullan (in Jossey-Bass, 2000) illuminates the relationship between culture and structure as he writes,

The emotionally intelligent leader also helps teachers, students, parents, and others create an environment of support, one in which people see problems not as weaknesses but as issues to be solved. Managing emotionally means putting a high priority on reculturing, not merely restructuring. Restructuring refers to changes in the formal structure of schooling in terms of organization, timetables, roles, and the like. Restructuring bears no direct relationship to improvement in teaching and learning. Reculturing, by contrast, involves changing the norms, values, incentives, skills, and relationships in the organization to foster a different way of working together. Reculturing makes a difference in teaching and learning. (pp. 160, 161, italics in original)

This study informs future leadership and learning community design by revealing that structure and culture must be considered simultaneously. Building “efficacy” for teachers, and the experience of negotiating meanings together revealed harmony and discord at the same time. Fullan (2001) speaks to building on differences and operating in the zone of paradox (p. 41), but ultimately in trusting in the process to forge understandings based upon the underpinnings of moral purpose, shared vision and authentic relationships. Issues surrounding learning communities as a form of professional development

are multi-faceted, requiring attention to overall outcomes, while striving to attain optimal balances of group process variables that remain in flux. With regard to the specific learning community shaped in this one-year research study, several questions arise:

Have those who actively participated in this K-5 teacher learning community built sufficient collective capacity to sustain learning engagements beyond the research mandate, and continue despite changes in administrative leadership, research site, and grade-group membership?

Will this professional development model and process continue in a different form, with different content, across different curricular areas?

What processes currently exist that support learning communities and inform teachers to “learn to do the ‘right thing’ in the setting where they work” (Fullan, 2001, p. 125)?

Within schools and school systems, how does the current institutional structure enable or disable the development of learning communities?

ISSUES OF LEADERSHIP ARISING FROM THE STUDY

Fullan (2001) warns that

Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong. Moral purpose, good ideas, focusing on results, and obtaining the views of dissenters, are essential, because they mean that the organization is focusing on the right things. Leadership, once again, comes to the fore. The role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results. (pp. 67-68)

Interactive learning environments require a variety of leadership supports in and through learning community culture. As complexity theory informs us, to operate in zones of paradox requires flexible and responsive leadership. Fullan (2001) writes, “The role of leadership is to cause greater capacity in the organization in order to get better results (learning)” (p. 65). Building greater capacity in complex organizations is a long-term process, with relationships, contexts, and processes ever-shifting factors. Beyond the kind of leadership required, it is necessary for leadership to be embedded throughout the learning institution, and throughout specific learning communities. Fullan, (2001, p. 123) cites Claxton regarding situations of complexity: “One needs to soak up the experience of complex domains... to extract subtle, contingent patterns that are latent within it.” Just such practices occurred as co-researchers debriefed, and planned itineraries for the grade-group meetings in this study. Many forms of ongoing shared leadership and collaborative dialogue led to the positive outcomes of this teacher learning community research project.

The leader becomes a context setter and the designer of a learning experience, keeping in mind that the context itself is not fixed. Fullan (2001) suggests that leadership must consider simultaneously “letting go and reining in” (p. 107), and moving towards coherence while realizing that “persistent coherence is a

dangerous thing” (p. 108). Fullan quotes Pascale et al. who advise new leaders to “design more than engineer, discover more than dictate, and decipher more than presuppose” (Pascale et al. in Fullan, 2001, p. 115). Fullan (2003) writes that “reform is not possible without paying attention to establishing the conditions for continuous reform” (2003, p. xii). Leadership across the learning organization must consider the impact of learning communities as a model of professional development for teachers, as these questions are considered:

What structures and provisions are required to create lateral leadership and shared leadership around learning communities in schools?

How will issues of limited funding impact on possible implementation of learning community models for teacher professional development?

What time frames, structures, and supports currently exist to support dialogue that sustains learning community culture within schools and across school divisions?

BROADSCALE ISSUES ARISING FROM THE STUDY

Broad domains of literature look to the future of learning community models for teacher professional development. At the centre of conceptions of future opportunities to learning-in-community are issues of: diversity, complexity, theory, measurement and assessment, leadership, and capacity and sustainability. Informing these issues, Deal and Peterson (1999) write:

Paradox versus opportunity, standards versus spirit, test scores versus stories — the list of dilemmas school leaders will face in the coming century goes on and on. But in our view, unless we can restore the sacred stature of education, very little will help us achieve our hopes, and dreams. Teachers need once again to believe in themselves and relish the opportunities they have to make a real difference. Communities need to re-examine the role schools play in society, that is, the role of balancing cognitive achievement with character development.

...Too often, schools are asked to master the wrong lessons about what makes a successful organization tick. Clear goals, rational structures, high standards, and accountability are only part of why a business succeeds. The real lesson is how business leaders are able to infuse passion and purpose into an enterprise and to build a common spirit and cohesive culture. (p. 140)

Fullan, in *The Journal of the National Staff Development Council* (2003), eloquently advises:

People in schools should not take shortcuts in their search for clarity and solutions. They need to engage with all kind of ideas to improve what they are doing, but not adopt external programs that foster dependency...

Whole-school reform models make the mistake of thinking that a comprehensive external reform model will solve the coherence problem within schools. It doesn't work because it feeds into the dependency of teachers and principals. In other words, when schools or districts adopt external models, which in itself is not always a bad thing, they fail to focus on changing the culture of the school, and consequently the models fail to become embedded...

Changing the culture is even more important because it establishes norms of continuous interaction. So, information becomes knowledge through a social process. And knowledge becomes wisdom through sustained interaction.

...As David Cohen, Richard Elmore, and others have argued, teachers need daily, in-depth opportunities to build up the knowledge and capacity to carry out the deeper reforms envisaged in the best curriculum frameworks. This requires a radical change in the norms and working conditions of teachers and, in fact, the teaching profession as a whole. (p. 57)

Peter Senge (1999) writes:

Sustaining any profound change process requires a fundamental shift in thinking. We need to understand the nature of growth processes (forces that aid our efforts) and how to catalyze them. But we also need to understand the forces and challenges that impede progress, and to develop workable strategies for dealing with these challenges. We need to appreciate “the dance of change”, the inevitable interplay between growth processes and limiting processes. As Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana puts it, “Every movement is being inhibited as it occurs.” This is nature’s way. We can either work with it, or work against it.

This requires us to think of sustaining change more biologically and less mechanistically. It requires patience as well as urgency. It requires a real sense of inquiry, a genuine curiosity about limiting forces. It requires seeing how significant change invariable starts locally, and how it grows over time. And it requires recognizing the diverse array of people who play key roles in sustaining change — people who are “leaders”. (p. 10)

From the research experience just concluded, and the directions suggested in the preceding quotations, the following questions emerge:

What foundational understandings need to be built in public education to illuminate the nature of collaborative processes in teacher professional learning?

”Living systems cannot be directed along a linear path. Unforeseen consequences are inevitable. The challenge is to disturb them in a manner that approximates the desired outcome.” (Pascale et al. in Fullan, 2001, pp. 108-109)

If the previous quotation is true, how does a learning organization strategically “disturb” to effect an approximate desired outcome, while honouring human relationships?

How do we determine the overall effectiveness of learning communities? What indicators are significant, and how do we measure effectiveness?

How can large, diverse institutions apply knowledge of interactive learning community models and constructivist designs to inform professional development initiatives?

As the Research Project Ends: Closing Thoughts from Trudy Capes and Deborah Mann

This research proved to be a challenge in its size, its multi-grade structure, and the wealth of knowledge and implications arising from this learning community experience. The processes of community are not tidy or predictable, nor do learning outcomes lead to equilibrium. Learning community models for professional development are powerful because dynamic learning processes are applied towards building meanings and continuously adapting practice. When teachers-in-community understand that processes of building relationships and culture promise to shape better learning opportunities for their students and themselves, great potentials can be realized. Parker Palmer (1998) reminds us that teaching is a human endeavour to be built within a scaffold of caring professional relationships and appreciation – that inner ground should be cultivated and respected. Teachers need safe ground in complex times. Administrators and teachers cannot be complacent.

As a model of professional development, learning communities build knowledge through ongoing dialogue. Information flow was successful in this Stirling McDowell Foundation research project, because information moved top-down, laterally (reciprocally) between group members, and from the bottom-up, as research cycles require ongoing feedback. Information flow has everything to do with perceived power and teacher efficacy. Traditional models of professional development often position teachers to attend to top-down information and directives and may allow for lateral discussion, but they may not offer vigorous and ongoing avenues for feedback. Principles of good human resource management — in particular, the ability to welcome ongoing feedback and acknowledge its place in the learning organization — is central to successful learning community culture.

Fullan (2001, p. 82) informs us that microcommunities of creative thinkers are likely to emerge in cultures of knowledge creation and sharing. Thomas and Roberts (in Senge, 1999) identify three positions to strategic thinking: those who are not interested or capable of strategy (p. 522); those who are strategically dormant, but can be involved and can learn strategic awareness (p. 523); and those who are “natural strategists, born into that mindset. They are drawn to all these activities — and will not thrive unless they can take part in strategy. Not to involve them would represent a tragic waste” (p. 523). Other groups within learning communities can emerge, presenting resistance and dissension. Learning communities, as democratic forums, require an understanding that a critical, dissenting, or resistant view is not to be ignored; dissenting voices signal legitimate concerns about content, perspective, and thought. Fullan (2001) writes,

”Defining effective leadership as appreciating resistance is another one of those remarkable discoveries. Dissent is seen as a potential source of new ideas and

breakthroughs. The absence of conflict can be a sign of decay” (pp. 74-75). Any shift in curriculum that is legitimate and democratic can stand the test of a critical view, or creative and strategic thinking, and no one view has a monopoly on truth. It is reassuring to revisit the foundations of democracy and understand that it is founded upon forging shared vision from a cacophony of dissenting voices that represent an array of situated wisdom and experience.

The particular dynamics that enabled this research project “to flow” had everything to do with the relationship of a principal and teacher who focused together to enable a learning community to shape itself. It took both of us to envision this McDowell research project, and the energy, commitment, and care of nearly sixty colleagues to give it life. For both of us as co-researchers, the experience was challenging, meaningful, and raised myriad questions that do not have clear answers. Ultimately, the end of this research mandate means letting go, and trusting in teacher participants to continue to seek meaningful, enriching, caring conversations with others around instructional practice.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: SAMPLES OF GRADE-GROUP MEETING AGENDAS

The following examples are selected as samples of agendas employed throughout the research experience.

THE FIRST STIRLING MCDOWELL RESEARCH AFTERNOON

(Grade-alike Groups from September 30-Oct 4, 2002)

A message and a few thoughts for our research participants regarding what our first afternoon together will look like:

Welcome. This is a community of learners... It's okay not to know the answers...

The question wall...

The "Eureka" wall...

Feel free to bring student work, personal anecdotes, and/or resources if you would like.

Please bring your K-5 ELA curriculum guide to the afternoon sessions.

Our room is our room for the duration of the research... Issues for function, access, etc. will be addressed in the first meeting.

Chairpersons for each of the meetings will rotate, beginning with Lawson Heights staff.

Suggested Afternoon Agenda:

1:00 - 1:30 Ice Breaker and Introductions

1:30 - 2:15 Thinking, Brainstorming, Sharing, Discussion and Dialogue to reconnect to the renewed ELA curriculum — What are we now doing (am I now doing) that fits with the six strands identified in the renewed document?

2:15 - 3:00 Coffee, and look at resources from four different publishers — displays set up in our meeting room.

3:00 - 3:30 Reflection, sharing, and feedback (use sheets provided)

GUIDE FOR THE 3RD AFTERNOON TOGETHER IN OUR NORTH-END LEARNING COMMUNITY

(January 13-17, 2003)

This week's emphasis, as always, is to provide the opportunity for us to build a professional learning community. Because we are using the K-5 ELA as the vehicle for building our learning community, the activities today will focus our thinking on the similarities that exist within instruction and assessment across core curricula and help each of us determine in our own reflection the extent that we use the similarities to support learning and streamline planning.

1. Welcome
2. In groups of six, share student work that you brought from your class.
3. From the lists of instructional strategies and assessment tools/techniques provided (lists are provided in focus room), circle the strategies/tools that you use in more than one subject area or across subject areas.
4. With a partner sort the strategies/tools/techniques that you have circled. Sort the strategies/tools/techniques onto the flip charts provided. Strategies and techniques that: a) incorporate a high degree of student involvement, b) inspire creative or critical thought in students, c) empowers interaction between students, d) facilitates student choice and independent study, and facilitates e) exploration and inquiry.
5. Choose one or two strategies/tools/techniques from the circled lists that would be useful to: a) learn more about and b) implement in more than one subject area or class that you teach. Write in your journals which one(s) you selected, and... *Take a few moments to write in your journal the following possible reflections regarding strategies/tools/techniques. Are there some similarities in terms of types of instructional strategies and assessment tools and techniques — that you tend to avoid? If so, what similarities? If you learned to implement one strategy of this type effectively, would it support your implementation of other similar strategies or tools/techniques?*
6. Mini lesson by an instructional consultant on how to design a rubric.
7. What do we need next time?

THE 4TH STIRLING MCDOWELL RESEARCH AFTERNOON

(February 24-28, 2003)

Today's Schedule:

1:00 Welcome

1:15 - 2:15 VALIDATION of this type of professional development (half-day professional grade-alike learning groups) ...or not...or partly and this is what we should change... or it could look like this. *Our ultimate goal, as always, is to provide an opportunity for us to build a professional learning community. Through using the K-5 ELA as a vehicle for building our learning community we have through personal professional growth processes been provided with some opportunity for curriculum reflection, curriculum inquiry, and curriculum networking. In Classroom Curriculum Connections: A Teacher's Handbook for Personal-Professional Growth, each of the processes are described as unique, and offer us as teachers the opportunity for different forms of learning. Hopefully in our time together you have been provided with some opportunities to:*

Increase your/our understanding of teaching/learning situations.

Expand your/our repertoire of instructional and assessment techniques.

Strengthen your/our support systems, including collegial relationships.

The ultimate goal of these activities has been to, through the building of professional learning community, strengthen teaching and increase opportunities for student learning.

- 1:15 In partners, read through the package together (photocopies of sections of the *Curriculum Connections* document), highlighting activities that you think have been supported by our research afternoons.
- 1:45 With your partner make a poster (chart, diagram, picture, web, lists depicting what we have learned, suggestions for improvement of our meeting time, what other things you would like to discuss, interesting things that have happened — use ideas you have highlighted or any other ideas you would like to add. Please put your names on the posters.
- 2:00 Post and share your charts with the group.
- 2:15 Coffee
- 2:30 Video K-1 Teachers — phonemic awareness — discussion
Grades 2-3 Teachers —Using Word Walls — discussion
Grades 4-5 Teachers — After the End — discussion
- 3:15 Group Brainstorm for suggestions of what to learn about, and the format you would like for the next meeting.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLES OF DATA GATHERING TOOLS, QUESTIONNAIRES, FEEDBACK SHEETS

Examples of data gathering tools, questionnaires, feedback sheets:

A. *SAMPLE FEEDBACK SHEET*

Things I would like the network to discuss, explore, work on...

Those practices (teaching methods, strategies, evaluation/assessment techniques) I am most interested in learning more about right now include:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

A subject area in which I am interested in strengthening my teaching is:

_____ because _____.

Other topics I am interested in exploring include:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

A specific concern I have in relation to teaching and learning is:

Curriculum projects I would like to work on include (e.g. developing units, pooling/evaluating resources):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. QUESTIONS FOR STIRLING MCDOWELL RESEARCH:

1. How has your vision of professional development evolved as a result of this experience?
2. What have you personally achieved in this professional development process that has not occurred before? What aspects of your experience contributed most significantly to your learning?
3. What information emerged in your discussions that was not present in curriculum or SaskEd Documents?
4. Have you identified areas you want to learn more about in the future? If so, what are they, and what fuels your interest?
5. Will this research project inform/influence, shape your professional development in the future? If so, how?

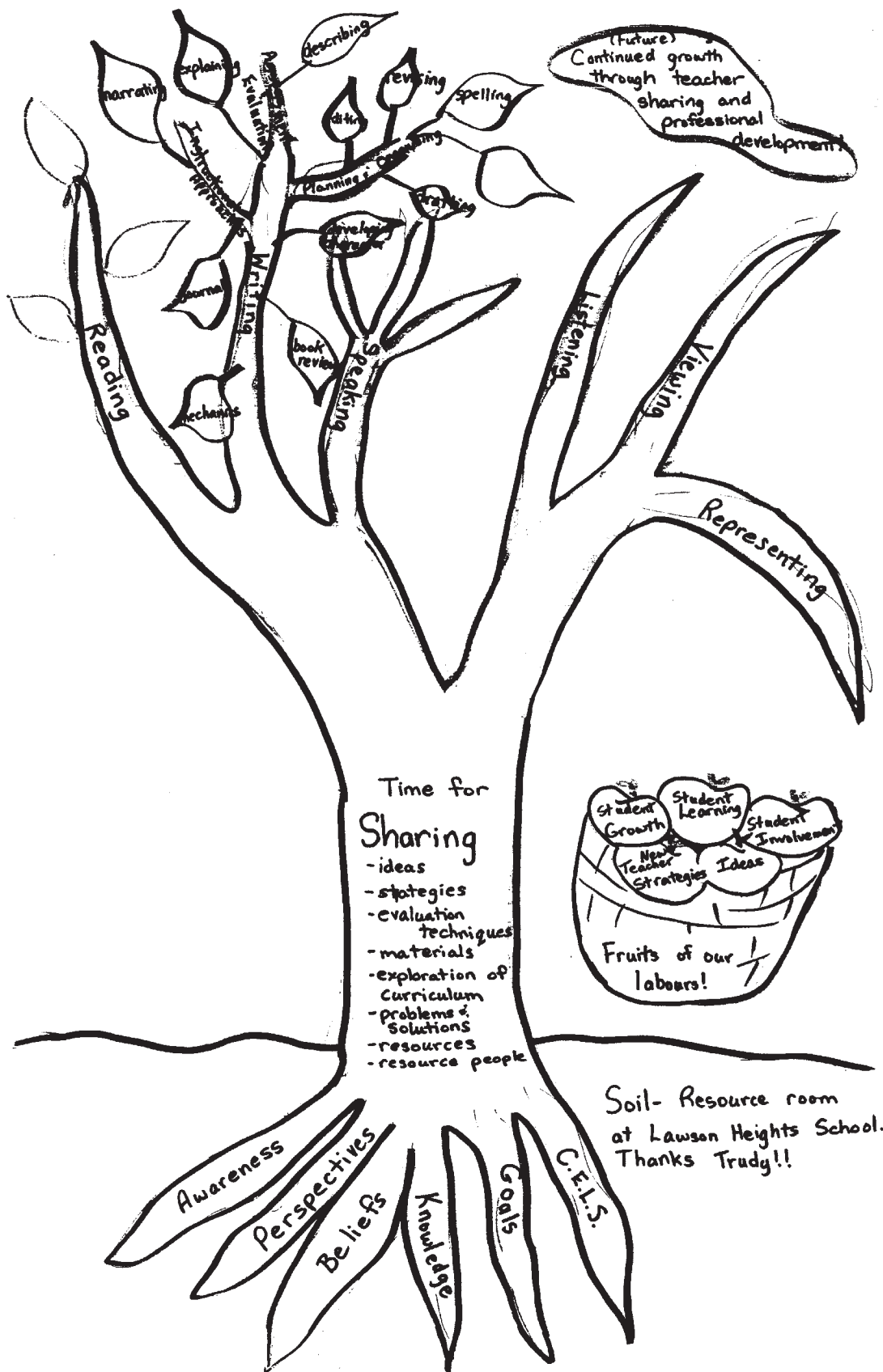
6. What are the limitations of the process? What are some suggestions to reshape the process to improve teacher collaboration sessions?
7. Please share one or two learning highlights that occurred as a result of this professional development experience.

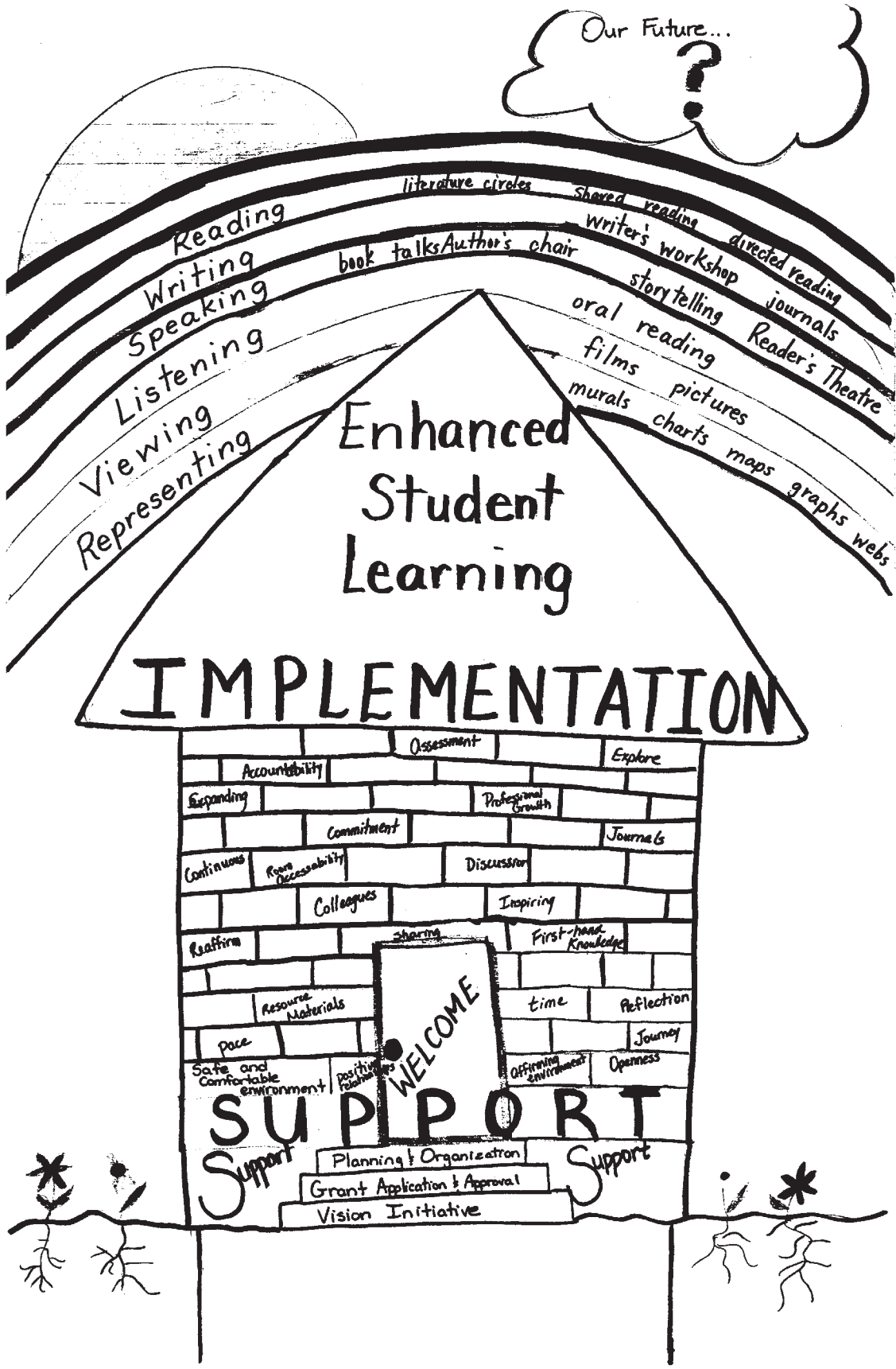
C. COMPLETE THE RESEARCH: QUESTIONS AND THOUGHTS TO PONDER IN YOUR WRITING, OR COMPLETELY FREE WRITING TIME, OR A COMBINATION...

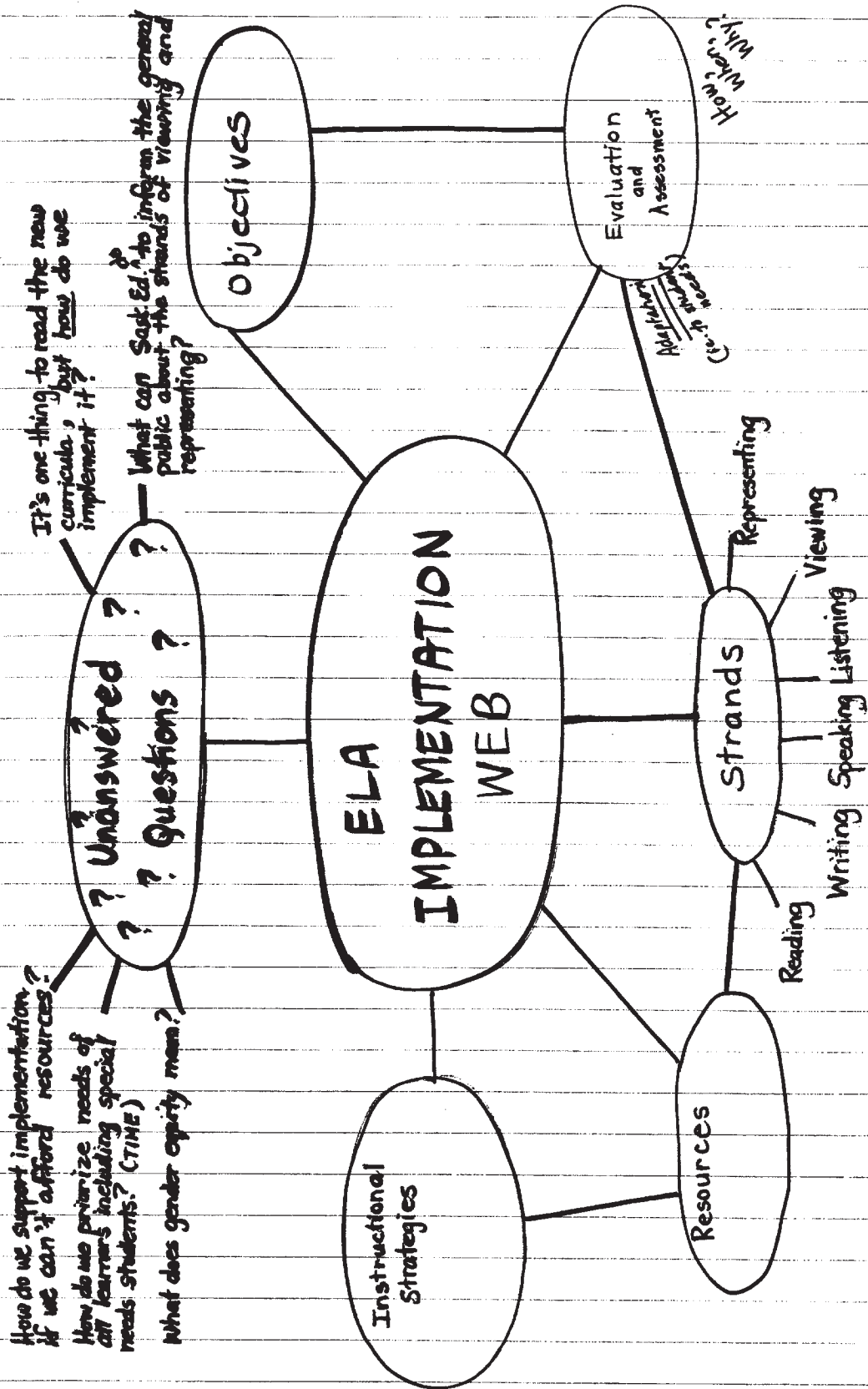
1. In what specific ways has this research experience impacted positively on student learning in your classroom (i.e. any changed results from anything you may have tried)?
2. Write an interesting anecdote from your classroom related to something we talked about.
3. Serendipity — a neat thing that happened, an unexpected surprise/congruity, a happy moment...
4. Metacognition — thinking about thinking — Were there any shifts that occurred in your thinking as teachers shared and as you worked in your classroom. (Example: I used to think that.....Then x said or x happened, and I Now I think)
5. "A day/afternoon in the life" — the research experience.
6. Craft knowledge: What specific things did colleagues offer (not included in the curriculum) that inspired you?
7. How will you approach PD in the future?
8. Are there some things you became aware of in the classroom and modified because of the research experience?

D. OTHER

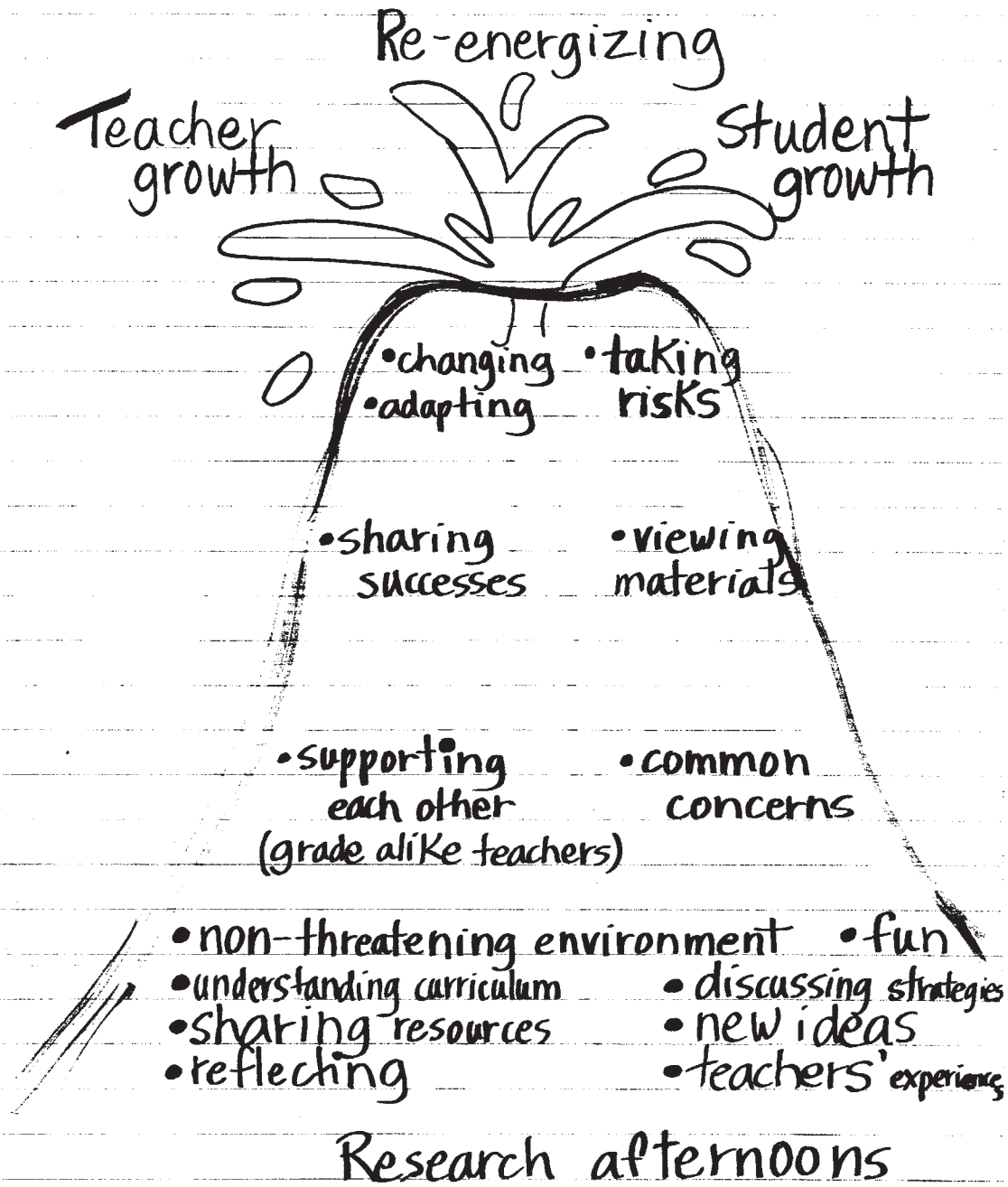
Other forms of feedback included: charts generated by teacher participants, documents (photocopied of pages from the Curriculum Connections teacher handbook, highlighted and written upon — comments, reflections, questions, etc.), as well as anecdotal records and the visual representations in **Appendix C**, following.







Explosion of Ideas



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