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Monograph Series
No. 2

Building Leadership Capacity - Sustainable
Leadership

Auckland Maungakiekie Principals' Group Action
Research Project 2009-2010

Eileen Piggot-Irvine (researcher)
plus principals:
Darryl Connelly, Robyn Curry, Judy Hanna,
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Abstract

This monograph outlines an action research project that was a learning journey for a group of New Zealand principals who wanted to improve the way that they addressed problems with their staff. The principals committed to exploring how they could overcome their defensive ways of operating in such stressful situations. Their goal was to use dialogue to be open and therefore trusted by staff. The typical action research phases of reconnaissance, implementation and evaluation were followed. Multiple outcomes resulted for the group and their staff with the most important that concerns/problems with staff *were* confronted via the use of dialogue and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this was done in a way that maintained relationships that were based on values of honesty and integrity.

This paper has been written collaboratively with the principals, with the plural 'we' outlining a report of the learning journey from their perspective.

Introduction and Background

We are a diverse group of seven primary school principals in Auckland, New Zealand, who form the Maungakiekie Principals' Group (MPG). Demographic information about our schools is included in Table 1 and this shows our diversity in decile (socio-economic rating of our community, with 1 the lowest, 10 highest), size of our senior management teams (deputy and associate principals), number of Full Time Teacher Equivalents (FTTE), number of support/administration staff, the student roll, and then a breakdown into student ethnicity by percentage.

Table 1: Participating Schools and Profile (as at 1 July 2009)

School	Decile	Principals (Research Team Members)	No. Snr Man. Team (incl. principals)	No. Tchrs FTTE	No. Support Staff	School Roll	Ethnicities by Percentage			
							Māori	Pasifika	NZ European	Other
Waterlea	6	Margaret Palmer	3	18	9	395	20	26	45	9
Mangere Bridge	4	Judy Hanna	6	18.5	12	367	29	38	25	8
Royal Oak Intermediate	4	Darryl Connelly	3	25	7	530	13	49	13	35
Onehunga Primary	4	Mavis Moodie	3	20	9	376	10	46	20	24
St Joseph's	3	Andy Thompson	4	16	16	284	5	75	5	15
Oranga	3	Diana Peri	5	19	11	332	17	56	17	10
Te Papapa	2e	Robyn Curry	3	11	12	214	20	69	6	5
Totals		7	7	126	76	2498				

As the MPG group, we all attended a New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society (NZEALS) workshop presented by Andy Hargreaves (Hargreaves, 2009) from Lynch School of Education at Boston College Massachusetts. This workshop was on 'The Fourth Way of Leadership Change' and looked at the five pillars of purpose and partnership, the three principles of professionalism and the four catalysts of coherence. The workshop also looked at seven principles of sustainable leadership. The latter became a catalyst for us to explore action research development project for the MPG. Subsequent to the NZEALS workshop, we met for two days in March 2009 to discuss the focus of an action research project. Assoc. Prof. Eileen Piggot-Irvine was engaged to act as a facilitator for the group. During our two days together we revised our understanding of what the overall scope of an action research project might look like and reviewed current literature on effective principalship.

At the heart of this action research project was learning as leaders how to improve the educational and social outcomes for all students in our Maungakiekie schools. The initial, general, focus of this project was to:
- explore what the research suggests for effective leadership activities and dimensions; and
- assist us as principals to use leadership tools to meet the challenges of leadership.

The following sections of this paper outline the action research approach adopted, followed by a description of the activity and results at each of the three phases in action research, that is, reconnaissance, implementation and evaluation. Our concluding reflections and

suggestions for further improvement follow the three phase outline and a reflective comment from Eileen as facilitator finalises the paper.

Action Research Defined

Like most research approaches, action research has become increasingly difficult to brand (McGee, 2008). Kurt Lewin (1946) and others (Cardno, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Gustavsen, 2006; Lewin, 1946; McGee, 2008), suggest that research that does not lead to change and improvement is inadequate and further that it must express theory and feedback into practice. Bearing this suggestion in mind, action research has application in a broad range of educational and business fields as researchers seek to understand problems involving people, tasks, or procedures that require a solution (Koshy, 2005; Lewin, 1946). Research in general is about creating new knowledge; action research is about creating new knowledge based on inquiry in a specific and practical context as well as expanding scientific knowledge (Gronhaug & Olson, 1999; Hult & Lennung, 1980; Koshy, 2005; Somekh, 1995). Cohen et al. (2007) cite seven examples where action research can be used effectively. Specifically in education, action research can be used for exploring teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluative procedures, attitudes and values, professional development, management and control of students, and administrative efficacy. Essentially, action research as a knowledge creation tool, seeks to bridge the gap between research and practice (Somekh, 1995).

If we accept that the purpose of action research is an inquiry to produce practical or actionable knowledge for social change, as referred to by the researchers above, then it seems that defining action research should be simple. However, Reason and Bradbury (2006) and others (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002; Gronhaug & Olson, 1999; Zuber-Skerritt, 2001) state emphatically that there is no short answer to what action research is and that the term is dynamic in nature. This is simply because large groups have differing beliefs and values that describe the practice (Hinchey, 2008). Hault and Lennung (1980), in seeking to define action research through a literature review, discovered that not only were there a large number of definitions but that particular institutions had their 'traditions' when it came to defining and using action research. A working definition we might start with describes action research as a participatory, democratic, process that seeks to develop practical knowledge and understanding related to human purposes (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). Other researchers tend to tease out this definition. For example, action research is: a type of collective investigation carried out by research participant that is self-reflective in nature (Altrichter, et al., 2002; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988); an inquiry to constantly refine practice (Koshy, 2005); and a deliberate systematic reflective inquiry from within (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007).

Alternatively, the components of the concept of action research can also be broken down. Cardno (2003) states that *action* refers to lack of acceptance of the status quo and that change/improvement is being looked for. The word *research* points to a systematic exploration or examination of the topic. Using this as a basis to define action research, and considering Lewin's (1946) belief about the need for research to make a difference, each of the above definitions involves to a greater or lesser degree three core things: participants; collective or democratic participatory processes; and inquiry for improvement. Perhaps one of the most telling statements about action research was made by Reason and Bradbury (2006) who state that action without reflection and understanding is blind.
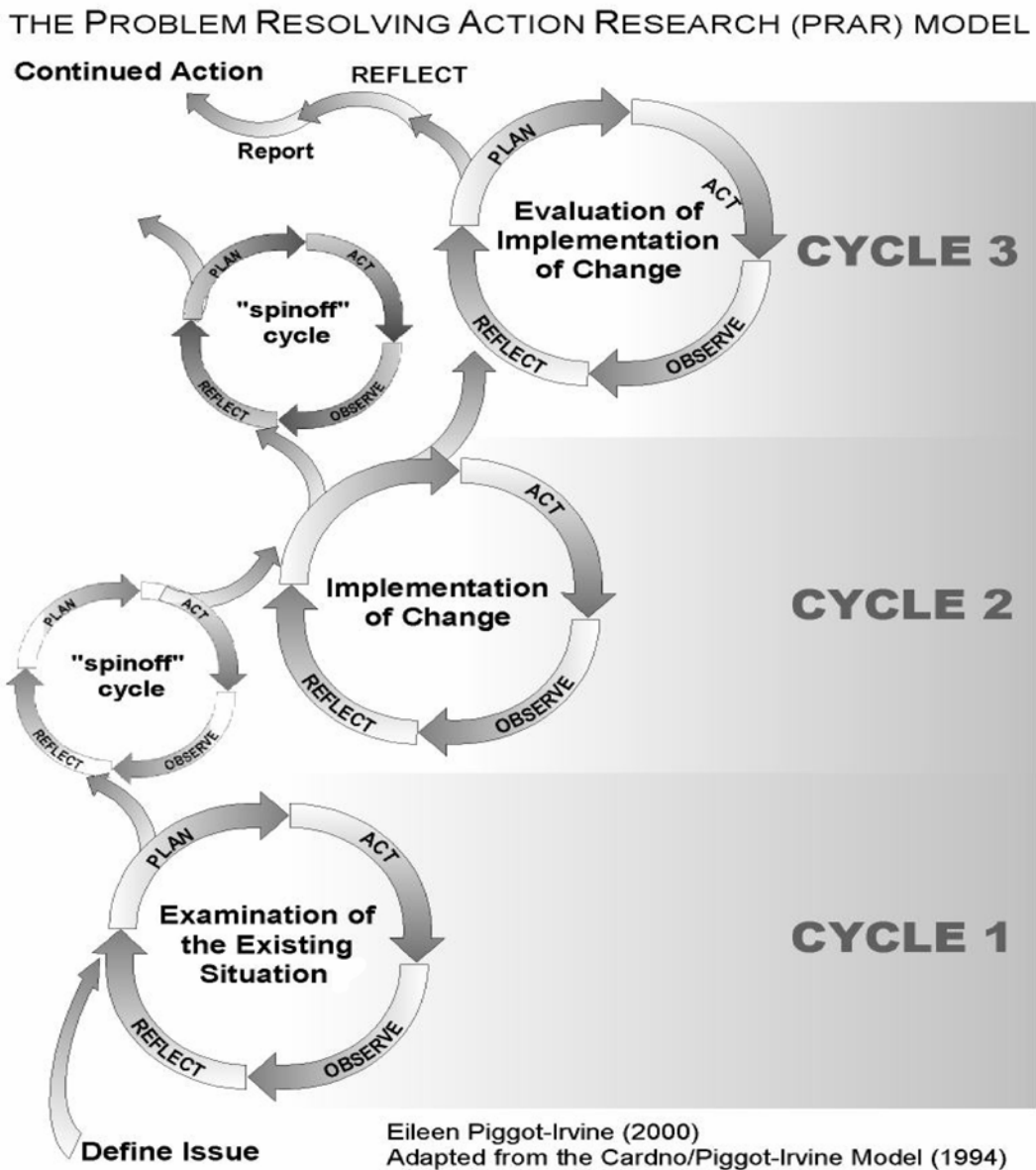
The Action Research Approach Adopted for this Project

In the MPG project an action research model was used to create a dialogical interchange of ideas between us as principals and to investigate the relationship between theory and practice, thus providing professional growth for those of us participating. The action research project, however, was more than the type of action learning that we had previously experienced. Action learning has restricted emphasis on evidence/data collection and does not have a requirement for public accountability. Action research has expectations of explanations of the methodology and use of methods for gathering data so that they can be publicly scrutinised.

The Problem Resolving Action Research, PRAR, (Piggot-Irvine, 2000), model was used for our project. This model (Figure 1) has a number of features common to other action research approaches. It is iterative, experiential, context specific, developmental, transformative, data-based reflective, collaborative and includes public accountability. In addition the PRAR model has additional characterising features. These are:

- spin–offs, recognising that unexpected issues are likely to arise;
- problem–solving dialogical interchanges which involves discussion, reflection and debate about the findings by the researchers; and
- a narrowing of the theory-practice gap and rejecting the requirement for practice to precede theory. Theory and practice are seen in a reciprocal relationship, informing each other and being mutually interdependent.

Fig.1

THE PROBLEM RESOLVING ACTION RESEARCH (PRAR) MODEL

Continued Action   REFLECT

Report

PLAN   Evaluation of Implementation of Change   ACT   CYCLE 3

"spinoff" cycle

REFLECT   OBSERVE

ACT

Implementation of Change   CYCLE 2

"spinoff" cycle

REFLECT   OBSERVE

PLAN   Examination of the Existing Situation   ACT   CYCLE 1

REFLECT   OBSERVE

Define Issue

Eileen Piggot-Irvine (2000)
Adapted from the Cardno/Piggot-Irvine Model (1994)

Defining the Issue and Reconnaissance

The first phase of our action research project involved clearly defining the issue to be improved upon, followed by the reconnaissance, or an examination of the existing situation.

When looking at the focus area our discussion began to crystalise on the correlation between the national defined professional standards for principals (Ministry of Education, 1999, shown in full in Appendix 1) and the national model of leadership presented in the 'Kiwi Leadership for Principals', KLP, document (Ministry of Education, 2008). This latter model is designed to reflect "the qualities, knowledge and skills required to lead New Zealand schools from the

present to the future" (p.5). After looking carefully at the four areas of 'practice' in the principals' professional standards and the descriptors that accompany them, the group (see Appendix 1) decided to focus their attention on the area of 'pedagogical leadership' – 'the creation of a learning environment in which there is an expectation that all students will experience success in learning'.

We also had significant discussion around school culture and it was felt that one of the professional standard descriptors in this area of practice was also worthy of inclusion in the issue to be researched. This standard was 'to promote a culture whereby staff members take on appropriate leadership roles and work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning'. This element fitted in with the focus of building leadership capacity and sustainability of leadership in our schools. The group finally decided to investigate in more detail the descriptors from the principals' professional standards that are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Areas from Professional Standards Selected for Investigation

Areas of practice	Professional Standards
CULTURE Provide professional leadership that focuses the school culture on enhancing learning and teaching.	• Promote a culture whereby staff members take on appropriate leadership roles and work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning. • Model respect for others in interactions with adults and students • Manage conflict and other challenging situations effectively and actively work to achieve solutions. • Demonstrate leadership through participating in professional learning.
PEDAGOGY Create a learning environment in which there is an expectation that all students will experience success in learning.	• Promote, participate in and support ongoing professional learning linked to student progress. • Demonstrate leadership through engaging with staff and sharing knowledge about effective teaching and learning in the context of the New Zealand curriculum documents. • Ensure staff members engage in professional learning to establish and sustain effective teacher / learner relationships with all students, with a particular focus on Māori students. • Ensure that the review and design of school programmes is informed by school-based and other evidence. • Maintain a professional learning community within which staff members are provided with feedback and support on their professional practice.

Once we had decided upon these general areas for a focus for the action research we then embarked on the reconnaissance phase.

Reconnaissance: Examination of the Existing Situation

The initial research required two stages to the reconnaissance phase. The first involved issuing a questionnaire to staff covering the focus area in broad terms in order to scope the issue and allow for further drilling down to a specific focus. The second stage of the reconnaissance was for the group to become more theoretically informed about the specific focus.

Reconnaissance Stage 1

We decided to formulate a questionnaire (Appendix 2) for teaching staff to assess how successfully the schools in the project were achieving 'a learning environment in which there is an expectation that all students will experience success in learning'. Each of the seven professional standards selected were then expanded into indicators which teachers were asked to rate on a five point scale, as shown in Appendix 2. An opportunity was provided for participants to write a comment related to one of the seven areas. The demographics of the group, that is, years of teaching, registration status and leadership roles were also collected.

The questionnaire was circulated to 126 teachers; by email to 101 teachers in six of the schools, and in hard copy to 25 teachers in the seventh school. A total of 111 teachers responded. The questionnaire was anonymous and to assist in maintaining the integrity of the anonymity in the collation process the questionnaires from six schools were forwarded by email directly to a data analyst.

Data from the questionnaire were presented to the group in graphical form. Each of us as principals received for our school:
- a whisker graph showing our individual school's collated responses to the 20 questions in the questionnaire;
- a whisker graph showing the sum total of all respondents, from all schools, to the 20 questions in the questionnaire;
- a comparative whisker graph showing our individual school's results to each question alongside the results for the whole group;
- a bar graph showing the number of teachers from all schools who responded 'Don't Know' to some of the 20 questions (the numbers from individual schools did not warrant individual graphs);
- a bar graph showing the teaching experience of the respondents from each school;
- a bar graph showing the teaching experience of the teachers across all schools; and
- a bar graph showing the leadership roles held by respondents.

The majority of teachers did not avail themselves of the opportunity to write comments after each section. The only three comments received related to the respondents not being at the school long enough to make a judgement.

Examples of the whisker graphs are included as Appendix 3, as is comment on the confidence levels associated with the results. Overall the results show that there were no obvious highs and lows with scores ranging from 3 to 3.7/5. There was very little differentiation in the scores within and across our schools.

Using the data, each of us as principals identified items of most significance to our school. These significant items were then discussed with our group to find common threads and priorities. The discussion required us to be open and honest as each reflected on both our own school's needs and our personal skill set and experience. The discussions were informed by reference to the School Leadership Best Evidence Synthesis, BES (Robinson, 2007), the New Zealand Curriculum, NZC (Ministry of Education, 2007), and the KLP (Ministry of Education, 2008). As a result of the conversation about the data we all decided to focus on questions 10 and 16, that is:

Question 10: Leaders in our school actively promote professional development/ learning related directly to effective teacher learner relationships.

Question 16: The leadership of our learning community challenge and support staff to inquire into their professional practice.

Both these questions fell within the 'Pedagogy' dimension of the Professional Standards for Primary Principals as shown in Table 2.

We realised that we needed to have an update on some of the fundamentals of effective leadership that specifically focuses on developing open, high trust, interactions. We believed that to create trust and to engage in challenge and support with staff we needed to begin by overcoming our own defensiveness. We spent several hours with Eileen examining the principles and practice of non-defensive ways of leading in order to quickly update (or review for many) ourselves with this topic. We realised that the next stage of the reconnaissance phase required us to deepen our theoretical understanding by conducting a literature review on the topic aligned to these items, that is, 'the leadership of our learning community challenges and supports staff to inquire into their professional practice'. This led us to the next stage of the reconnaissance phase of the action research.

Reconnaissance Stage 2

The initial step in our literature review was to brainstorm the key elements of the topic. These are illustrated in Figure 2 and further elaborated in the following summary resultant from our literature review.

Fig. 2: Brainstorm of Key Search Words and Phrases
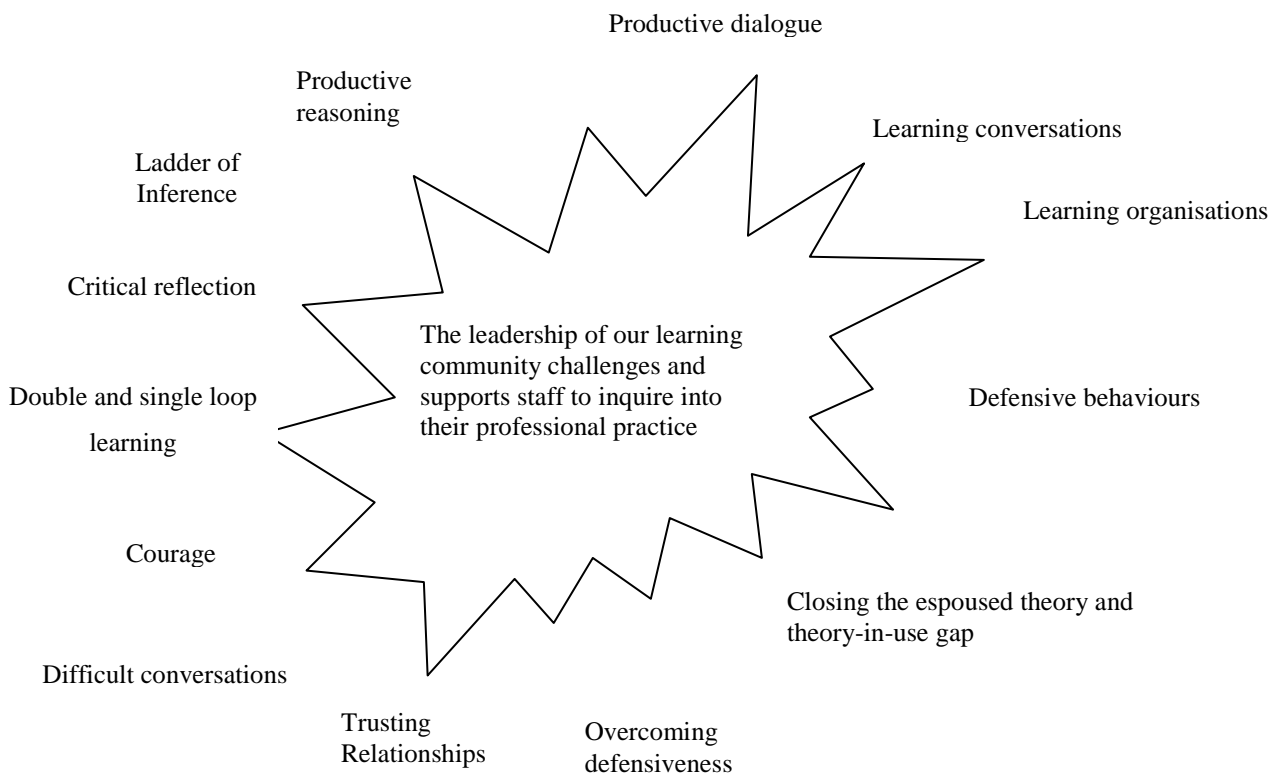
Effective principals are considered to be able to combine simultaneously both tackling educational challenges and developing relationships (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009) and such relationships are seen to be based on values of honesty and integrity (Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010). Leaders therefore need to manage the balance between both supporting and challenging others while managing relationships (Ministry of Education, 2008). This may all seem straight forward in theory but in reality it is complex. The complexities lie with 'people issues' and the need for leaders to learn skills to lead change and problem solve (Argyris, 1991; Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1996; Hargreaves, 2009; Notman & Henry, 2009; Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010; Robertson, 2005; Robinson, 2002). Each of these will be discussed in turn.

The 'people issues' usually arise when leaders and teachers inquiring into their practice often experience uncomfortable emotions and display defensive behaviours as they analyse their practice, receive feedback and make changes (Annan, Lai & Robinson, 2003; Cardno, 1995). Argyris, (1991) believes that leaders need to be courageous to tackle these complexities of responses. We suggest that courage is associated with dealing with both our own uncomfortable emotions and defensive responses and those of our staff. Such courage gained through talking about difficult issues opens up their organisations to be 'learning organisations' (for elaboration see Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010) where questioning is not seen as a sign of mistrust or an invasion of privacy, but rather a chance to learn through inquiry. We will discuss inquiry first, followed by our interpretation of the type of processes that leaders need to engage in to raise issues that might be the subject of inquiry.

In a culture of inquiry teachers talk about the analysis and evaluation of their teaching and engage in challenging their practices. This critical self-reflection for both individuals and groups is a tool that allows teachers to maximise meaning from their teaching experiences. In order to add rigour to such an inquiry environment, leaders need to create the conditions conducive to learning and solving professional problems. Those conditions include having: shared norms and professional beliefs, a focus on student learning, reflective dialogue and active listening (Wesley, 2004); and shared practice, collaboration and evidence-based practice (Hargreaves, 2003; Timperley, Phillips & Wiseman, 2003). By engaging in inquiry what should develop, over time (O'Neil, 1995), are learning partnerships and communities with sustainable ways of working together.

Inquiry is a social process that involves trust, respect and openness of members. Members who belong to such learning partnerships or communities benefit from both giving and receiving feedback and questioning. These benefits include deep learning which turns information into knowledge, reduces classroom isolation, increases intellectual stimulation, increases mutual accountability, promotes life-long learning and increases opportunities for sustainable change over time (Annan, Lai & Robinson, 2003; Du Four 2004; Hargreaves, 2009; O'Neil, 1995; Robertson, 2005; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003).

Inquiry is often instigated following identification of complex issues or dilemmas and it is usually the role of the leader to raise such issues. We confirm, from experience, that dealing with dilemmas and progressing complex issues pose problematic interactions for school leaders (Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1996) and our usual response has been to put such issues in the 'too hard basket'. Our next step in our literature review was to therefore investigate how we might tackle such issues by engaging in interactions that lead to trust rather than diminishing it. In discussing these interactions researchers often suggest the employment of

'learning conversations' (Robinson, 2002), 'open to learning conversations' (Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd, 2009), or as it is often referred to, 'productive dialogue' or 'dialogue' (Argyris, 1991; Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1996; Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010; Robertson, 2005). Essentially, despite the variation in names, the conversations are based on common elements derived from the work of Argyris (1991) and in this project we have adopted Argyris original word dialogue to describe our approach.

The dialogue that we are referring to is not an everyday chat but designed to dig deep through layers of complexity to overcome defensive behaviours and promote high trust environments (Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010). Leaders choosing the approach need to learn an associated set of skills/strategies and know that in order to dig deep they must be patient in their learning (Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1996; Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010; Robinson, 2002).

Although there is no prescription for the type of steps in the sort of dialogue we are referring to, essential elements when addressing an issue or concern include:
- Preparation for the conversation (gathering evidence, negotiating uninterrupted time etc);
- Advocacy (stating the concern clearly using evidence and revealing reasoning but taking care to have little 'easing in' or introductory unrelated chat);
- Inquiry (allowing response from the other person, mutually checking assumptions - staying low on the ladder of inference - getting reactions, inviting challenge/ encouraging other's views, summarising key understandings and continually checking understandings);
- Mutually agreeing on the situation;
- Joint solution generation and identification of priorities;
- Planning for improvement/change; and
- Monitoring of improvement - following through/ following up and support identification.

In general, these steps are designed to progress or resolve the issue whilst retaining a respectful relationship by bringing the issue into the open. In order to keep the relationships respectful the following are some of the characteristics that **we** identified that were underpinning the dialogue. It should:
- Be based on evidence;
- Not involve confrontation;
- Involve joint responsibility;
- Be associated with awareness of cultural practice;
- Have a goal to clarify the issues;
- Assist others to solve their problems; and
- Have time set aside for the conversation.

Further underpinning the steps and our interpretation of characteristics are even deeper skills that incorporate aspects of 'double loop learning', understanding 'espoused theories and theories of practice', 'staying low on the ladder of inference', and the ability to 'reflect both in and on action'. Elaboration of these aspects is provided by a variety of authors including Piggot-Irvine and Cardno (2005), Lai and Robinson (2006), Piggot-Irvine (2010), Robinson (2002), and Stoll et al. (2003). In the following section we include our interpretation of each.

'Double loop learning' is deep learning where the learner digs deeply into the theories and values that guide their practice. It differs from 'single loop learning' which we see as shallow because it offers the learner the opportunity to only learn a new strategy but not change their values and beliefs. Often it results in conflict being avoided. For deep learning to occur learners need to overcome their urge to avoid conflict and it involves re-examining theories and values so that any defensive strategies are overcome.

'Espoused theories' are our beliefs and what we explain or what we say about what we do and 'theories of practice' are what we *actually* do. When both are examined the learner gains insight into differences between the two, that is, what they say they do and what they actually do. This type of examination allows the learner to consider if there is a gap between espousals and practice and then to decide what needs to be changed.

The 'ladder of inference' is a metaphorical ladder on which each rung represents a progressive step in solving problems. The ladder is climbed by selecting evidence, describing what the evidence looks like, interpreting the reason for the evidence and finally drawing conclusions based in the evidence. For a good, 'productive', result using the ladder of inference it is important that those having the conversation are climbing the same ladder and are on the same rung. Participants may go up and down the ladder during a dialogue as clarification is sought.

'Reflection in action' is the ability to be aware immediately, on the spot, of what is happening in the midst of a conversation and to then be able to correct any inappropriate part of the dialogue immediately. This is a lot harder than 'reflection on action' where we think about what has happened after the dialogue.

To undertake this work of dialogue, with all of its steps, characteristics and deeper skills, we believe that we need, as leaders, to have courage, self-knowledge, a dedication to building relationships and developing staff, and adequate time and resources. Essentially, we agreed that we need to know ourselves thoroughly and our own defensive responses in order to bring about sustainable changes in others. This is a point well confirmed by other experts (eg Argyris, 1991; Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1996; Day, 2000; Dyer, 2001; Notman & Henry, 2009). We also agreed that we need to work 'with' staff rather than 'dealing to them' – a point confirmed by Stoll et al. (2003).

In summary, we concluded that there were four key principles of effectiveness that we identified from the literature that were associated with our issue for investigation in action research:

> 1. Set clear goals for improving teaching and learning and pursue them to ensure success for all;
> 2. Build relationships built on trust, respect and openness;
> 3. Deal with ethical dilemmas and use dialogue to progress complex issues when they arise; and
> 4. Demonstrate commitment to the professional growth and support of other school leaders and teachers.

We further distilled these four key areas of effectiveness into the following two main areas:
> 1. Set clear goals for improving teaching and learning and pursue them to ensure success for all; and

2. Build relationships of trust, respect and openness.

With these two areas firmly established we next decided how we would improve practice. We embarked on the implementation phase of the action research.

Implementation Phase: Learning and Practising Dialogue

In this phase of our project, we began by ensuring that we spent considerable time reflecting upon what the literature was suggesting about overcoming defensiveness and becoming more productive by engaging in dialogue. This reflection led to us clarifying our own interpretation of the steps in dialogue which, in turn, resulted in us developing an initial set of codes for analysing our own dialogue with staff when discussing problems. The coding was aligned to the following strategies of dialogue: advocacy (stating the problem, the reasons for it and our evidence), inquiry, checking, joint solution generation, planning a change and monitoring.

The steps and coding shown in Table 2 show our first attempt to develop the steps and codes for the analysis of productive dialogue and they were based on an original set of steps from Piggot-Irvine & Cardno (2005).

Table 2: Summary of Steps in Dialogue and Codes for Analysis

State the issue/ position (**advocacy**)	**A**
State the reason for the concern, and give objective **evidence**	**E**
Check assumptions – stay low on the ladder of inference	**CA**
Invite response/ get reactions (**inquiry**)	**IR**
Invite challenge/ encourage other's point of view (**inquiry**)	**I**
Summarise key shared understandings	**SU**
Continually check understandings. (**clarify understandings**)	**CU**
Jointly suggest solutions and prioritise – **mutual solutions, and mutually prioritise**	**MS** **MP**
Follow through / follow up and support	**F**

Each of us in the group then piloted the coding system when analysing an initial conversation. Our immediate learning was associated with recognition of the importance of having a fairly even balance between advocacy and inquiry. We saw this as a seesaw that we continuously needed to keep even if we were to avoid slipping into overuse of either advocacy or inquiry – both of which could lead to excessive control or avoidance if unbalanced. Group reflection on the analysis of these initial conversations allowed us to recognise two things: that these conversations did not include all of the strategies and that there were varying degrees of mastery of the strategies. The identified gaps led to the codes being revised (see later in Table 3) and group members practising conversations to include all the strategies. As we conducted this revision we referred back to the literature review.

Digging deeper into the conversations confirmed how important it was to hold the values underpinning the process, that is, honesty, respect, empathy, collaboration, support and openness. We recognised that these values ultimately lead to trust. This led us to exploring and practising further how we needed to keep in mind the notions of the 'ladder of inference', 'single and double loop learning', 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' whilst

implementing dialogue. There was recognition that the tools were not a 'recipe' because the dialogue did not always follow a linear order; in fact if felt at times that there was 'dancing' between the steps in dialogue. Gradually, we felt that we were evolving a repertoire of strategies and skills developing that could be 'called upon' when appropriate.

At approximately the mid-point through our implementation phase we noted at a group meeting our reflections about our thinking at that stage. The following comments are representative of our many reflections:

> *This requires thinking the best of people and finding a way through to a solution that provides the best for both people.*
>
> *I need to let go of the idea of 'winning' or of thinking that the other person is wrong, or lying, or fudging!*
>
> *I didn't make time in the conversation so that both I and the other recipient could reflect – we both needed to reflect-in-action.*
>
> *There is the potential to change the action as well as the beliefs and values of each person involved – this is powerful.*

At about the mid-point also, we pooled our collective additional resources that we had gained from other development opportunities. One such tool was a laminated card with a sequence of prompts on it that had been issued at a 'First Time Principals' training. The card prompted us to remember the basic steps in dialogue, even though the author (Robinson, 2002) had expressed the steps in a slightly different format. Robinson's steps were, as follows:

- *Say what you mean*
- *Say why you think it*
- *Inquire (their reaction, their thoughts, accuracy)*
- *Detect and check assumptions*
- *Establish common ground*
- *Make a plan.*

Throughout this implementation phase the collegial work, and having both the professional freedom to learn progressively and make connections between theory and our practice, were critical contributing factors to growing learning that we were experiencing as a group. We think a further key contributor to the depth of learning that we believe we were engaging in was enabled because we did NOT have a prescribed, directed, outline for the way we were to engage in the dialogue process. We largely had to construct our own interpretation of the material we were working with and this, we think, resulted in our considerable ownership of the learning.

As the work in the implementation phase progressed, we further refined the steps and coding outline shown in Table 2 so that it reflected our extended learning. The decision was made to code future conversations with both productive and defensive strategies (these are shown as Tables 3 and 4 in the following outline of the evaluation phase of the action research). An alphabetical coding was used that categorised the defensive strategies into 'Control' strategies, or 'Avoidance' strategies, or both. We became increasingly aware that many of the defensive avoidance strategies were, in fact, control strategies when we unravelled the intent

of the strategy. This shift in our thinking is shown in Table 4 where a dotted line links avoidance (A) and control (C).

There was also a growing understanding that the thoughts that remained unspoken during the conversations were examples of the defensive strategy of withholding information and our challenge was to make this information discussable. We were also collectively becoming much more conscious of how easily we slipped into a control approach just because of our principal role. As one of our group stated:

> *The role of principal gives us authority, and increases the risk that we will slip into a controlling role.*

The potential for the hierarchical nature of school organisational structures to cause issues of power to influence the dialogue was considered by us. We reflected on the influence of this power on threatening the level of openness and trust between ourselves and the staff with whom we engaged in dialogue. When considering whether there might be a tension between the purpose of the dialogue, from the leader's perspective, and the requirement to find a mutual solution, there was agreement amongst our group that the conversations must be about mutual solutions – they must be bilateral.

With the refined thinking and analysis tool for coding, each of us in the group continued to implement the productive dialogue values and strategies and to record the conversations for evaluation. As we carried out this extended practice we individually analysed our conversations and then moderated the analysis in pairs. In the moderation, we cross-checked each other's analysis and then engaged in what we called a 'meta-dialogue' to point out where our interpretations might have differed. We think that this moderation process was highly beneficial in that the peer learning helped us to refine our dialogue skills. One of the group summed it up in the following way:

> *We engaged in meta-dialogue between ourselves, on our dialogue, and that is an ideal opportunity for us to use the dialogue skills again.*

Continual practice with both the dialogue and 'meta-dialogue' processes allowed each of us to improve continually. Again, another quote encapsulates the thinking of us all:

> *The ability to reflect-in-action increases as we become 'routinised'.*
> *I feel I have a valuable tool in my 'tool box', which gives me confidence.*

Evaluation Phase: Demonstrating Effectiveness of Implementation

In the third phase of the action research we evaluated how effective our implementation activity had been. We chose two approaches for conducting this evaluation. First we collectivised our individual dialogue analyses. Second, we sought feedback from our staff once again to determine whether they believed we had improved on some of the lower scoring areas that were indicated in the initial reconnaissance phase survey – the survey results that led us to engaging in the 'productive' approach for improvement.

Dialogue Analysis

As noted in the implementation phase discussion, progressively we had expanded our codes for analysing our conversations as we incrementally learnt more. At the end of the implementation phase we had determined that we needed to elaborate both the productive and defensive in our analysis, as shown in Tables 3 and 4. We also decided to tally our individual analyses for one conversation each as a way of evaluating how well we were implementing the skills that we had learnt. The tallies are shown in each of Tables 3 and 4, followed by our interpretation of the results.

Table 3: Dialogue Strategies and Analysis

Dialogue Strategies	Code	Principals						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	Tally
Brief Introduction Easing in, a polite**,** short introduction.	BI	1	1	1	1	1		5
Advocacy State the issue/position.	A	2	1	2	1	1	1	8
Evidence (a component of Advocacy) State the reasons for the concern, and give objective evidence. Express in a way which is tentative and ready for checking, e.g. "I'd like to talk to you about my perceptions and I'd like to hear your response"; "My current perception s....Can I check that with you?" or "I'd really like to hear your take on it."	E	5	3	2	1	1	1	13
Check Assumptions Stay low on the ladder of inference. Clarify and check your, and their, evidence and assumptions. Do not leap to the top of the ladder of inference without checking. If there is no common perception, or key understanding, acknowledge that. You may also need to take space for each of you to find further evidence. If there is any common understanding, use it to lead into solution generation.	CA	1	2	-	-	3	1	7
Invite response/Inquire Get reactions. Invite challenge/ encourage other's views.	IR	5	9	2	2	2	2	15
Summarise Understandings Summarise shared key understandings.	SU	2	2	-	-	-	-	4
Clarify Understandings Continually check understandings.	CU	2	1	-	-	1	-	4
Generate Mutual Solutions and Mutually Prioritise Jointly suggest solutions and prioritise. Encourage their solutions, not yours. Leave them space, create a gap or time to reflect on solutions. No more than two days.	MS / MP	1	1	-	-	1	-	3
Follow Through Follow up and support.	F	-	4	-	1	1	-	6

Table 4: Defensive Strategies and Analysis

	Defensive Strategies	Code	Principals						
			A	B	C	D	E	F	Tally
A	Starting with positives or assurances (often called 'easing in') in conversations	A..C*				1	1C	2	4
B	With-holding information in important conversations	C				1			1
C	Failing to state your position or where you were coming from when discussing problems	A..C		1			1A	1	3
D	Making judgements or assumptions about people without testing or checking them	C	1			2			3
E	Failing to check what your colleague thinks about any information you provide in the conversation.	A..C	1			2	1C		4
F	Using persuasion to get what you want	C							
G	Giving false reassurances to people to cloud your message	A	1					1	2
H	Giving mixed messages or confusing the message in an effort to be nice to colleagues	A..C				3		1	4
I	Trying to keep things comfortable	A		2	1	4	1	1	9
J	Deciding on the outcome before any conversation about problems	C	2	1		3		1	7
K	Deciding to hold back in order to protect your colleague from embarrassment to threat	A..C				2			2
L	Name dropping when you need to support your argument	C	3						3
M	Ignoring or downplaying information provided by your colleagues	C	1						1
N	Making statements without illustration, evidence or explanation	C				2		1	3
O	Using questioning to disguise your own view	A..C	1		1				2
P	Ignoring the feelings/responses of your colleagues	A..C							
Q	Avoiding disclosing your own feelings	A				1			1
R	Avoiding disclosing information that may upset your colleague, or weaken your position	A..C				2			2
S	Providing your own solutions to any problem with a colleague without inviting theirs (leads to low ownership)	C	5	3	1		1	1	11
T	Taking responsibility for following up any problems yourself (again leading to low ownership)	C				1	1		2
U	Failing to plan for any improvement where problems might have been raised	A..C			1	1			2
V	As a last (or maybe first) resort, deciding to 'give it to them straight' (a blasting!) if you have a problem to resolve.	C							

*A..C (avoidance that in fact has a controlling underpinning)

Based on these findings, we have summarised our predominant responses under the headings of productive and defensive strategies. Note that there is also a more detailed response from each principal in Appendix Four.

Productive

Almost all of us as principals began our conversations with a brief introduction only, that is, there was little easing in or avoidance at the beginning of the dialogue. All six stated the issue clearly and we also all used evidence to clarify the issue (three used evidence once and three used it three or more times). We can conclude that the 'advocacy step' of dialogue was well done.

Four of us explicitly checked our assumptions, however we all invited response to our advocacy statement. Despite reasonable implementation of this 'inquiry step' of the dialogue, each of us noted that this was still an area for improvement because largely we failed substantially to check our own assumptions.

While only two of us summarised shared key understandings in the conversation, three of us did clarify understanding by thorough checking with our conversation partner (though we recognise that the checking was relatively controlling). Three jointly, rather than unilaterally, suggested solutions and engaged in planning for follow up and support. The latter results suggested to us that just half the group were employing genuinely bilateral, non-controlling, strategies for the solution generation and follow-up steps of dialogue.

Defensive

Following the analysis we all recognised that we each have areas for development and this became even clearer when we also analysed our defensive strategies (we note that there is overlap between these and the conclusions we have drawn for productive strategies). The majority of defensive strategies used were controlling in nature.

All of us unilaterally either provided our own solutions to a problem, or took responsibility for following up the solution, leading to low ownership by the conversation partner. It was also clear, as noted in the previous section, that we were controlling when we failed to genuinely use inquiry to find out what our colleague thought about any information provided in the conversation and when we made judgements or assumptions without testing or checking them. A further dominating control strategy that many of us used was that of deciding on the outcome before any conversation. A strong avoidance strategy employed was trying to keep things comfortable.

One of us only 'name dropped' when needing to support the argument and ignored or downplayed information provided by the colleague.

Overall we conclude that, although we feel we have made considerable progress in learning and implementing the values and strategies of being productive, we each have considerable further improvement to make in reducing our controlling strategies in a dialogue. We realise that only then will we be engaging in an open way with our staff.

Staff Feedback

The dialogue analysis is just one component of data collection for evaluation of the implementation phase of the project. To triangulate our own perceptions in the latter data we also needed to gather feedback from our staff. To achieve this we developed a feedback form for staff (shown with full results in Appendix 5). The form included both open and closed response questions and the selection of questions was based on the productive dialogue strategies outlined in Table 4. We spent some time 'interpreting' the strategies so that they could be easily understood by our staff. We each emailed the feedback form to our staff that we had conducted a dialogue with (eight in total) and we ensured anonymity by asking the respondents to return the completed form to an independent person for collation. Table 5 summarises the combined feedback for all principals, but note that the full results are reported in Appendix 5.

Table 5: Summary of Staff Feedback on Implementation of Productive Dialogue

Rating	1 (weak)	2	3	4	5 (strong)
Brief introduction	-	1	3	1	3
Stated issue clearly	-	-	3	2	3
Reasons, evidence, provided in way that was ready for checking	-	-	3	1	3
Clarified and checked evidence and assumptions	-	2	3	2	1
Allowed time for gathering of further evidence	-	1	2	3	1
Continually checked and clarified understandings	-	-	4	2	2
Invited response	-	-	1	5	1
Inquired into and encouraged other views	-	-	2	5	1
Generating a solution followed reaching common understanding	-	-	-	4	2
Summarised main understandings shared	-	1	3	2	2
Encouraged their solutions	-	-	3	2	3
Allowed time to reflect on solutions	1	2	-	3	1
Discussion of follow-up and support	-	1	1	3	3
Dialogue led to clarity about the issue	-	-	1	5	2
Positive about the agreed solution	-	-	3	3	2
Felt safe discussing issue in no blame culture	-	2	2	1	3

A further key question asked: 'Did the conversation positively/negatively impact on your future actions?' All respondents stated that it had positively impacted.

In summary, the staff that we conducted the dialogue with mostly considered that we began our conversations with a brief introduction only and stated the issue clearly. We were also largely seen to have provided reasons and used evidence in a way which allowed for the evidence to be continually checked. In summary, the staff perceived, overall, that the 'advocacy step' of dialogue was undertaken by us, but not in a way that we would suggest was exemplary. The 'inquiry step' of the dialogue (inviting response, encouraging others views) was viewed by staff as having been conducted slightly more positively. Summarising key understandings in the dialogue was moderately well done and most of us were seen as encouraging the staff member's solution, as well as discussing follow-up and support.

Overall, the dialogue was perceived by staff to have led to clarity about the issue discussed and respondents were mostly positive about the agreed solution generation. Although all believed that there was a positive impact from the dialogue, it would appear that four out of eight of the respondents believed that improvement could be made in creating a safer, no blame, culture in the dialogue.

Comparing Our Analysis with that of the Staff

We used different tools (first our checklist for our own evaluation of practice and second the form for staff feedback) for analysis of the use of dialogue because we needed to 'interpret' some of the productive dialogue strategy descriptions in ways that staff could understand for the feedback form. This use of differing tools could be seen as a limitation for direct comparison because we were not explicitly comparing 'apples with apples'. However, the productive strategies outlined within both tools were essentially the same and allowed for analysis of the main components in the dialogue approach. It is these components that we examined to determine how our own analysis compared with that of the staff.

Reasonably consistent results existed between ourselves and our staff indicating that we conducted the 'advocacy' step of the dialogue moderately well. The fact that we were considerably direct and non-avoiding in the early part of our conversations by coming quickly to the issue at the beginning of the dialogue is an example of use of advocacy. We also clarified the situation via the use of evidence and providing reasoning.

In terms of the 'inquiry' step, our own analysis was less positive than the perception of our staff. Inviting response to our advocacy statements was considered to be conducted well both by ourselves and our staff, although we felt that we needed further improvement in checking our own assumptions – something that was not so strongly reported by our staff despite the fact that we thought we were quite controlling in this checking.

Three of us (half) believed that we summarised shared key understandings in the conversation reasonably well and the staff feedback confirms that this was moderately well done. Three of us again thought that we bilaterally suggested solutions and engaged in planning for follow up and support. Given that this was only half of our group it was interesting to see that staff feedback was more positive about the solution generation, as well as discussing follow-up and support.

Although we did not specifically ask staff for direct feedback on defensive strategies, the overall sentiment of positive outcomes from the dialogue that staff provided is seen as overly generous by us. We all considered that we each had areas for development in terms of lowering our controlling strategies. In particular, we think we need to work on reducing holding predetermined assumptions linked with inquiry and the way that we unilaterally offer solutions and manage follow up if we are to enhance staff ownership. We also think that we need to reduce engagement in avoidance strategies linked to trying to keep things comfortable.

In summary, we believe that our staff have been generous in their evaluation of our implementation of the dialogue process. We feel affirmed by this but believe that we have considerable further improvement ahead of us.

Group Reflections on Involvement in the Development Overall

As a group of principals we had a lengthy discussion and recorded our reflections on our learning during the action research for improvement of our dialogue skills. We have summarised our reflections below (directly quoted in full in Appendix 6) on what has made the group succeed, what it has taken for us to have the courage to have the conversations rather than put them in the too hard basket, the impact of the development, and what has got in the way of our learning.

What has made the group succeed?

A commitment and willingness to learn and collaborate? has been core to our learning, as indicated in the following quote:

> *Commitment, and the impetus of the professional learning, was shared by everyone at each meeting.*

Non-judgmentalism and accepting responsibility for resolving problems were also strong features of our practice. Some organisational issues helped, such as meeting frequently, our ownership of the learning process and focusing on just one area for development in depth. Although there has been challenge we have also gained confidence.

What has it taken for us to have the courage to have the conversations?

We think that our courage for learning this difficult material was reinforced by our commitment to improvement for ourselves, staff and, most importantly, students. We were also clear that we did not want to get into the messy litigation situation that we had seen other principals go through. Additionally, courage was enabled via the group support and reflection and the dialogue process itself, as the next quote suggests:

> *The structure of the dialogue gives us confidence – especially because we realised we do not have to come up with all the answers.*

Courage was also derived from being knowledgeable through reading the background literature, practising continuously, and having reinforcement and clarity from evidence provided in the evaluation phase.

What has the impact been?

We recorded multiple impacts from both involvement in the action research approach itself and from the focus on improvement of dialogue and we think that all the impacts noted in Appendix 6 are important. In summary, support for, and trust in, each other has resulted from our engagement in the process and this has happened alongside increased confidence and learning associated with the dialogue approach. We have seen impacts on systems and staff but the bottom line is reflected in the following quote:

> *It touches on the heart of what schools are all about. Being able to link the academic work with our work has been critical – it makes it relevant.*

Overall, we came together as a disparate group of principals, with varying amounts of challenge and change happening in our schools, and yet we became exceptionally cohesive during the project.

What might have got in the way of us being so productive?

Our excessive workload as principals has been the biggest barrier to learning but we also recognise that by confronting and resolving problems our workload will eventually decrease, as recorded in our reflection session:

> *We have acknowledged that this is most important barrier but also the dialogue has been an enabler. This learning is sustaining us through our workload because we are not letting the urgent drive out the important.*

Further Actions

As part of our reflections on the project we have also considered how we would extend our learning. We conclude that our next key goal will be to both transfer and deepen our learning by:

- Actively coaching others on the staff;
- Modelling for other leaders in the school;
- Holding workshops with staff and the Board of Trustees;
- Embedding and sustaining this by including the principles in both the school's appraisal and complaints procedures. This might hold people responsible for adhering to the dialogue procedure;
- Utilising dialogue as part of a 'Critical Friend' process;
- Continuing the reinforcement of our learning by having a learning group regularly as a principals' cluster;
- Deepening the learning and analysis by taping a dialogue and asking another member of the group to engage in further meta-dialogue;
- Having a regular time to share ways in which we are implementing the learning in our schools; and
- Making sure that we keep this as 'important' and not let other 'urgent' things crowd it out.

Concluding Reflections as the Facilitator

I confirm that there are further development and learning activities to be engaged in and as the principals themselves indicate in the previous section, these activities are multiple and varied. There are multiple aspects of the project that I would also like to substantiate and reflect upon from the perspective of the guide or facilitator in this action research.

Overall, I believe that the project strongly conformed to Cardno's (2003) suggestion that the *action* should involve lack of acceptance of the status quo and that change should be looked for, and that the *research* should incorporate a systematic exploration or examination of the topic of defensive and productive approaches to leadership. This group of principals have been determined to overturn existing inadequate practice associated with addressing concerns with staff and they systematically unpacked their own actions to detect where areas of

inadequacy existed using phased activity in an action research model. They enthusiastically collaborated in an inquiry approach which both enhanced their understanding of the relevant literature and research and applied that in a practical context (Gronhaug & Olson, 1999; Hult & Lennung, 1980; Koshy, 2005; Somekh, 1995). Most importantly also reflection was central to this inquiry. There is no doubt that they conducted collective self-reflective investigation (Altrichter, et al., 2002; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

Involvement in the action research, from my perspective, led to the principals managing to address the educational challenge of 'people issues' and problem solving (Argyris, 1991; Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1996; Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010; Robertson, 2005; Robinson, 2002). They confronted concerns/problems with staff via dialogue but they did it (too many 'thats' in this sentence) in a way that maintained relationships that were based on values of honesty and integrity (Piggot-Irvine & Doyle, 2010). The jury, in my opinion, is still out however on whether the dialogue approach has led to enhanced trust, learning partnerships and communities that have consistency and developed sustainable ways of working together. Their staff noted that improvement could still be made in creating a safer, no blame, culture in the dialogue and this is not unexpected given that the principals are at an early stage of implementation of this new approach. Regardless, the overall feedback from staff that the dialogue is perceived to have led to clarity about the issue discussed and a positive impact, confirms that the principals are meeting the challenge of confronting concerns.

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Appendix One: Professional Standards for Primary Principals

The Professional Standards set out in this schedule provide a baseline for assessing satisfactory performance within each area of practice. They form part of the principal's performance agreement, which will reflect the school / Board goals, the principal's job description and more specific objectives. Included in the development of the performance agreement will be the identification and development of appropriate indicators. The performance agreement must also include the New Zealand Teachers Council criteria for registration as a teacher.

Part 4 of the Primary Principals' Collective Agreement describes the responsibility of the employing board to develop the principal's performance agreement.

Areas of practice	Professional Standards
CULTURE Provide professional leadership that focuses the school culture on enhancing learning and teaching.	• In conjunction with the Board, develop and implement a school vision and shared goals focused on enhanced engagement and achievement for all students. • Promote a culture whereby staff members take on appropriate leadership roles and work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning. • Model respect for others in interactions with adults and students • Promote the bicultural nature of New Zealand by ensuring that it is evident in the school culture. • Maintain a safe, learning-focused environment. • Promote an inclusive environment in which the diversity and prior experiences of students are acknowledged and respected. • Manage conflict and other challenging situations effectively and actively work to achieve solutions. • Demonstrate leadership through participating in professional learning.
PEDAGOGY Create a learning environment in which there is an expectation that all students will experience success in learning.	• Promote, participate in and support ongoing professional learning linked to student progress. • Demonstrate leadership through engaging with staff and sharing knowledge about effective teaching and learning in the context of the New Zealand curriculum documents. • Ensure staff members engage in professional learning to establish and sustain effective teacher / learner relationships with all students, with a particular focus on Māori students. • Ensure that the review and design of school programmes is informed by school-based and other evidence. • Maintain a professional learning community within which staff members are provided with feedback and support on their professional practice. • Analyse and act upon school-wide evidence on student learning to maximise learning for all students with a particular focus on Māori and Pasifika students.

Areas of practice	Professional Standards
SYSTEMS Develop and use management systems to support and enhance student learning.	• Exhibit leadership that results in the effective day-to-day operation of the school. • Operate within board policy and in accordance with legislative requirements. • Provide the Board with timely and accurate information and advice on student learning and school operation. • Effectively manage and administer finance, property and health and safety systems. • Effectively manage personnel with a focus on maximising the effectiveness of all staff members. • Use school / external evidence to inform planning for future action, monitor progress and manage change. • Prioritise resource allocation on the basis of the school's annual and strategic objectives.
PARTNER-SHIPS and NETWORKS Strengthen communication and relationships to enhance student learning.	• Work with the Board to facilitate strategic decision making. • Actively foster relationships with the school's community and local iwi. • Actively foster professional relationships with, and between colleagues, and with government agencies and others with expertise in the wider education community. • Interact regularly with parents and the school community on student progress and other school-related matters. • Actively foster relationships with other schools and participate in appropriate school networks.

Note: Principals with teaching responsibilities will also need to meet the requirements of current (of the time) standards and/or criteria for teachers.

Appendix Two: Staff Survey

Maungakiekie Principals' Group Action Research Project 2009

There is an expectation that all New Zealand students will experience success in learning. The purpose of this survey is to assess how our school is working towards achieving this and to identify areas for specific further development.
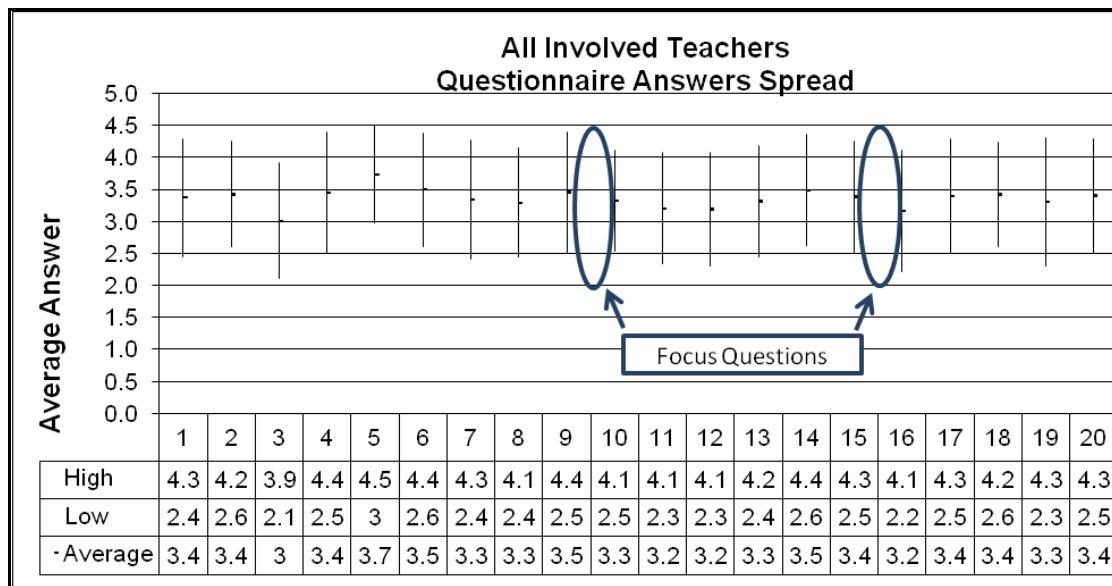
Demographics	Responses
Years teaching (in New Zealand)	
Registration Status	
Leadership roles in school	

This survey is collated independently and individual teachers will not be identified at any point.

1 = we do not do this at our school
2 = we are starting to move in this direction
3 = we are making good progress here
4 = we have this practice well established
5 = we are refining our practice in this area
DK = do not know / Not applicable

#		
1	In our school opportunity is provided for teachers to take on leadership roles.	
2	In our school staff work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning.	
3	In our school staff encourage students to be active participants in reflecting on and developing teaching and learning programmes.	
	Comment:	
4	In our school we have multiple opportunities to engage in professional development/learning' that is linked to student progress.	
5	In our school staff actively engage in on-going professional development.	
6	Leadership in our school supports on-going professional development/learning that meets the current needs of the students/teachers.	
	Comment:	
7	The leadership team at our school engages staff in sharing knowledge based on valid evidence (Walk throughs. Assessment data, literature).	
8	Staff in our school understand what 'effective teaching' looks like in literacy and numeracy.	
9	Shared knowledge and effective teaching and learning is explicitly linked to the NZC (New Zealand Curriculum)	
	Comment:	
10	Leaders in our school actively promote professional development/ learning related directly to effective teacher learner relationships.	
11	Leaders in our school ensure that staff members have a clear understanding of the impact relationships have on student learning.	

12	The teachers in our school have positive relationships with Maori students that constructively impact on their learning.	
	Comment	

13	School-based and other evidence contribute to the design and review of our school programmes.	
14	The leadership team has direct, hands-on, involvement with our school curriculum design and implementation.	
	Comment:	

15	The leadership of the school provide opportunities for staff to receive helpful feedback to improve professional practice.	
16	The leadership of our learning community challenge and support staff to inquire into their professional practice.	
17	The leadership of our school provide opportunities for staff to be supported with professional practice.	
	Comment:	

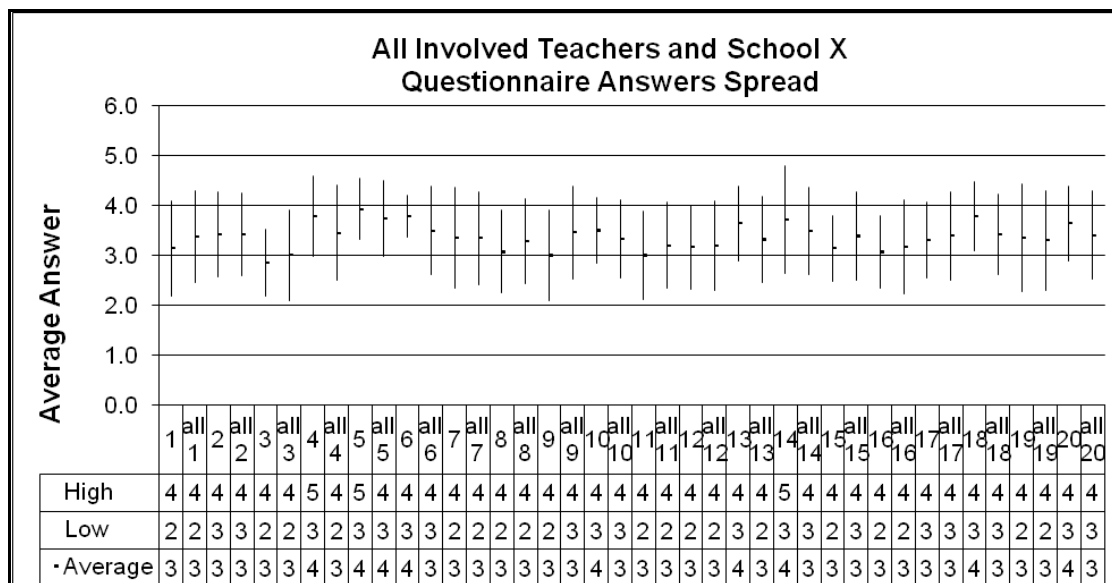| 18	Decisions made by leadership to maximise learning for all students reflect the analysis of achievement information.	
19	Decisions made by leadership to maximise learning for Maori and Pasifika students reflect the analysis of achievement information?	
20	Staff effectively use the analysis of student achievement data to inform teaching and learning of all students.	
	Comment:	

Thank you for completing this questionnaire, please press the button below to send it to Moshe Szweizer

Press to send the questionnaire

Appendix Three: Survey Results for Reconnaissance Phase

All Involved Teachers Questionnaire Answers Spread

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
High	4.3	4.2	3.9	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.1	4.4	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.3
Low	2.4	2.6	2.1	2.5	3	2.6	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.2	2.5	2.6	2.3	2.5
Average	3.4	3.4	3	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.4

All Teachers Answers Confidence Level: **91%**
Total Number of Respondents: **111**

All Involved Teachers and School X Questionnaire Answers Spread

	1	all 1	2	all 2	3	all 3	4	all 4	5	all 5	6	all 6	7	all 7	8	all 8	9	all 9	10	all 10	11	all 11	12	all 12	13	all 13	14	all 14	15	all 15	16	all 16	17	all 17	18	all 18	19	all 19	20	all 20
High	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Low	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	3
Average	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	3

School X's Answers Confidence Level: **73%**
School X Number of Respondents: **14**
Total Number of Respondents: **111**

The confidence level expressed in the graphs represents the confidence we have about the survey results. Thus it is not about the individual result but the survey as such.

If one says that the level is 100% then one would claim complete certainty of the results. The level is related to the number of people questioned. The formula to calculate confidence level is: **1 - 1/sqrt(N).**

Most questionnaires are conducted with approximately 1000 participants. That gives a confidence level of 97% (or 3% error margin). Thus, for our questionnaire to have a 97% confidence level we would have to have 1000 teachers to answer the questionnaire.

Whisker graphs were chosen to record the data as they show more accurately the range of responses to a particular question. The middle point is the average of all responses. The "whisker" shows one standard deviation. This shows where approximately 68% of all respondents sit either side of the average. The whisker is always the same length either side of the average. It helps show how close to the average most of the responses have been. The wider the whisker or spread, the wider the response to the question.

Appendix Four: Summaries of Analysis of Dialogue from Evaluation Phase

Principal A

Following one 'stating the issue' statement, two evidence statements were used to support the reason for concern. The conversation partner responded with supporting evidence. At this point a closed question was used to invite response. Before the conversation partner was given time to respond one more lot of evidence and two advocacy statements were shared. After the conversation partner responded another evidence statement which included a summary of key understandings was made by me which contained two controlling defensive behaviours. The first was that I *'Ignored or downplaying information provided by my colleague'* and the second I *'name dropped when I needed to support my argument'*. At this point I used another controlling behaviour when I *'provided my own solutions to the problem without inviting my conversation partner's input (leads to low ownership)'*. However the partner agreed and a mutual solution was agreed upon. The partner offered a follow through which was mutually agreed to.

The analysis of the transcript and the results of the coding show I need to listen to responses and keep low on the ladder of inference.

As a result of using the dialogue tools more regularly my familiarity with the process and confidence in using the tools have grown. I need to hold the notion that the process will assist, leaving my head clear to do the listening and thinking that is involved. By relying on and believing in the process I find that I am less afraid and I have more courage therefore I am not *avoiding* having the conversation.

I have found that when I prepare for conversations they seem to go more smoothly.

As the instigator of the conversation I recognize that I have a privileged position as I have time to be more prepared than the partner. To address this imbalance I need to remind myself that such conversations require learning by both people in the conversation, therefore I need to ensure I learn not to *control* the conversation but allow the partner to do more talking and I do more listening.

Principal B

This analysed conversation was one of a continuing series of conversations with a staff member about certain concerns. While earlier discussions were resulting in some very positive impacts on the staff member's actions, some incidents of concern did still occur. For both me initiating the conversation and the staff member involved, there were times in this conversation that drew upon past conversations.

This conversation used the identified Productive Dialogue Behaviours as follows: Brief Introduction, Advocacy, Clarify Understandings and Mutual Solutions (x1); Check Assumptions and Summarise Understandings (x2); Evidence (x3); Invite Response and Follow Through (x4) and Inquire (x5). It was noticeable that the usage of a number of strategies that were used minimally in earlier conversations eg Invite Response, Inquiry and Follow up, had increased in usage as a result of a focus on incorporating these into the conversation. These strategies had in common an

identified need by the principal for the ownership of the problem to be transferred into the hands of the staff member.

However, while Defensive Strategies may have dropped in number since earlier conversations, this conversation identified there is still work to be done in this area. The Defensive Strategies used were:

D: Making judgements or assumptions about people without testing or checking them, a controlling behaviour (x1);

I: Trying to keep things comfortable, an avoidance behaviour (x2);

J: Deciding on the outcome before any conversation about problems, a controlling behaviour (x1); and

S: Providing my own solution to any problem with a colleague without inviting theirs, a controlling behaviour (x3).

It is apparent in analysing these Defensive Strategies that there is still some difficulty in 'letting go' and allowing the conversation to evolve. The identified responses suggest I had the need to feel in control of the conversation, and having given some deep thought to the situation in readiness for the conversation I had some preconceived outcomes. While it is prudent to have thought through some possible outcomes it is how I handle these ideas in the conversation that can make the difference. To 'push one's own barrow' takes the conversation too high up the Ladder of Inference for ownership to be in the hands of the teacher. Change happens when the ownership is with the person with the need to change. To overcome this dilemma I may need to use more Productive Dialogue Behaviours such as finding Mutual Solutions and Mutually Prioritising. It is noted that in this conversation that these strategies were under-utilised. There is also a need to recognize that I had time to consider possibilities prior to the conversation but the teacher did not have that time. It may be necessary for the teacher to take a day or two to consider the context of the conversation and for a second meeting to take place. It may be only then that the teacher is ready to Mutually Prioritise and take some ownership of the choices ultimately selected.

This analysis has identified my need to have the confidence to 'let go', to be less controlling and to let the conversation evolve by using Productive Dialogue strategies to jointly suggest Mutual Solutions. This will provide opportunity for both the teacher's and my own suggestions to be considered and prioritised in a way that enables ownership to transfer to the teacher.

Principal C

The conversation included a brief introduction. One statement of advocacy, where I stated my position, was followed up with evidence. I invited response three times, invited the other person's viewpoint once, and clarified understanding once. There is one example of failing to check what my colleague thought of what I said, and one of providing my own solution to the problem.

The productive reasoning strategy that I have become more proficient at is that of inviting response. I invited the person into the conversation several times, but in order to reach a conclusion that I thought needed to happen, I took control. On reflection I can see places where I could have been much more open and bilateral by asking

reflective questions which might have encouraged my colleague to become more involved in the conversation. In conversations I have had with staff since this one I have reminded myself to check assumptions and understandings more frequently, and to give the other person a space to suggest their own solutions.

The person involved in this conversation has been of concern for the same reasons last year, but I, and her team leader, avoided having a conversation with her about it at that time. By the time this conversation did happen there was an element of urgency, which is one explanation for this 'single loop learning' type of conversation. I have also considered whether I was the appropriate person to have had this conversation with the colleague. This is an example of the need for other leaders in the school to be empowered with the knowledge and practice of productive reasoning in order to challenge teachers in their teams.

Principal D

This conversation began with me clearly stating the issue and my reasons for the concern. However early in the conversation my colleague became quite defensive in her responses and used many avoidance strategies as a means of digressing from the issue we were discussing.

This resulted in me relying too heavily on defensive strategies as a way of trying to bring the conversation back to the initial issue. Instead of redirecting the conversation immediately back I tried to keep things comfortable and this resulted in me possibly giving mixed messages about the purpose of the conversation (H, I).

I could have been more effective if I had focused on staying low on the ladder of inference by clarifying and checking, asking for evidence and by coming to a common understanding of what in fact we were discussing as the issue (D-2, E-1).

Without establishing ongoing clarity during the conversation I wasn't as successful as hoped in coming to a shared solution. Instead I was quick to provide the solutions without inviting suggestions from my colleague, resulting in low ownership of the solution by her. (S-2), (i.e. no bilateral agreement).

It is evident in analysing my conversation that I have developed my skill level in beginning the conversation by clearly stating the issue, and with providing evidence to support the issue. However I still need to practice my productive dialogue behaviours as the conversation progresses. This will require me to reduce my use of defensive strategies and not come to my own conclusions without checking out my assumptions with the other person. The solution also needs to be a clearly defined and shared one which is more likely to result in a positive outcome for all.

Principal E

What the data shows:
The productive dialogue reported on in this section was carried out relatively early in our research. The dialogue was carried out between myself, the principal, and a senior staff member and related to concerns about the successful involvement of an outside agency in the school. Analysis of the data shows that the productive dialogue

followed a lineal sequence. That is, there was evidence of a brief introduction followed by a position statement (advocacy) and evidence. Responses were elicited from the senior staff member, who made a defensive statement leading to a checking of assumptions and a re-checking on two other occasions with additional responses being invited twice. Efforts were made to clarify understanding by myself, a mutual solution was sought and follow up was agreed.

In contrast, six defensive strategies were in evidence to some degree. Controlling defensive strategies included: commencing with positives; and failing to always check what the staff member thought about some information provided. Towards the end of the dialogue I provided solutions and took responsibility for follow up. Two avoiding defensive strategies were shown. First, I failed to be absolutely clear in my position and second there is evidence from the dialogue that I was making an effort to keep things 'comfortable'

Analysis and reflection:
On the surface the productive dialogue as detailed above could be described as acceptable. However, two aspects are missing. First, little effort was made to invite challenge or elicit other views (inquiry). This could have been handled appropriately in the early stages of the interview when the staff member commenced with a statement 'I thought this would be coming...' This was an opportunity to invite challenge to the complaint and my view of the complaint. Second, there was a lack of summarising of understanding. Nowhere during the conversation was there a summary statement detailing the points previous discussed. This was mediated when I checked assumptions three times. Aspects of the conversation were an improvement on earlier dialogue. In particular, assumptions and response invitations were used more frequently to enhance the dialogue.

Controlling defensive strategies were evident and were focused around 'maintaining' relationships and getting on. That is, starting with positives and follow up responsibility being taken by myself. It could be argued that the avoiding strategies are doing the same thing with me trying to keep things comfortable and not stating my open and honest view of the situation. This area was a big improvement on and earlier encounter. Earlier I withheld information and made assumptions without asking for or having evidence provided. These controlling strategies were not so evident in later conversations.

The real challenge for me in developing skills with productive dialogue is to take the conversation slowly and have key waypoints well scripted before hand. For example, on the tracking sheet where dialogue is recorded, I now have specific codes (CA and I) to prompt particular actions. Later in the tracking sheet I have also made a place to summarise understanding.

My next step is to 'live' my own axiom of building capacity. Capacity is built best when relationships are open and honest. In this case I need to be clear that the behaviour is the problem not the person per se. Capacity is built when the staff members have the full responsibility of, in this case, repairing the damage and doing the follow up including reporting back to me on the outcome.

Principal F

This conversation began with me stating the concern. Previously I have spent time easing in with one or more statements of advocacy.

During this conversation with a teacher I was much clearer all the way through about the issue that was concerning me.

I found that this conversation was only 10 minutes where previously I would have spent a lot of time on the teacher's feelings instead of getting to the point.

An analysis of strategies used;

Productive
        Brief Introduction x1
        Evidence x4
        Inviting Response x4
        Inquiry x 3
        Follow Through x1

Defensive
        Using questioning to disguise my own point of view x2
        Giving mixed or confusing message in an effort to be nice to teacher x2
        Solving the problem myself, suggesting solutions x3

I found it very difficult to define my own comments within the defensive strategy list and welcomed the opportunity to do this particular exercise with a peer.

Improvement or things for me to work on include;
        Not solving the problem myself
        Not including myself in the solution by using (we)
        Setting a timeframe for the follow up
        Be clearer about my feelings / thoughts earlier in the conversation.

Defensive strategies used were all about CONTROL. Although I was following 'the plan' I felt exasperated that the teacher with whom I was having this conversation was either looking surprised or agreeing with me. On analysing I discovered that towards the end I had reverted to my own style and became directive around solving the concern. This is a problem for me as I am used to being in charge. I will use a 'wait time' before solutions are generated when next speaking to this teacher. I will also be aware in future conversations of my tendency to both be nice and tell people what to do.

Appendix Five: Results of Staff Feedback on Implementation of Dialogue Skills

During these conversations:

1. Did I use a brief introduction to outline the purpose of the conversation?

           1   2(1)   3(3)   4(1)   5(3)

Comment:

I felt the conversation just happened because the time was right. It wasn't planned for, but I had been expecting it as I had seen the person in the professional leaders office and knew I had spoken with them in the days previous. I assumed it was about me as we have a 'love hate ' relationship. Nothing I do is ever right yet they are accountable to me for some things.

I am not always clear about what our conversation is going to be about before the meeting. As I am a thinker it could be better for me to know beforehand. People's different styles should be taken into account.

2. Did I state the issue clearly?

           1   2   3(3)   4(2)   5(3)

Comment: Nil

3. Did I state clear reasons for the issue/concern and give objective evidence? When doing this also, did I express my concerns in a way which was tentative and ready for checking, e.g. "I'd like to talk to you about my perceptions and I'd like to hear your response"; "My current perception s....Can I check that with you?" or "I'd really like to hear your take on it."

           1   2   3(3)   4(1)   5(3)

Comment: Nil

4. When checking assumptions did I….
   a. clarify and check both yours and my evidence and assumptions?

        1 2(2)   3(3)   4(2)   5(1)

   b. acknowledge when there was no common perception or key understanding?

        1   2(1)   3(2)   4 (3)   5(1)

   c. allow time for each of us to find further evidence when there was insufficient evidence?

        1   2(1)   3(2)   4(3)   5(1)

Comment: Nil

5. Did I continually check and clarify your understandings?

           1   2   3(4)   4(2)   5(2)

Comment:

It seemed to be a normal type of conversation with interjection and clarification happening all the time. I feel we agreed and moved forward together.

6. Did I invite responses from you?

        1   2   3(1)   4(5)   5(1)

Comment: Nil

7. Did I inquire as to your views by inviting, challenging / encouraging your views?

        1   2   3(2)   4 (5)   5(1)

Comment:

I offered my views about the person and was alerted that the meeting they
had with the professional leader of the school came about because of my actions but
there was a lot going on at home for this person and it was me who had 'opened the
flood gates'.

8. When we reached a common understanding did I use it to lead into generating a solution?

        1   2   3   4(4)   5(2)

Comment: Nil

9. Did I summarise the main understandings that we both shared?

        1   2(1)   3(3)   4(2)   5(2)

Comment:

Not always shared by both

10. In reaching a solution did I ...
    a. encourage your solutions and not mine?

        1   2   3(3)   4 (2)   5(3)

    b. Allow you time to reflect on solutions (maybe for up to two days)?

        1(1)   2(2)   3   4 (3)   5(1)

Comment:

This is an on going conversation.

11. Did I discuss some form of follow up and or support with you?

        1   2(1)   3(1)   4 (3)   5(3)

Comment:

There were some possible next steps (e.g., a meeting with the staff member or an offer
to mediate). Neither taken up.

The following questions will help us gauge your personal feelings about the usefulness of the outcome.

1. As a result of this conversation are you clearer about the issue discussed?

        1   2   3(1)   4(5)   5(2)

Comment:

I feel that I have a clearer understanding of how the staff member feels
about me and have been able to feel more comfortable with some of the decisions
I have made in relation to that person.

2. Do you feel positive about the agreed solution?

             1   2   3(3)   4(3)   5(2)

Comment:

The agreed solution is to be aware of how this person feels. I now
'avoid' this person more. Probably not the best solution to the issue but it
currently works for me as I do not believe I can ever 'win' with this staff member.

3. Did the conversation positively/negatively (delete which does not apply) impact on your future actions?

All respondents stated positively.

Comment:

It has enabled me to have a deeper understanding of how another staff
member feels about me or perceives my actions. I feel less immobilised by the
person concerned and feel more at peace with how they feel about me.
I discussed possible solutions with other teachers and sought feedback from them as well.
Yes reflected back. I conditioned myself to be calm and relaxed and get the best achievement from the children.
Yes. I have been given a lot of ideas that I can try.

4. Did you feel safe discussing the issues in a no blame culture?

             1   2(2)   3(2)   4(1)   5(3)

Comment:

I generally always feel safe in discussing issues/concerns/new ideas
with my professional leader.
I was nervous.
There have been times when the facts have been wrong and it has started
conversations off on the wrong foot. I have felt an accusatory atmosphere has
happened before we talk.

Further comments:
xx has been supportive and helpful with her ideas and suggestions pertaining to my
teaching role.

Appendix Six: Group Reflections on Involvement in the Development Overall

What has made the group succeed?
We have learned with each other and from each other
Everyone in the group wanted to learn
Commitment, and the impetus of the professional learning, was shared by everyone at each meeting
We have utilised people's skills in the group
No-one underestimated the importance of the issues being confronted
Group members gained confidence to deal with issues that might otherwise have been 'put on the back burner'
There was a genuine intent in the group to help each other
Reduced isolation
Open sharing of resources
Non-judgemental group
We didn't default to whining, or complaining about people – there was no blaming of other people (our staff) for problems
Frequency of meetings was important
While the external facilitator drove, challenged, and reflected our learning in relation to research, and modelled the dialogue process through the whole project, we generated our own solutions almost all the way through
The fact that we chose one thing to investigate has kept us focussed
There has been challenge – in a safe way
Asking reflective questions of other people in the group has, at the same time, challenged ourselves

What has it taken for us to have the courage to have the conversations?

We recognised that we had a need to improve the dialogue we have with staff
Wanting to avoid litigation, and also staff frustration, when issues are not managed well and moved on
We recognised that this work will have an impact on children's learning and achievement
The impetus of seeing change – success breeds success
Reflection and support from other members of the group
The structure of the dialogue gives us confidence – especially because we realised we do not have to come up with all the answers
The practice and literature research we did gave us confidence
The evidence analysis, and the meta-dialogue

What has the impact been?

Often I arrive at the meeting feeling tired and hassled, but I would leave saying "that was such a great meeting!" and feeling enthusiastic
Self-confidence gained from our learning
Trickle-down to other staff members through our own personal modelling
Learning has happened on a number of levels – skills and strategies, plus learning how to progress a particular dialogue or situation in our schools
We are also now linking the work to our appraisals

The nature of what we have been investigating has broken down any barriers there might have been between group members
Trust developed in the group (and humour!)
The growth of trust and relationship within the group is having beneficial impacts in other work within the cluster
It touches on the heart of what schools are all about. Being able to link the academic work with our work has been critical – it makes it relevant.

What might have got in the way of us being so productive?

Workload: we have acknowledged that this is most important barrier but also the dialogue has been an enabler. This learning is sustaining us through our workload because we are not letting the urgent drive out the important.
We didn't quite realise how big this was going to be when we started – it has evolved!