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UCC
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Understanding teacher collaboration in disadvantaged urban primary schools: Uncovering practices that foster professional learning communities.

Jacinta McCarthy

Thesis presented in fulfilment of the regulations governing the award of the degree of Ph.D.

Supervised by Dr. Paul Conway.
Head of Department: Prof. Kathy Hall

School of Education, CACSSS,
University College Cork,
National University of Ireland, Cork.

May 2011

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed _____

ID No: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

Background: This study is set in the context of disadvantaged urban primary schools in Ireland. It inquires into the collaborative practices of primary teachers exploring how class teachers and support teachers develop ways of working together in an effort to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of their students. Recommendations for teachers to collaborate and work as part of professional learning communities have appeared in policy documents and in educational literature since the 1970s. Yet 'collaboration' as a practice has been slow to permeate the historically embedded assumption of how a teacher should work. Traditionally, opportunities for teachers to share their practice with colleagues have been absent or rare. However DEIS (Delivering Equality in Schools) urban primary schools have a high number of support teachers on staff. The class teacher and the learning support teacher may find more opportunities to collaborate than their counterparts in non-DEIS schools. This study inquires into the collaborative practices of teachers in these DEIS schools.

Aims: This study aims to answer the following research questions.

- What are the dynamics of teacher collaboration in disadvantaged urban primary schools?
- In what ways are teacher collaboration and teacher learning related?
- In what ways does teacher collaboration influence students' opportunities for learning?

In answering these research questions, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to teacher learning through collaboration. Though current policy and literature advocate and make a case for the development of collaborative teaching practices, key studies (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008) have identified gaps in the research literature in relation to the impact of teacher collaboration in schools. This study seeks to address some of those gaps by establishing how schools develop a collaborative environment and how teaching practices are enacted in such a setting. It seeks to determine what skills, relationships, structures and conditions are most important in developing collaborative environments that foster the development of professional learning communities (PLCs). This study aims to establish if collaborative

practice is a feasible practice resulting in worthwhile benefits for both teachers and students.

Sample and methods: The selection of DEIS urban primary schools for this study is based on the assumption that firstly these schools have staff numbers that are favourable in the event of collaboration developing amongst teachers. And secondly, teachers in these schools have an added purpose to collaborate as they are concerned with raising the literacy and numeracy levels of their students.

A mixed method research design was used for this study involving a postal survey, one to one interviews, a focus interview, observations, student attainment data and other data sources. The study was organised in three purposeful phases:

- All 338 DEIS urban primary schools were surveyed and there was a good response rate of 53%. Three questionnaires were sent, one aimed at school principals, one aimed at learning-support/resource teachers and one aimed at class teachers, with considerable overlap in survey items.
- Four short case studies were conducted. Based on the survey four schools were identified as sites of good practice and two semi-structured interviews were carried out in each of these schools, one with the principal and one with the learning-support/resource teacher. In addition, a collaborative teaching lesson was observed in each school.
- In one of the four schools a more in-depth case study was carried out. Relevant documentation, journal entries, a focus group interview and evidence from an ongoing collaborative literacy project which began in 2006 was collected and analysed. Data on students' MIST (Middle Infants Screening Test) scores for 2003, 2004, 2009 and 2010 was recorded and analysed.

Results: This study reveals the dynamics of teacher collaboration in DEIS urban primary schools. The evidence shows that teachers are aware of the necessity and importance of collaborating with colleagues and the majority of learning-support teachers are now planning collaboratively with class teachers. Due to the prevailing culture of solo teaching and relative isolation in teaching, collaborative planning between teachers tends to be more prevalent than collaborative teaching. However, a

substantial number of teachers in DEIS schools have taken collaboration a step further and begun to provide in-class support, sharing the same work-space as colleagues.

This study reveals that teacher learning is enhanced through teacher collaboration. Teacher learning is positively affected by factors that act as collaboration catalysts, through identity negotiation and by extended school leadership. The results also reveal that school culture is a major influence in the development of collaborative practices. Evidence shows that the provision of social contexts and tools for teachers to engage in reflective activities is essential. Inadequate opportunities for reflection can prevent embryonic PLCs from developing fully.

Results of this study reveal that opportunities for student learning are improved when a collaborative programme of work with specific, clear targets is implemented. Continuity in the pupil's learning programme is provided. In-class support enables every child to be challenged with active learning in small groups scaffolding their learning. Effective in-class support raises student self-esteem and they view themselves as learners with the potential to succeed. When assessment and recording of achievement levels is used for planning future work programmes it leads to more focused teaching and subsequently increased student achievement levels.

Significance: This study provides a detailed portrayal of teacher collaboration at systemised level in DEIS urban settings. It depicts a deeper understanding of teacher collaboration through the inclusion of my own personal journey from working in relative isolation to working collaboratively. In particular it confirms and is consistent with previous research on teacher collaboration. Whereas some previous studies have highlighted increased *student* achievement through the use of effective collaborative teaching practices, this study highlights the high level of *teacher* learning that results; teacher learning that has long-term effects as it has the potential to challenge teachers' assumptions and transform their beliefs about teaching and learning.

This study asks if DES recommendations on teacher collaboration in recent years has in any way influenced the changes that have occurred in practice. Collaboration has now become a 'buzz word' in education and teachers interpret it in different ways. This study inquires into the work practices of teachers, noting significant changes,

particularly the ways in which teachers in DEIS urban primary schools have begun to work and learn together as part of a wider professional learning community.

This study is also significant because teacher collaboration is deemed essential for the development of inclusive practices in schools and has therefore become an area of increasing interest and concern in recent years.

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This study has taken almost five years to complete. During that time I met numerous people to whom I am indebted. However, the following list includes those to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude:

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And last but definitely not least, my deepest gratitude and love to my family

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the two most influential people in my early life:
To my mother Margaret Healy, whose faith in me has never faltered and to my late grandmother, Jo Morrissy, who taught me to work hard, always striving for excellence and to be satisfied only with my best efforts and never anything less.

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Abbreviations / Acronyms

CPD – Continuous Professional Development

DEIS – Delivering Equality in Schools

DES – Department of Education and Skills (Department of Education and Science, pre 2010).

EBSCO – Elton B. Stephens Company

ERIC - Education Resources Information Centre

ERC – Education Research Centre

EPA – Educational Priority Area (UK)

EPSEN – Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

HSCL – Home School Community Liaison

IATSE – Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

IEP – Individual Education Plan

IPLP – Individual Profile and Learning Programme

INTASC – Interstate New Teachers Assessment Support Consortium (US)

INTO – Irish National Teachers' Organisation

KWL –what I *K*now, What I *W*ant to know and what I *L*earned (Graphic Organiser)

LS – Learning Support

MIST – Middle Infants Screening Test

NCCA – National Council for Curriculum Assessment

NPPTI – National Pilot Project for Teacher Induction

NQT – Newly Qualified Teacher

NSEF – National Economic and Social Forum

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PASW – Predictive Analytics Soft Ware

PD – Professional Development

PE – Physical Education

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

PLC – Professional Learning Community

PPDS – Primary Professional Development Service. Since September 2008 this service is now under the wider umbrella of the PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers)

SDPS – School Development Planning Support

SSP – School Support Programme

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SET – Special Education Team

SNA – Special Needs Assistant

TALIS – Teaching And Learning International Survey

TDA – Training and Development Agency for schools in Britain.

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

Glossary of terms

Class Reader : Irish primary school teachers and pupils use this term to describe the formal basal reading book, which is generally used on a whole-class basis.

Differentiation: Personalising instruction based on individual pupils' strengths, abilities, interests, prior knowledge and preferred learning modes.

Disadvantaged: Those who are prevented from reaching their educational potential due to a complex set of factors that range from their social cultural and economic background to their community and environmental settings.

In-class Support : Provision of learning support within a pupil's own classroom. The support teacher goes into the classroom to support the pupil rather than withdrawing him/her.

Inter-Quartile Range : (IQR) The IQR is used in statistical analysis, to avoid misleading or skewed results when the data presents with a large range or extreme values. The highest and lowest quarter of the measures are omitted, and the IQR of the middle 50% of values is quoted. Thus, the IQR is derived from the median measure and gives a more accurate picture, because it reduces the importance of the extreme ends of the range.

In-service: Professional development taking place or continuing while one is a full-time employee.

Learning Support: Provision of support for learning for pupils with low attainment or general learning difficulties.

Off-site professional development: Teachers travel away from their schools to engage in professional development courses or work-shops, usually in universities or teacher support centres. May be individual endeavour.

On-site professional development: Teachers engage in professional development in their schools often facilitated by outside expert. There is usually whole staff involvement.

Phoneme : The smallest unit of sound in a language.

Phoneme / phonological awareness : An awareness that spoken language is made up of discrete units, the smallest of which is a phoneme, and the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words.

Phonics: Teaching students how to use grapheme-phoneme (letter-sound) correspondences to decode or spell words.

Professional Learning Community: A PLC is an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. It is often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups.

Resource Teacher: Teachers who dealt specifically and solely with children diagnosed as having 'low incidence' disabilities e.g. autism. Since 2003, there has been a blurring of the role of resource teacher and learning support teacher.

Special Educational Needs : Educational needs which are additional to or different from those of a person's peers.

Special Education Team : A team of teachers in a school who support the learning of all pupils with special educational needs.

Special Needs Assistant: Person who assists the class teacher / school with the integration of SEN pupils. SNA duties are of a non-teaching nature and a pupil's care needs are a priority.

Withdrawal: The process of withdrawing pupils from their classroom to support their learning in a small group or one-to-one situation in an alternative room.

Chapter 1- Introduction

Here and now I am concerned with the story as an instrument of education……. Every facet of classroom life, every subject, even one as sober as arithmetic, can be adroitly turned into a story.
McMahon (1992, p.54)

Instead of teaching, I told stories. Anything to keep them quiet and in their seats. They thought I was teaching I thought I was teaching I was learning.
McCourt (2005, p.19)

One of the greatest tricks of the teacher's craft is telling a story. Everyone loves a good story. Brian McMahon and Frank McCourt, two prolific Irish writers and teachers, used story as a form of pedagogy in their classrooms. Why use story? One reason is that it catches the attention of students and keeps their interest. Such a method is appealing to teachers because teaching is demanding and classroom control and discipline are one of its major preoccupations (Fullan, 2001a). A teacher's work calls on one to be "a drill sergeant, a rabbi, a shoulder to cry on, a disciplinarian, a singer, a low-level scholar, a clerk, a referee, a clown, a counsellor, a dress-code enforcer, a conductor, an apologist, a philosopher, a collaborator, a tap-dancer, a politician, a therapist, a fool, a traffic cop, a priest, a mother-father- brother-sister- uncle- aunt, a book keeper, a critic, a psychologist, the last straw……You're on your own in the classroom, one man or woman…..it's like a boxer going into the ring or a bullfighter into the arena " (McCourt, 2005, p19 and 255).

McCourt's often satirical depiction of the teacher's work presents the familiar historical image of the lone teacher; teaching in front of a class, surrounded by students, yet isolated from colleagues. Due to widespread access to education, this traditional stereotype is firmly entrenched in the minds of most people from an early age. Sarason, in a study of teachers in the 1950s found "a culture of individuals, not a group concerned with pedagogical theory, research and practice. Each was concerned with himself or herself, not with the profession's status, controversies, or pressures for change" (Sarason 1996, p.367). This traditional image of the teacher lingers in present times despite the notion that nowadays, teaching methods should vary and differ from traditional practices

because “class teaching is regarded by its critics as inimical to differing abilities, interests and capacities of learners” (Sugrue, 1997, p.5).

Today’s child-centred approach to teaching means that the one-size fits all approach is no longer adequate and the teacher must cater for each student in a class of mixed ability. This is a demanding task that proves difficult for one teacher working with a class of students who have varied and specific needs. Working collaboratively with a teaching colleague in the classroom can alleviate the inherent difficulties. ‘Two heads are better than one!’, ‘Many hands make light work!; we are familiar with the rhetoric but can we change the historically long practice of ‘one teacher, one classroom’, and why should we? This study examines the neglected image of the teacher rather the familiar one. It explores how class teachers and support teachers collaboratively develop their practice and argues that it is now necessary for them to do so.

The teachers in this study work in schools that are set in urban disadvantaged areas in Ireland. In the numerous policy documents from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) over the past decade the low academic achievement of students in disadvantaged schools has been recognised as a key policy focus. Increasingly there is recognition that engaging with this problem entails the transformation of teaching and learning practices in school with a particular critique of passive learning especially for students who are neither motivated by school learning nor see the relevance of it. For example in 2005, the DES asserted that:

> Everyone involved in the work of designated disadvantaged schools must recognise that the significant level of low achievement in classrooms means that teaching and learning approaches must be highly focused on the specific needs of individual children. Text-book based whole-class teaching does not cater for the needs of these children….The learning contexts involved require a very high level of teaching expertise.
>
> (DES, 2005b), p.63).

Teachers therefore, must develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meaningfully translate curriculum to meet the diverse needs of their students. The rationale of meeting the needs of all students requires teachers to focus on individual ability and not on what is regarded as normal or expected at each class

level (Brookfield, 1995; Gartner and Lipsky, 2005). This approach, proposed by the DES, makes complex demands on teachers that require significant development of their learning and expertise. Development of teaching skills is one of the most potent ways of enhancing quality provision for children, ensuring that the teaching they receive makes a significant difference to the quality of their lives (Ramey and Ramey, 1998; McGough, 2002; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005).

Low literacy and numeracy achievement levels of students in disadvantaged Irish schools are a cause for concern (McGough 2002; Eivers, Shiel & Shortt, 2004; DES Inspectorate 2005). Traditionally, teachers have worked alone in their classrooms without in-class support from colleagues. Is this approach to teaching insufficient and therefore a contributory factor to the low achievement levels and will continuation of the traditional approach to teaching risk a repetition of past failures? The 2003 findings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that effective ways of learning can and should be fostered by the educational setting and by teachers. This PISA report highlights the importance of engaging students in meaningful learning as motivation and self-confidence are indispensable to outcomes that will foster lifelong learning (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development *(OECD)*, 2005). Teachers need to be mindful of meaningful learning for students as the latest PISA report (2009) revealed that literacy levels in Ireland had dropped more significantly than in any other OECD country. One in six students had significant reading problems, with 23 per cent of males having a literacy level below functional literacy (OECD, 2011).

How do the teachers in designated disadvantaged schools in Ireland approach and deal with literacy problems, ensuring that meaningful learning occurs in their classrooms while simultaneously meeting the needs of all of their pupils? Recent research supports the idea that working collaboratively in communities of practice develops teaching skills and increases teachers' knowledge through continuous sharing of everyday work practices (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Teachers learn from one another and create momentum to fuel continued improvement (Wenger, 1998; Wells 1999; Achinstein, 2002; DuFour, DuFour,

Eaker & Karhanek, 2004; Kelchtermans, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Loxley, Johnston, Murchan, Fitzgerald & Quinn, 2007). In this study I map the process of classroom teachers working collaboratively with support teachers, in planning, delivering and assessing teaching and learning programmes and argue that this collaborative model provides some resolution in the Irish context because it enhances teacher learning which in turn leads to more effective learning opportunities for students. This research study inquires into the whole phenomenon of teacher collaboration and examines its effects on teacher and student learning.

This chapter initially discusses the context of this study which is one of disadvantage. This is followed by a brief description of special needs education in disadvantaged schools as collaboration between class teachers and support teachers is the specific focus of this study. The purpose and aims of the study are then presented followed by a description of the research methods that were used. The significance of this study is discussed while the limitations are also considered. An overview of the thesis ensues. Finally, an autobiographical statement is included in this chapter as this study has been shaped by my own experiences of collaboration.

1.1 Context of study

The context of this research is to understand teacher learning as it impacts on student learning in *urban disadvantaged* schools in Ireland. The pupils attending these schools constitute a majority of those who currently fail to benefit from the education system and their under-achievement in school can have inter-generational effects on families and their communities (Lynch 1999; DES, 2005). Many of these students are among the most marginalised children in Irish society today and come to school with complex social, emotional, health and developmental needs that are barriers to learning (Conaty, 2002).

These pupils have, on average, significantly lower mean achievement scores in literacy than pupils in non-disadvantaged schools (Cosgrove, Kelleghan, Forde & Morgan, 2000). In an assessment of reading achievements carried out by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) in 2004, the findings show that there was

"about two-thirds of a standard deviation at each grade level"(p.157) between pupils in designated disadvantage schools and pupils in other schools.

> Not only did pupils in the literacy survey achieve lower mean scores, but the percentages of pupils who achieved scores at or below the 10th percentile were considerably higher than at standardisation. Twenty-seven percent of First and Sixth class pupils, and 30% of pupils in Third class achieved scores at or below the 10th percentile (compared to 10% at each class level in the standardisation sample). ….. very few pupils in the survey could be described as having high levels of reading achievement. Just 4% of pupils in First class, and 3% in both Third and Sixth classes, achieved scores at or above the 90th percentile (Eivers et al, 2004, p.157).

It is evident from these figures that low reading achievement levels in designated disadvantaged schools in Ireland are a serious concern.

1.1.1 Tracing educational disadvantage

Underachievement and marginalisation is recognised internationally as a social justice issue and as an issue to be tackled to increase participation in society and to enhance economic development (OECD, 1995; McLoyd 1998; DEIS, 2005). It is necessary to briefly outline the recognition of educational disadvantage in order to fully understand the context of this study. Educational disadvantage became a recognized problem for developed democracies in the 1950s with the emergence of the debate on poverty in Britain and the United States. The debate on educational disadvantage in Ireland began in the 1960s. The Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap report (1965) raised the issue which resulted in Ireland being one of the first countries in Europe to set up preschools in disadvantaged areas. In 1969 a number of playgroups were opened in areas of social disadvantage, one of which was the Rutland Street Project in Dublin, aimed at preparing children for primary school. This project was noteworthy in that it produced positive long-term results similar to those of the Head Start programme in the United States (Nicaise, 2000). In an evaluation of the project it was found that children made good progress in acquiring school related knowledge and skills, the project had an impact on the structure of children's homes and in the long-term, the children stayed on at school (Kelleghan et al, 1995, p 11).

Interventions to support educational disadvantage at primary school level were not put in place until 1984 when the DES initiated a scheme of special funding and measures for schools in designated areas of disadvantage beginning in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Underachievement in schools, unsatisfactory retention rates and a poor accessing of higher education prompted initiation of the scheme in an attempt to address these difficulties (Conaty, 2002, p. 20). The scheme was very much influenced by what had happened much earlier in Britain. Table 1A gives an historical overview of the development of the concept of disadvantage.

Table 1A:
The historical background to the recognition of disadvantage as a concept (Welshman, 2006)

1880s	Social investigators such as Charles Booth became concerned about a social residuum in London
early 1900s	Anxieties about the unemployable were raised in the writings of Beveridge and Webbs
1920s-1930s	These years were characterised by the search for a social problem group
1940s-1950s	The notion of the problem family emerged
1960s	Oscar Lewis developed the concept of the culture of poverty
1972	The term 'cycle of deprivation' was coined by Sir Keith Joseph
1980s -	The cycle of disadvantage and the recognition of the underclass, as being socially excluded came to the fore especially in US. Many US and European initiatives were launched to counteract educational disadvantage
2000 -	'Disadvantage' now being replaced with terms such as equality and inclusion

In the post war years in Britain the concept of 'the problem family' had emerged, which was followed by the debate on the culture of poverty in the 1960s (Rutter and Madge,1976; Welshman, 2006). This debate led to the development of policies that focused on culture, deprivation and environment. One such policy was reflected in the Plowden Report (DES, UK, 1967). This report was in many ways a 'progressive' document criticising rote learning, emphasising the importance of early childhood education and acknowledging the role of parents in the education of their children. One innovative proposal of the report was that

Educational Priority Areas (EPAs) should be identified and granted extra staff and funds.

> The criteria for the selection of EPAs included such features as family size; overcrowding; poor attendance and truancy; the proportions of 'retarded', disturbed or 'handicapped' pupils; and the number of children unable to speak English. (Welshman, 2006, p.100)

This was "one of the first examples of a new found enthusiasm for area-based initiatives" in Britain (Welshman, 2006, p.100), and Ireland followed suit.

1.1.2 Interventions to counteract educational disadvantage

In Ireland in 1980, the Government White Paper in Education endorsed the equality of educational opportunity and interventions were subsequently implemented in the prioritised areas (Kelleghan, Weir, ÓhUllacháin, and Morgan, 1995). By the mid 1990s the disadvantage scheme included a variety of supports; 'Early Start' Preschool initiative, 'Giving Children an Even Break' which considerably reduced class size in the early years, the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme, the School Completion Programme, the Early Literacy Initiative, the School Books Grant Schemes, the provision of additional supports for vulnerable groups, particularly Traveller students, reduced class sizes and additional capitation grants. It is clearly evident then, that a great many strategies were devised to deal with problems posed by educational disadvantage in Ireland.

Despite the interventions initiated to address educational disadvantage there is little evidence of any improvement in the average literacy and numeracy standards of pupils attending primary schools serving disadvantaged communities (Kelleghan et al, 1995; European Social Fund, 1997; Archer, 2001; Lynch, 2001; McGough 2002; Eivers et al, 2004; DES Inspectorate 2005). The many new initiatives were launched in schools without school based professional development for teachers. The initiatives were not coordinated in vision and practice. Student achievement levels were not raised as a result. Hence came the development of the DEIS Plan (Delivering Equality in Schools, 2005). All schools designated as disadvantaged are now known as DEIS schools. This action plan sought to deal with the fragmentation of previous efforts and to build

a coordinated and more integrated response than previously. Informed by the report from the Educational Disadvantage Committee (2005), the DEIS plan promotes the concept of educational equality. The term 'educational disadvantage' is now deemed to be 'jaded language' with negative connotations (Gilligan, 2005, in Downes & Downes, 2007). The terms 'educational inclusion' and 'equality education' are now viewed as more apt and progressive, where the solution rather than the problem is the focus (Spring, 2007; Downes & Downes 2007). Tormey (2010) questions whether or not these terms are better at making clear the political positions which underpin their use (p.190). Tormey proposes that educational disadvantage is very much a contested concept, one that takes on different meanings as it becomes embedded in the varied belief systems of different groups (2010, p.191). However for the purpose of this study, the concept of educational disadvantage is understood in its broad sense as defined in the 1998 Education Act as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevents students from deriving appropriate benefit from education in schools" (Section 32, paragraph 9).

This study focuses on collaboration between teachers in DEIS *urban* primary schools only. Therefore it seeks to contribute to the knowledge in this area by addressing key gaps in research in the Irish context. Though policy and international literature support the transformation of teaching practice, recent changes in teaching practice in Irish schools are not yet well documented. The inspectorate report (2009) on effective literacy and numeracy practices in DEIS schools is the first of its kind to be published by the DES.

The rationale for focusing on DEIS urban primary schools only, came from a number of considerations.

- The differences between urban and rural disadvantage have been taken into account in the DEIS programme through specific targeted actions (DEIS , 2005, p.12).
- Urban areas tend to have the highest concentration of disadvantage and therefore a high concentration of the associated problems.

- DEIS urban primary schools have a higher number of children needing learning support - between a quarter and three-tenths of pupils qualify for support (Eivers et al, 2004, p.157) - therefore they have a higher allocation of learning-support teachers than do schools in other areas, where the levels of disadvantage are more dispersed.
- The category of DEIS urban primary schools, includes some of the very large city schools that have a higher enrolment than rural schools. These schools' staff numbers are high.

The selection of DEIS urban primary schools for this study is therefore based on the assumption that firstly these schools have staff numbers that are favourable in the event of collaboration developing amongst teachers. And secondly, due to the low literacy and numeracy levels, teachers in these schools have an added purpose to collaborate. They are concerned with raising the literacy and numeracy levels of their students. Admittedly, favourable staffing ratios and motivation to collaborate are not enough in themselves for collaboration to occur in schools but this study aims to show that they are two important contributory factors that assist teachers in the development of collaborative practices in schools.

1.2 Specific focus of study

This study is an inquiry into one particular approach to teacher collaboration. Traditionally teachers have tended to be isolated in their own classrooms and opportunities to share with others have been absent or rare (Fullan, 2001a). However in DEIS urban primary schools where there are a number of support teachers on staff, the class teacher and the learning support teacher may find the opportunities to collaborate.

Learning-support/resource teachers are allocated to primary schools by the DES, depending on a number of factors such as low achievement levels in literacy and numeracy, and the number of diagnosed special needs pupils. These teachers work to support the diverse learning needs of children with learning difficulties or children who have special educational needs. DEIS schools also have resource teachers for pupils from the travelling community, language support teachers for pupils whose first language is not English, and some DEIS schools have a

support teacher allocated on a pilot basis to cater for the needs of pupils with social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. All of these teachers are now expected to act as part of a Special Education support Team (SET). The Department of Education and Science recommends that these support teachers work closely with class teachers ensuring that programmes of work designed for pupils with learning needs are collaboratively planned and organised (DES, Learning Support Guidelines 2000). Current recommendations propose that all support teachers belong to the SET in their school supporting the learning of all categories of pupils with learning difficulties known as pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Traditionally, since the inception of remedial provision in Ireland in 1963, support teachers have withdrawn children to a separate room for their learning support. 'Remedial teaching' was the term used for learning support at the time and it clearly portrays how a deficit model prevailed. It was felt "that the children who receive remedial help would overcome their difficulties and return to their classrooms where they would make, at least, average progress without additional help" (INTO, 1994, p. 27). This perception of pupils needing support led to the practice of withdrawing them from their classrooms to remediate them until such time as they 'caught up' with their peers. There has been a significant increase in the number of resource teachers for pupils with SEN since 1998. At that time there were 104 resource teachers but by 2004, this number had increased to 2,600. However this increase did little to enhance inclusive practices as most resource teachers were operating one-to-one tuition by withdrawal of the children from their classes as their only approach (DeBúrca, 2005; Travers, 2006). This method "militated against approaches such as small group work, paired work and crucially, a range of appropriate in-class support methods to facilitate inclusion" (Travers, 2006, p.137).

With the publication of the Learning Support Guidelines (2000) and the subsequent DES circulars pertaining to learning-support provision there has been a significant change in the perception of the pupil needing support. It is now recommended that schools and teachers "support pupils experiencing low achievement through a team approach" and "develop and implement an

individual learning programme for each pupil in receipt of supplementary teaching" (LS Guidelines 2000, p.14, 15). The change in the wording from 'remedial' to 'learning support' indicates that the pupil is now perceived as a learner with the potential to learn, at his own pace. The curriculum and teaching methods must now be adapted to suit the pupil. It is an inclusive rather than a deficit model.

Inclusive education is based on the principle that each and every pupil has the right to be educated in the regular classrooms and not constantly singled out and excluded due to their differences (Ainscow, 2000; Westwood, 2003, Travers, 2006). Continuous withdrawal of pupils in need of support by the learning-support teachers does little to support the inclusion argument because it leads to pupils becoming stigmatised and has implications for self-esteem (Travers, Balfe, Butler, Day, Dupont, McDaid, O'Donnell, & Prunty, 2010). In the 2007, Guidelines for teachers of students with general learning disabilities (NCCA, 2007) there is an emphasis on supporting the needs of the child within the classroom setting and there are many suggestions offered to help teachers differentiate their instruction (p.50-51). In DEIS schools, where there is a high incidence of learning and behavioural difficulties in many classrooms, putting these suggested strategies into effect can be very difficult for a class teacher working alone. The help of a colleague, namely the learning-support/resource teacher, may ensure that differentiation is possible in DEIS schools.

For the purpose of this study, 'learning-support teacher' is the title given to all support teachers. With the introduction of the general allocation model (DES, Circulars 24/03 and 02/05), it is recommended that learning -support teachers are now part of the Special Education Team in the schools that they work in. The general allocation model is intended to make possible the development of truly inclusive schools. As a result, learning -support teachers and resource teachers are both responsible for supporting the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Prior to Circular 24/03(2003) there were clear distinctions between the roles of learning-support teachers and resource teachers. Learning-support teachers provided supplementary teaching to pupils with low achievement (interpreted as pupils who are at or below the 10th percentile on

standardised tests of achievement- DES, 2000, p.57) and to pupils with high incidence disabilities e.g. dyslexia. Resource teachers dealt specifically and solely with children diagnosed as having 'low incidence' disabilities e.g. autism. But the 2003 circular states that "the department will support school management in the development of coherent special education teams that draw on the skills of all specialist teachers, … without making artificial distinctions between them" (DES, 2003, p.3). Pupils formerly falling into the category of learning support are now under the more general SEN umbrella in many schools. This is a major departure from existing policy and practice and the first official approval by the DES of a blurring of roles in the deployment of support services. Schools with learning-support teachers and resource teachers and schools that have further support services such as resource teachers for travellers are now recommended to develop a special education support team that will collaborate with class teachers in the planning and delivery of special education provision to all pupils in need of support (DES, 2005, a, p.1).

This inquiry traces the issues that classroom teachers and learning-support teachers encounter as they engage with the task of collaboratively planning, enacting and evaluating practice. It is argued here that such work challenges them to develop new professional identities that may significantly change the nature of their teaching practice. Such a transformation requires teachers' acknowledgement of changing identity, a change in mindset, the ability to articulate practice knowledge and a deep sense of commitment to student learning (Gee, 1992; Day, Kington, Stobart & Samons, 2006; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008).

1.3 Purpose and aims of study

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the dynamics of teacher collaboration in disadvantaged urban primary schools?
- In what ways are teacher collaboration and teacher learning related?
- In what ways does teacher collaboration influence students' opportunities for learning

The purpose of this study is to track teacher learning through collaborative practices which in turn generate solutions to the recurring problem of low student achievement levels. It is interesting that since 1999 guidelines from the DES recommend that teachers work collaboratively but up to 2009 there have been no exemplars for teachers to assist them in enacting collaborative learning programmes.

> The success of teaching and learning strategies requires the explicit prioritisation of literacy and numeracy education in which the most effective use of available physical and human resources is made. A culture of change for improvement is required in order to enhance the quality of children's learning in a developmental and meaningful way.
>
> (DES Inspectorate, 2005d, p.68)

Therefore, schools and teachers have been left to devise their own frameworks and strategies at local level in their attempts to incorporate collaborative practice into their learning programmes.

This study aims to examine the practice of these teachers as they attempt to improve literacy and numeracy standards while incorporating new and innovative teaching and learning methods that are recommended by the DES through collaboration with colleagues. This is not merely a matter of instigating a technical differentiated approach but is far more complex than the guidelines suggest. It involves extending teachers' professionalism to a point where actions such as the articulation of practice knowledge, critical reflection on assumptions, engagement in critical dialogue, observation, recording and evaluation of student work, all become commonplace in the everyday practice of teachers.

A further aim of this study is to explore and map the many challenges that teachers face in their attempts to change their teaching from a practice that is private to one that is public. Does such a change challenge teachers' identity? The self images teachers have, how they define their work, and the meanings they attach to themselves and their work are all affected by changes in their work practices (Day, 2004, p53). Day (1999), among others argues that such change in identity is the real work of professional development since it signals a

commitment and motivation to examine and change practice to better meet the needs of students.

A key challenge is the difficult work of articulating 'practice knowledge' and reflecting on work practices that are embedded in the culture of the profession, the teacher and the school:

> In the organisational learning system with which we are most familiar, conflicts and dilemmas tend to be suppressed or to result in polarisation and political warfare. An institution congenial to reflective practice would require a learning system within which individuals could surface conflicts and dilemmas and subject them to productive public inquiry, a learning system conducive to the continual criticism and restructuring of organisational principles and values.
>
> (Schon, 1983, p.335)

Thus reflective practice and the commitment from teachers to become reflective practitioners is a central strand of this study.

Other challenges that arise include the lack of allocated planning time for teachers who wish to work collaboratively, the unfamiliarity of most teachers with collaborative practices, and the heavy curricular demands placed on teachers by the Revised Primary Curriculum (DES, 1999). In addition, the autonomous nature of teachers' work can be challenged when sharing practice with a colleague.

This study aims to establish if well-designed collaborative planning, teaching and assessment programmes can partly address the challenges of inclusion and differentiation that Irish primary school teachers face in the 21st century. It is hoped that this study may inspire schools to develop as successful competent professional learning communities, where all children's needs are considered and provided for by a team of teachers who share a common purpose and vision.

1.4 Research methods

To answer the research questions fully a mixed methods approach was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology for this study. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in this study with the data collected in three phases:

- A postal questionnaire was sent to all DEIS urban primary schools for completion by the Principal, one class teacher and one support teacher. The purpose was to gather information on how DEIS urban primary schools were planning for and teaching students with SEN.
- Four 'snapshot' case studies which include a site visit and interviews with key stakeholders including the principal and learning-support teachers and observation of classroom practice in each school.
- One in-depth case study which includes a longitudinal study over four years with data collection in the form of interviews, learning logs, reflective journals and assessment results.

The qualitative data provides insights into the ways that teachers in DEIS urban primary schools work together, what collaboration means to them, the challenges they face along the way, the structures and conditions that need to be put in place and the relationships and skills they need to develop. This rich detail is gathered from the answers given to the open-ended questions in the survey and also through interviews and observations in the four schools. Finally the single case study in one school is conducted through action research, providing a lens for the examination of a developing professional community. The research methods are outlined in detail in Chapter 3, which aims to give an accurate account of how the research was conducted.

1.5 Significance of study

This study inquires into the changing nature of teachers' practice in Ireland and asks if policy as text has become policy as practice. In other words have the DES recommendations on teacher collaboration in recent years in any way influenced the changes that have occurred in practice? Collaboration has now become a 'buzz word' in education and teachers interpret it in different ways. This study inquires into the work practices of teachers, noting significant changes, particularly the ways in which teachers in DEIS urban primary schools have begun to work and learn together as part of a wider professional learning community.

As professional learning communities are relatively new to education systems there is a need for documentation and analysis of these communities in diverse settings and at different points in their evolution in order to provide a cornerstone for local learning systems (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.129). This study is relevant and significant because it attempts to do just that by inquiring into the early development of professional communities in DEIS urban primary schools in Ireland. This study also provides insight into the significance of school culture. The TALIS international Report 2009, states that it is not possible to establish whether a positive school climate depends on good teacher co-operation or whether good teacher co-operation depends on a positive school climate (p.22). This study explores this idea a little further.

It is hoped that this study will not only contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on the professional development of teachers through collaboration but also to the relationship it has to positive student outcomes. The case study involves assessment of a literacy project which started in 2006. It further considers student outcomes resulting from that ongoing collaborative project thus addressing a key gap in the Irish context.

> There is a dearth of Irish research on methods of teaching reading in designated schools, particularly on the effects of different approaches to teaching pre-reading/beginning reading in Junior classes. Such research could examine the use of structured beginning reading programmes, the extent to which Junior class teachers modify their teaching practices in smaller classes, how classroom and learning-support activities are linked, and the extent to which assessment information is obtained and used in reading classes.
>
> (Eivers et al, 2004, p.175)

This study in its inquiry into the early intervention literacy project will have significance for the reasons outlined by Eivers et al above. It may help other practitioners to improve their practice, not by applying the exact models described in this study but by adapting ideas presented here to suit their own school's needs thus helping them to become change agents in their own school communities.

1.6 Limitations of study

As this study focuses on disadvantaged schools in urban areas its findings may be quite specific in the context of urban disadvantage. It remains to be seen if the recommendations made at the end of the study are applicable in the broader educational context. I acted as a lone researcher with limited funding and limited time. Therefore the study has limitations in that not all the research paths could be thoroughly exhausted. The postal survey was conducted in early 2007. Since then more literacy and numeracy programmes have been launched nationwide and programmes such as 'Literacy Lift-off', 'Peer Tutoring', 'Maths Recovery' and 'Ready, Set, Go, Maths' involve collaboration and in-class support. These programmes have been taken on by many DEIS schools and include professional development for teachers. Therefore it is likely that the actual number of DEIS schools where teachers work collaboratively may have increased since the survey was conducted in 2007.

1.7 Thesis overview

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides an in-depth study of the literature relating to teacher collaboration and educational change. The literature review is framed by socio-cultural theory which proposes that the external social world in which the individual develops is a major factor in the learning process because it is through participation in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions that we are drawn into the use of these functions in ways that enhance their further development (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p.7). Working collaboratively allows teachers to construct new solutions to the problems they face by working with other teachers. Collaborative practice between teachers involves a skill that seems to be learned through involvement in shared thinking, and a great deal of teachers' learning comes from grappling with varying ideas and classroom practices (Rogoff, Goodman-Turkanis & Bartlett, 2001, p. 232). Socio-cultural theory serves as a fitting framework for teacher collaboration.

The literature review chapter examines the areas that are most pertinent to teacher collaboration; the building blocks as it were and the challenges involved. The review establishes why collaboration is necessary, what it means and what it

entails. It looks specifically at studies that report on the impact of teacher collaboration and goes on to discuss the many challenges posed by working collaboratively; changing the traditional culture of education, improving teachers' pre-service and professional development opportunities, provision of supportive leadership, access to reflective inquiry groups, and the interpretation of policy.

Chapter 3 looks at Research Methods using the theory of educational research to frame the research process used in this study. It aims to give an account of how the research for this study was conducted. The subsequent three chapters present and analyse the research findings. Chapter 4 looks at the dynamics of teacher collaboration in DEIS urban primary schools; how the practice evolves and how it is enacted. Chapter 5 establishes the link between collaborative practice, teacher learning and professional learning communities. Chapter 6 examines the impact of teacher collaboration on student learning. The final chapter, Chapter 7, discusses the conclusions and implications resulting from the research findings.

1.8 Autobiographical content

Given that this study includes action research, the story of my own learning journey is a central component. I have personally travelled the path from working in relative isolation to working in collaboration in my own classroom and school. Therefore, I believe this understanding of the context of my research enhanced my awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to many of the challenges and issues that arose throughout the research process and assisted me in my interactions with other teachers.

My interest in the whole concept of collaboration has developed from my experience of teaching in a disadvantaged urban primary school for twenty-eight years. In 1995, after twelve years as a mainstream class teacher, I transferred to the 'Early Start' unit in our school. Early Start is a DES pre-school initiative for children in disadvantaged areas. This experience had a profound impact on my teaching as it required working constantly in collaboration with the child care worker in the Early Start Unit. Prior to my Early Start experience there had been a negative side to my practice. Teaching large classes of thirty to forty children

in isolation meant that some children despite my best efforts left my class at the end of the year failing to reach their potential in literacy and numeracy. I hoped at least that they had left feeling respected and cared for during an enjoyable year. It was the best I could offer as lone educator of such a large number. But failing to teach the 'weaker' children left me feeling inadequate as a teacher and I constantly looked toward new ideas and methodologies in an attempt to increase achievement levels.

My experience in Early Start greatly influenced my teaching in that I developed a sense of self-efficacy through the collaborative work I engaged in. Keeping assessment profiles of each child's development allowed us to see how the children were benefiting from our joint planning and teaching. With two of us we found that most if not all of their needs could be met. As a result the children were busy learners and little time was spent on discipline or traditional autonomous practices. The time spent in Early Start showed me that effective team work produces a more thorough and productive outcome than does a teacher working alone. For me it was also a more enjoyable form of teaching practice.

On my return to mainstream, five years later, I found it impossible to achieve what I hoped to achieve as I worked once again as lone educator to a class of twenty-five children. Working as hard as I possibly could, giving as much independence as possible to these young children, it still proved an impossible task to ensure that all learning needs as well as physical demands were met. The isolation which I had been accustomed to in the first twelve years of my career now became crippling and I was in a lonely place, professionally speaking. Continuing to profile the children's learning was very time consuming and unachievable at times. I felt I could not succeed in what I wished to achieve. I realised then that I could make some necessary changes in the way that I worked and I 'reached out and grabbed' whatever help I could.

I began to work more closely with the resource teacher for travellers who supported the children in my classroom. She had always withdrawn the children for support but I asked and encouraged her to come into the classroom instead.

She agreed. The difficulties and intricacies involved in setting up and sustaining our collaborative partnership were identified, faced, tackled and to some extent overcome. The greatest difficulty was finding time to plan our work together. But there was without doubt an improvement in what could be achieved daily in the classroom when two teachers worked together, even for a short time.

I then took a further step and moved from the comfort of my own classroom to try to develop a whole school approach to collaboration. This proved particularly difficult as it was necessary to gather and address colleagues' views and opinions and initiate the change process. At times there was conflict. But eventually, after two years of development, a collaborative planning schedule was set up in our school and as part of my special duties post, I was responsible for planning and scheduling times for teachers to meet to plan their shared work. All of this work was documented as part of a Masters degree in education completed in University College Cork in 2004.

As time has moved on we, as a group of teachers in our school, have developed as a community of learners and now many of us are involved in collaborative projects with colleagues. Other factors have been influential in this development: strong and positive leadership, the personal professional development of individual teachers, effective whole school planning with a focus on student learning and 'openness' among teachers. I now work as a member of the Special Education Team in our school and have more opportunities to foster and develop collaborative partnerships. We share a vision of school improvement where the children we teach are at the centre of that goal and our communal desire to develop their literacy and numeracy skills has given purpose to our collaborative practice.

I acknowledge that my own perceptions of teacher collaboration have been shaped by my own experiences as a teacher. Since 2002 I have witnessed my own understanding of this concept of collaboration grow and develop and change, due to placing it in a wider social domain than when I began my journey initially. My journey has been enriching and rewarding in that I have learned much about my practice, my identity and my values through working with others

in a mutual sharing of work practices. Researching our efforts, which for me was valuable 'backyard research' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), meant that I also experienced the conflict that can arise when deep-set cultural practices are questioned. However, I now believe that instead of a solitary private journey our professional development can encompass a mutual sharing of practice, purpose and vision, resulting in an enrichment of many aspects of our teaching lives while also providing better opportunities to improve the literacy and numeracy standards of our most disadvantaged students.

1.9 Conclusion

In summary this study seeks to inquire into the concept of teacher learning through collaboration and define it in terms of how teachers perceive it and how they enact it. The study examines how collaboration affects the traditional role and identity of teachers as their practice changes and it questions if collaboration is a feasible and worthwhile practice in the context of improving the literacy skills of pupils in disadvantaged urban primary schools, particularly in light of the disappointing 2009 PISA findings. I hope this study provokes reflection among its readers, encouraging a questioning of the many hegemonic practices in our schools so that the difficulties teachers face as lone educators in the classroom, "like a boxer going into the ring or a bullfighter going into the arena" (McCourt, 2005, p.255) can be alleviated through collaboration with colleagues.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: Understanding teacher collaboration

All of the talk of reforming schooling must never lose sight of the ultimate goal: to create institutions where students can learn through interactions with teachers who are themselves always learning. The effective school must become an educative setting for its teachers if it aspires to become an educational environment for its students.
(Shulman, 1989)

Schools will never realise the fundamental purpose of helping all students achieve at high levels if the educators within them work in isolation.

(Dufour et al, 2004)

The concept of teacher collaboration has been discussed at length by many renowned educational researchers for almost three decades (e.g. Lortie, 1975; Shulman 1989, Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Rogoff, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Sarason, 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2002; Stoll & Louis, 2007) and the literature on teacher collaboration in the educational research databases is vast. Collaboration is proposed as an effective educational approach, arguing that teachers planning, teaching and assessing a programme of work collaboratively will achieve more than teachers doing so alone.

Initially, in this literature review, socio-cultural theory is explored briefly as it provides an apt framework for the concept of collaboration from a theoretical perspective, supporting the view that learning and development occur through our social interactions with others. This review also includes an examination of the literature on inclusive practices. This examination is necessary as the concept of inclusion underpins the collaborative work of class teachers and support teachers, the specific focus of this study. It is argued that collaboration between learning-support teachers and class teachers is unavoidable in light of current educational policy but is also an essential ingredient in the development of successful learning-support programmes, particularly in disadvantaged schools. This review looks at what collaboration is and how it works.

Teachers who work together sharing a vision of improvement and success for their students are said to belong to a professional learning community (PLC). There are varied formats of PLCs described in the research literature but there appears to be a broad international consensus that it suggests a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective and collaborative way (Bolam et al, 2006). Despite an abundance of proposals in favour of teacher collaboration and professional learning communities, research that assesses their effectiveness is limited.

In recent years a small but growing body of research confirms that participation in more collaborative professional communities impacts teaching practices and improves student learning (Levine & Marks, 2010). In this literature review I present a table of recent studies that have in some way examined the impact of teacher collaboration at primary school level. The table presents the findings of the studies and lists the challenges that face educators who strive to develop effective teacher collaboration. Each of these challenges is subsequently discussed more thoroughly.

2.1 Why collaborate?

A fitting framework for the argument proposing teacher collaboration is one of socio-cultural theory, which supports the view that learning and development occur through our social interactions with others. Learning is not seen as an individual accomplishment (Cole, 1985) but an integral aspect of engaging in community activities while gradually mastering the purposes of those activities and the means by which they are achieved (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Many of our social interactions enhance higher order thinking. In educational settings, whenever teachers collaborate, each assists the other and each learns from the contributions of others (Wells, 1999).

Traditionally, our education system has been based on the factory model (Cubberly, 1905), a model that has its origins in the industrial age. The teacher worked alone and was seen as the holder and the dispenser of knowledge while the pupils were mere passive recipients. This traditional model of schooling has persisted partly because the habitual practices developed over time have enabled teachers to work in a predictable fashion and allowed them to organise complex duties in a labour saving way by controlling student behaviour and using full frontal whole class teaching methods despite heterogeneous pupils. These routines have become customary and teachers and

students find it very difficult to change because of their "unexamined institutional habits and widespread cultural beliefs about what constitutes a 'real school' (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p.88).

However, the factory model of schooling is now inadequate for meeting the education goals of today. Over the past fifty years we have witnessed a paradigm shift where the pupil is at the centre of the learning process and the teacher is just one of the knowledge sources available to him. In today's world students are expected to master rigorous content, learn how to learn, pursue productive employment, and compete in the global economy (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Teachers are no longer seen as the "expert knowledge holders" and the twenty-first century will see teachers becoming knowledge brokers and learning counselors skilled in the learning processes (Day, 1999, p.207). The traditional teaching practices of teachers seem insufficient to meet the needs of today's students. New pedagogical approaches must be considered.

In recent decades, the writings of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky have gained prominence and his socio-cultural theory has become the foundation on which many new approaches to pedagogy have been based. A key feature of this view of human development is that higher order functions develop through many of our social interactions. It is built on the premise that "psychological functions such as perception and memory appear first as elementary functions and then develop into 'higher' functions through assimilation into the socio-cultural practices that occur when people live and work together" (Boreham & Morgan, 2008, p.72). Vygotsky was influenced by Marxist claims and other social scientists' claims about the primacy of social forces and proposed that social relations underlie all higher functions and their relationships (Wertsch, 1991, p.26). As such, Vygotsky's stance on learning is socio-genetic.

According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective has profound implications for teaching, schooling, and education. Vygotsky argues that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual. He proposes that it is necessary to also examine the external social world in which the individual has developed because it is through participation in activities that require cognitive and communicative functions that children are drawn into the use of these functions in ways

that nurture and 'scaffold' them (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, pp. 6-7). Vygotsky identified the fundamental nexus of development and learning which he called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). He defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86).

Wells (1999) takes Vygotsky's theory a step further. He suggests expanding the original conception of Vygotsky's ZPD (p.333). He proposes that the ZPD provides an opportunity for learning for *all* participants and not simply for the less skillful or knowledgeable. It has an additional interpretation then for teachers as learners themselves. Just as students solve problems with their peers in the classroom, teachers too often construct novel solutions to the problems they face by providing "horizontal" support for each other. Collaboration between class teachers and support teachers who strive to provide maximum learning opportunities for pupils with learning difficulties, is a good example of how teachers can provide that mutual support.

2.2 Collaborative partnerships that support inclusion

Vygotsky argues that a negative societal attitude toward individuals with disabilities prevents a child with disabilities from mastering social-cultural means and ways and acquiring knowledge at a proper rate and in a socially acceptable form (Gindis, 2003, p.203). Vygotsky viewed special schools as a form of social isolation of children with special needs and deemed it "unlawful segregation" and proposed a model of special education called "integration based on positive differentiation" (Vygotsky, 1995, pp.114 & 167). Vygotsky advised that "only a truly differentiated learning environment can fully develop the higher psychological functions and overall personality of a child with a disability" (Gindis, 2003, p. 212).

2.2.1 Differentiating instruction

In the 1970s the idea of a differentiated approach in curriculum implementation began to unfold. Differentiation refers to personalising instruction based on individual pupils' strengths, abilities, interests, prior knowledge and preferred learning modes (Tomlinson, 1999). When teachers differentiate their instruction they accommodate the rights of minority groups by offering equal opportunities in schooling and providing

whatever resources and help may be necessary for them to realise their full educational potential. (O'Hanlon, 2000, p.77). Gartner and Lipsky (2005) argue for education for all students in a merged or unitary system and suggest that effective practices in classrooms and schools will provide the solution to developing an inclusive culture of education (p.186). They refer to the work of Algozzine and Maheady (1985) in supporting the view that inclusion is based on the belief that "substantial student improvements occur when teachers accept the responsibility for the performance of all their students and when they structure their classrooms so that student success is a primary product of the interaction that takes place there" (Gartner & Lipski, 2005, p.498).

Tomlinson and Layne-Kalbfleisch (1998) propose a form of differentiated learning based on three principles of brain research; an emotionally safe learning environment, appropriate levels of challenge and individual interpretation of skills and ideas. With these principles in place an effective learning experience is more likely for each student. The teacher differentiates the work by level, pace, interest, access and response, structure, sequence, teaching style and teaching time and structures such as individual work, pair work, and varied group work are used (NCCA 2007).

However, the theoretical principles of differentiation can be extremely difficult to implement in practice. It may prove particularly difficult in designated disadvantaged schools where up to one third of pupils in a class may be under the 10^{th} percentile Eivers et al, 2004) and therefore in need of learning support. For students in disadvantaged settings curricular opportunities are often diluted rather than enriched. Criticisms claim that the work is not always challenging for every student, it is often repetitive and rarely involves higher order thinking (Conway, 2002). Tharpe and Gallimore (1988) suggest that the familiar model of schooling means there are too many students for each teacher. Therefore there are not enough opportunities for interaction, conversation and joint activities between the teacher and her students. The teacher working alone can find it impossible to scaffold each child's progress through the ZPD. Assisting the performance of each child is usually intangible. Westwood (2003) suggests that differentiation is a complex process because it places very heavy demands on teachers' time, knowledge and organising skills. Brookfield (1995) proposes that the rationale of 'meeting the needs of all students' sets an unattainable

standard for teachers. He suggests that teachers who strive to meet everyone's needs permanently carry around a burden of guilt as they struggle to live up to this impossible task (p.21). Tomlinson (2003) supports this view believing that the task of teaching each child from his point of entry into the curriculum and from his perspective as a learner is extremely difficult. Tomlinson suggests "it is a goal beyond the grasp of even the most expert teacher" (2003, p.8).

As a result, the responsibility for children with learning difficulties has often been left to the learning-support teacher or special educator. Gartner and Lipsky (2005, p. 181), propose that "there is, in effect, a 'deal' between special and general education. The former asserts a particular body of expertise and a unique understanding of 'special' students, thus laying claim to professional obligation and student benefit. The latter, because of the lack of skills and resources or prejudice, is often happy to hand over 'these' students to a welcoming special education system". The role of the special educator or learning-support teacher requires deep understanding of the cognitive abilities children have already developed. To understand the child fully, learning-support teachers need to work with these children in their classroom setting and therefore work collaboratively with class teachers. Collaboration between class teachers and special educators should be balanced so that the professionalism and expertise of each teacher is appreciated. "This sharing, should not be construed as sharing among the skilled and less skilled, the expert and the novice, but among communities of professional equals committed to continuous improvement" (Rosenholtz, 1986, in Hargreaves, 1994, p.204). This research study argues that a situation where class teachers and support teachers work together may ensure that differentiation is effectively practiced. Having the expertise of another teacher in planning, implementing and assessing a programme of work could mean that each child's learning is scaffolded and sufficiently challenging.

However, teachers are accustomed to working alone and they tend to prefer an information exchange or problem solving relationship rather than an opportunity to actually teach in the same classroom with a special educator (Price, Mayfield, McFadden, & Marsh, 2000). A great number of teachers "do not welcome the eyes, minds and mouths of outsiders, even outsiders who teach across the hall" (Perkins, 1992, p.222). This persistent notion of the lone teacher is problematic as the solo

practices of teachers are insufficient to meet the complex challenges that teachers face (John-Steiner, 2000). It perhaps explains why inclusive classroom practice is not yet a widespread reality in schools (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

2.2.2 Working together is essential

Educational policy and research is replete with recommendations for teachers to work collaboratively:

> It is time to end the practice of solo teaching in isolated classrooms. Today's teachers must transform their personal knowledge into a collectively built, widely shared, and cohesive professional knowledge base.
>
> (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2000, p.4)

> The single most important factor for successful school restructuring and the first order of business for those interested in increasing the capacity of their schools is building a collaborative internal environment.
>
> (Eastwood & Seashore Louis, 1992, p.215)

and

> Teacher collaboration in strong professional learning communities improves the quality and equity of student learning, promotes discussions that are grounded in evidence and analysis rather than opinion, and fosters collective responsibility for student success.
>
> (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.38)

Schools and teachers frequently face similar ideas supporting teacher collaboration in educational literature and policy. Some schools may have a very congenial atmosphere between regular class teachers and special educators but an atmosphere of congeniality must not be mistaken for one of collegiality. Teachers may be consulting with one another briefly but this is not collaboration. Collaboration means more than just consulting with one another, talking shop and sharing lore. Collaboration is the fullest form of working together which occurs "when people strive together toward the same outcome in ways that directly share the work and the thinking involved in a successful learning situation. By this it is meant that individuals within any team will be working jointly on assessments and children's daily programmes and will be sharing their expertise with each other on a regular basis. They will be working in at atmosphere of trust and support for each other, meeting and talking frequently" (Lacey, 2001, p.16).

Shulman (1989) suggests that "teacher collegiality and collaboration are ….absolutely necessary if we wish teaching to be of the highest order". Dynamic collegial

partnerships between staff members are essential for effective school based curriculum development. Very often, the failure of school-based initiatives is attributable to the non-existence of collegial working relationships in the school. Day supports this view and states that "the building of joint, authentic purpose, trust and mutual understandings, and the provision of support and continuity of relationships through sustained interactivity are so important for success" (Day, 1999, p.188). According to McEwan (2009), working collaboratively is "the only way a diverse faculty with diverse students can hope to achieve the alignment of content standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are needed to raise the achievement bar for all students" (2009, p.96). The commitment on the part of all staff to work collaboratively and to share expertise is one of the essential ingredients for a successful inclusive programme (Westwood, 2003).

Therefore we can assume that class teachers and learning-support teachers working collaboratively will increase their chances of success if they work together in a committed, sustained and balanced, professional relationship. Considering Brookfield's view of meeting the needs of every pupil as an 'impossible task' for the teacher in the classroom then collaborative practices where two or more teachers working together address the needs of all pupils, offer a possible solution. However, what is debatable is the type of collaborative practices that teachers should engage in. Research is only beginning to establish what balance between in-class and out of class support is most effective for SEN students (Hunt & Goetz, 1997; Rea, McLaughlin & Walther-Thomas, 2002). The next section looks at the types of joint work teachers must engage in to reach a successful outcome.

2.3 What collaboration looks like

If class teachers and learning-support teachers work collaboratively they need to consider planning the programme, teaching the programme and assessing the programme. What does effective collaborative planning, teaching and assessment look like and how can class teachers and learning-support teachers become more proficient at it?

2.3.1 Collaborative planning

The first important step is that of joint planning. As both teachers are concerned for the same pupil both teachers should write programmes and targets jointly. "They should

discuss the needs of the children together and decide between them on priorities. Thus the programme will be balanced and everyone will feel ownership of it. It will be an integrated programme based on ways of bringing together the different parts of the children's curricula" (Lacey, 2001, p.66).

Teachers may plan a specific programme of work for a particular child but may teach the programme independently of one another. Both teachers are working on the same programme with the child and this has obvious benefits for the child. However this element of collaboration doesn't extend to classrooms and therefore rarely poses a threat to teachers' independence. Teachers remain within their comfort zone and resist challenge on a professional level (Day, 1999). Being part of a collaborative culture requires systematic critical inquiry where teachers are continually thinking, talking about, sharing and extending their practice. Lacey (2001) stresses the importance of sharing the same work space claiming that there is much to be learned from informal side by side interactions. Joint collaborative work at classroom level is perhaps the most difficult element of collaboration between class teachers and learning-support teachers as it demands a change in tradition, culture and ultimately in the way teachers behave. This explains why it is, according to Little (1990), a comparative rarity. It requires teachers to give up at least a measure of their independence (Day 1999).

> ..in their more rigorous, robust (and somewhat rarer) forms, collaborative cultures can extend into joint work, mutual observation, and focused reflective inquiry in ways that extend practice critically, searching for better alternatives in the continuous quest for improvement. In these cases collaborative cultures are not cosy, complacent and politically quiescent. Rather, they can build collective strength and confidence in communities of teachers who are able to interact knowledgably and assertively with the bearers of innovation and reform.
>
> (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 195)

What are the ways that teachers can engage in joint classroom work? How can they teach collaboratively?

2.3.2 Collaborative teaching

"Collaborative teaching is the process that takes place between two teachers who explicitly plan, carry out, and assess classroom instruction. The team shares a common goal - the success of all students. Good collaborative teaching is not an accident but the result of careful planning and thoughtful decision making" (Poff & Snead 2000, p.1).

Flanagan sums up collaborative teaching as "a dynamic process that educators constantly reconfigure to fit their instructional plans and the learning needs of their students" (Flanagan, 2001, p.1)

Collaborative teaching requires teachers to share, co-operate and agree on methods of instruction. Having jointly planned a programme of work the class teacher and learning-support teacher may plan further for joint classroom instruction. Bauwens and Hourcade (1997), suggest three approaches to implementing collaborative teaching;

- 'Team teaching', where both teachers share the presentation of the new material.
- 'Supportive learning' activities where the teachers work with different groups of students within the classroom teaching the same skills but perhaps varying in methodology
- 'Complementary instruction' where one teacher takes the lead in teaching the content material while the other re-enforces by teaching the how-to skills so students can successfully understand and acquire the content material.

Hawkins (2000) refers to similar methods of collaborative teaching, identifying them as

- Parallel teaching, where both teachers teach the same material in the same manner to two heterogeneous groups.
- Modified teaching which is similar except that the groups are graded according to ability so one teacher needs to modify instruction and content.
- Multiple groups, where learning centres are set up within the room, the children work in co-operative groups and both teachers facilitate several centres or groups.
- Remedial and re-teaching, where the special educator re-teaches an individual or small group after whole class teaching while the rest of the class engage in enrichment activities.
- Pre-teaching, where the class is divided before a whole class lesson to teach important concepts to students with special learning needs.

Many of these methods are unfamiliar to the majority of teachers who are accustomed to working as lone practitioners. Those who are engaged in collaborative partnerships

in their classrooms need to share expertise with a wider group possibly through action research projects that reveal the effectiveness of the changed approach to their work. Time away from the classroom for consultation, professional conferences, and additional training is vital to the success of any new programme.

2.3.3 Collaborative assessment

An important aspect of collaborative teaching is the ensuing assessment. For teachers working alone assessment is usually in the form of assessing the students' assignments. But how is teachers' practice assessed? Teachers who reflect on their practice through journaling are able to assess certain aspects of their practice through careful examination of the interactions recorded in their journals and thus improve on practice. Collaborative teaching can provide the opportunity for teachers to evaluate not only their own methodologies but those of their partners as well. However, it requires teachers to be open to suggestions and value the effectiveness of constructive criticism from colleagues. Working in a collaborative partnership requires teachers to open their practice to public examination. Little maintains that "the close scrutiny of practice within a group perhaps is sustained only where the competence and commitment of the members is not in doubt" (1990, p. 521).

Teachers who chose to work together need to develop skills of advocacy and inquiry for feedback to be effective. A lack of these skills may result in feedback terms such as 'you should…' or 'you ought to…' which may generate defensive behaviour in the partner who is asking for feedback (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, pp.53-61). It is important to be able to present one's own point of view as well as to be able to understand the other person's perspective. It requires the ability to communicate well, the ability to convey feelings, the ability to listen attentively, to reflect and repeat what it is you are hearing and the ability to question appropriately. If these qualities exist in a collaborative partnership then both teachers will benefit from peer evaluation and continue to develop skills that improve their practice.

A second part of collaborative assessment is the assessment of student learning as a joint undertaking. If the programme of work has been jointly planned and delivered then both teachers need to assess students' learning in order to establish that the aims have been achieved and the targets attained. In order to move forward and plan further

programmes both teachers need to be familiar with what has preceded and what the outcome of the collaborative programme was. A team approach to the assessment of students' work can be very enriching. The perspectives of other teachers who are not immersed in our particular instruction goals can help us to see what is actually in students' work and to use what we have learned from careful looking to reshape our teaching (Seidel, 1991).

Wineburg, (1997, p.1) refers to schools as the last holdouts when it comes to changing from an individual performance appraisal to a 'work team review.' In his study of collaborative assessment he maintains that collaboration is often viewed with suspicion and advises that educators should view the lack of collaboration as a more serious defect than its inclusion. "What a teacher can do with social support is a better measure of effective teaching than what that teacher can do alone" (Wineburg, 1997, p.6).

2.4 Examples of collaboration in action

Early evidence to support a collaborative approach to teaching is available from reports on the 'Denver Programme for Curriculum Revision', an innovation that dates back to the 1920s. The project involved over seven hundred teachers and principals revising thirty-five courses of study (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p.98). It was found that groups of teachers working together over time, carrying out investigations and planning instruction will "teach better and with more understanding and sympathy than they could ever otherwise teach" (Newlon, 1917-1918, p.267).

A second example is that of The Prospect School, Vermont which began as a school for children in 1965. Its philosophy and descriptive processes were created at the school and were used in schools and inquiry groups across the United States. Attention to student work was central to the school and the ways children spontaneously inquire and make meaning were highly valued. The teachers focused on a child or a child's work, by also reviewing their own practice. Groups of educators and parents were involved in collaborative conversations in an attempt to explore and rethink their work and the aims and art of teaching (www.prospectcenter.org.).

A more recent example is that of the 'Open Classroom' school, developed in Salt Lake City, Utah in the early 1980s. All members of the school; children, parents and teachers

participate in inventing and adapting customs and traditions and they learn from their efforts to collectively develop the principles and practices for themselves (Rogoff, 2001, p.10).

In the US state of New Mexico, Wiburg and Brown spent five years developing lesson study communities based on the Japanese lesson study model. "We believe that only by addressing the culture of teaching and learning will we be able to change the system in such a way that many more children succeed at school" (Wiburg & Brown, 2007, p.xiv). Their action research study made significant progress toward closing the achievement gap in poorly served communities as well as building learning communities that fostered collaboration. "Lesson study teams can foster the formation of professional learning communities in which teachers support each other as they implement new strategies into their classroom practice" (p. 152)

All of these examples of collaborative practices suggest a belief in socio-cultural learning, where teachers learn through a mutual sharing of space and practice. The examples reveal a steadfast commitment to change and improvement and show that "a good school is not a collection of good teachers working independently, but a team of skilled educators working together to implement a coherent instructional plan, to identify the learning needs of every student, and to meet those needs" (Boudett, City & Murnane, 2005, p.2).

Having established then that teacher collaboration is a worthwhile endeavour for schools to nurture, it is important at this point to explore the challenges that regularly face teachers, schools and education systems in their efforts to change and improve and become more collaborative.

2.5 Studies on the impact of teacher collaboration

As already stated earlier, the literature on teacher collaboration is vast. A search for 'teacher collaboration' using Google Scholar will yield half a million results! A refined search using Advanced Google Scholar, including all of the phrases 'teacher collaboration', 'impact', 'literacy levels', 'elementary schools', 'professional learning communities', 'teacher learning', and 'student achievement', results in over 65,000 links. Similar searches of the EBSCO and ERIC databases for articles published

between 1995 and 2010 yield thousands of results.

As the abundant literature shows, the need for teacher collaboration has been addressed for over thirty years (Lortie, 1975, Little, 1990). However it is only recently that methods for collaborative work that actually are effective are coming to light, that is, those that can significantly alter teachers' knowledge and actual teaching practice and also show some impact on relevant student outcome measures (Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, & Edwards Santoro, 2010).Therefore, with this in mind, the ten studies summarised in Table 2A on the following pages were not chosen through a quick search of the databases but through a careful selection process of collected literature based on their specific relevance to this study.

The ten studies are summarised under the following headings: author, title, year of publication, purpose of the study; participants of the study and the findings. They look specifically at primary schools, they consider the effect of teachers' practices on literacy achievement, identifying factors they consider important for change and improvement including teacher collaboration. Therefore their findings are very pertinent to this study.

Though research into the impact of teacher collaboration is only beginning to appear in educational research literature there are a number of other completed studies that provide rich evidence of the impact of teacher collaboration (eg. Piazza, McNeill & Hittinger, 2009; Levine & Marcus, 2010). They have not been included in this table of studies as their focus is on high schools where school organisation differs greatly to primary schools. However, some of their findings are drawn from in the ensuing discussion. The findings of the studies summarised in Table 2A and in related studies identify the challenges that schools face in their attempts to cultivate a collaborative environment. These challenges are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 2A: Studies of collaborative practice and its impact on teacher and student learning

	Study	Purpose	Participants	Findings - outcome	Findings -challenges
1.	**Walther-Thomas, C. (1997)** Co-teaching experiences: The benefits and problems that teachers and principals report over time	To investigate the emerging benefits and persistent problems schools teams encountered as they implemented inclusive special education models	25 schools in eight school districts, in Virginia, US, where new co-teaching models were implemented. 119 teachers and 24 administrators participated over a 1- 3 year period.	For students- Improved academic performance, social skills, peer relationships, increase in teacher-pupil time, increased emphasis on cognitive skills For Teachers: prof. satisfaction, opportunities for prof. growth, personal support and increased opportunities for collaboration	Planning time Student schedules Administrative support PD opportunities
2.	**Taylor, B.M., Pearson D., Peterson, D.S., Rodriguez, M.C. (2003)** Reading Growth in High-Poverty Classrooms: The Influence of Teacher Practices That Encourage Cognitive Engagement in Literacy Learning	To investigate the effects of teaching on students' reading achievement	Participants included. 88 teachers and 9 randomly selected students per classroom in 9 high-poverty schools across the United States that were engaged in a literacy instruction re-form project.	A framework of reading instruction that maximizes students' cognitive engagement is important What teachers teach and how teachers teach reading is of paramount importance.	Focus must be on curriculum and pedagogy (higher level questioning, modelling, coaching, and on-site PD)
3.	**Cunningham, P.M. (2006)** Struggling Readers: High-Poverty Schools That Beat the Odds	To identify the factors that contribute to improved literacy levels in high-poverty schools.	6 case studies of elementary schools across 5 US states – schools that 'Beat the Odds'	The factors identified as important were- assessment,community/parental involvement, curriculum, instruction, leadership, sustained focus on literacy, PD, in-class support from specialist teachers	Strong leadership Focus on and framework for literacy PD & teacher collaboration Formative assessment Pedagogy , School Community

	Study	Purpose	Participants	Findings - outcome	Findings -challenges
4.	**Goddard,Y.L. & Goddard, R.D. (2007)** A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement and Student Achievement in Public Elementary Schools	To empirically test the relationship between a theoretically driven measure of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement.	Survey data were drawn from a sample of 47 elementary schools with 452 teachers and 2,536 fourth-grade students.	Students have higher achievement in mathematics and reading when they attend schools characterized by higher levels of teacher collaboration for school improvement.	To provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and professional development
5.	**Vescio,V. Ross, D. and Adams.A. (2008)** A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning.	To establish the impact of PLCs on teacher and student learning.	A review of eleven studies previously conducted between 1995-2004.	Well-developed PLCs have positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement. Teaching culture changed as a result of teachers' participation in a PLC.	Changing school culture Focus on student learning and achievement by teachers On-site and off-site PD Longitudinal studies focusing on assessment of achievement
6.	**Bryk, A., Bender Sebring, P., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., and Easton, J. (2010)** Organising Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago.	To identify schools that had improved student achievement levels since school reform was introduced in Chicago in 1988. To identify a set of practices and conditions that were key factors for improvement.	Chicago elementary schools – from almost 500 schools over 40,000 students and over 10,000 teachers were surveyed over a period of 7 years	The findings identified many schools that had substantially improved but also many that had not. Five essential supports deemed necessary for improvement.	Inclusive, facilitative leadership. Parental involvement. Professional capacity of staff. Instructional guidance. Student-centred environment.

Studies in the Irish Context

	Study	Purpose	Participants	Findings - outcome	Findings -challenges
1.	**DES – Inspectorate (2005)** Literacy and Numeracy in Disadvantaged Schools: Challenges for Teachers and Learners.	To identify school variables that impact on the development of literacy and numeracy skills and to recommend policies and strategies that would enable schools to raise levels of literacy and numeracy	12 DEIS Irish primary schools. Data collected through inspector evaluations, survey of school principals, interviews with principals and teachers, and inspectorate review of whole school planning documentation	High level of absenteeism Parental involvement lacking Half the pupils had low literacy scores, two thirds low numeracy scores. Weaknesses in planning, teaching and assessment	Planning and preparation, teaching methods, assessment methods, in-class learning support, strategic leadership, parental/ community involvement and teacher retention
2.	**Inspectorate (2009).** Effective Literacy and Numeracy practices in DEIS schools	To identify existing models of best practice in literacy and numeracy with a view to disseminating them and promoting their wider application	8 DEIS Irish primary schools, identified by the Inspectorate as schools that implemented 'best practice'. Case studies of the 8 schools where inspectors reviewed school documents, attended school meetings, interacted with pupils during lessons and interviewed staff	All schools had made improvements in literacy and numeracy but all stated that further improvements were needed All schools unique but shared similar characteristics re leadership, culture, student focus	Supportive and shared leadership, teacher efficacy, positive behaviour expectations, commitment to planning, high level of team teaching , continuous PD- PLC, parental involvement, priority on literacy and numeracy , assessment, teacher collaboration, adaptation to meet pupils' needs, differentiation, in-class learning support
3.	**Kennedy, E. (2008)** Improving literacy achievements in a disadvantaged primary school: Empowering classroom teachers through professional development *(Unpublished PhD thesis, DCU)*	To investigate how a research-based approach to literacy could be implemented with a view to raising literacy achievement levels in a disadvantaged school through provision of on-site CPD for teachers.	Case study of one DEIS, Band 1 school. 4 class teachers of 1st class level involved , 4 SEN teachers 56 pupils and parents	Literacy levels were raised substantially and pupils became more motivated- No quick-fix – gradual phased approach is necessary Multi-faceted high quality PD to improve literacy instruction Increased time for literacy eg 90 min blocks – ' instructional density' needed Teacher commitment and collaboration	On-site CPD for teachers that increases teacher knowledge rather than technical skills Literacy framework that gives teachers autonomy rather than prescription The use of formative assessment Positive school culture that facilitates professional dialogue, reflection and collaboration in the long term

	Study	Purpose	Participants	Findings - outcome	Findings -challenges
4.	**NESF (2009)** Child Literacy and Social Inclusion: Implementation Issues	To identify best practice and to pin-point barriers and supports to effective policy implementation in DEIS schools	Detailed case study research of four DEIS schools, stakeholders views and submissions made to the project team.	DEIS is providing needed resources, supports and training but no significant increase in literacy levels	Structured literacy programmes Focus on planning and setting targets. Effective leadership and teamwork More time to literacy, More PD for teachers Assessment focus.

2.6 Challenges identified in the literature

All of the studies are concerned with identifying factors that lead to better learning opportunities for students and ultimately higher achievement levels. There are a number of factors that surface repeatedly in the studies as areas that must be addressed if improvement in learning is to be achieved: professional development, leadership, collaboration, organisational issues, school community and a focus on student learning. Making changes in any one of these areas is a complex task in any school. Vescio et al's (2008) study examined eleven other studies and concluded that school culture changed as a result of involvement in professional learning communities. This finding supports Fullan's suggestion that 'reculturing is the name of the game' (2001b, p.43). It is a continuous task, hard and labour intensive, taking much time to accomplish. But it is essential to transform the culture of schools in order to successfully bring about change. What is meant by school culture and why is it so important to the change process?

2.7 Culture of education

"The culture of a school, shapes how teachers think, feel and act. It explains their view of the world, reinforces their interpretation of events and instructs them in appropriate conduct" (Dufour et al, 2004 p.173). Culture is "the assumptions we don't see" (Schein, 1992), "the stories we tell ourselves" and "the way we do things around here" (James 1995); ways that we think are in our best interests but that have actually been designed by more powerful others to work against us in the long run. Schools are an example of this hegemony in action (Gramsci, 1985).

We have inherited a legacy from an education system based on the factory model of schooling where pupils are segregated into age cohorts called classes, taught by one teacher. As a result, teaching has traditionally been a very private profession. Teachers work as lone educators, each in their own space divided by the walls of their classrooms. "These walls serve a metaphorical function as well: teachers are expected to work alone without any help" (Britzman,1991, p.49). Hargreaves (1994) refers to Lortie's (1975) description of classrooms in schools as egg-crate like structures. The environment where teachers work is insulated and isolated; they work behind closed doors separated from each other so they rarely see or understand what it is their colleagues do. Teachers plan and deliver their lessons in isolation and only see colleagues before the school day begins, for brief moments during the day and at lunch. Practice is not usually shared at these times."Groups of teachers seldom engage in problem solving. Rather, they often talk with one another only in the lunchroom, when talk about the activities of teaching is, not surprisingly, anecdotal and brief" (Griffin, 1986, p.3). The way schools are structured and organised makes it very difficult for teachers to have professional conversations. "Nothing about the way schools are typically structured, from their isolated classrooms to their modular, clock-driven, workday, is conducive to colleague consultation" (Goldsberry, 1986, p.5). Therefore collaborative planning and assessment opportunities are non-existent for teachers despite the fact that they should be a priority as recommended in many of the studies summarised earlier (Walther-Thomas, 1996; Cunningham, 2006; Goddard & Goddard, 2007; Kennedy, 2008).

In Ireland, this traditional culture of isolation predominates. The OECD (1991) refer to the "legendary autonomy" of Irish teachers' and report that

> the face…..Irish schools present to the world is quite recognisably that of previous generations……Co-operative teaching and non-instructional forms of learning have not been conspicuous elements in determining design and layout in the past. (p. 55)

Despite the fact that a child-centred approach was espoused in the 1971 New Curriculum, transmission models of teaching continued to dominate and schools failed to adopt the new methods as large classes, lack of resources and lack of continuous professional development made the task very difficult (Drudy & Lynch, 1993, p.103). Despite gaining national independence in 1922, Ireland's education system held on

tightly to the traditions of an inherited British system (Coolahan, 1981) and teachers continued to teach large classes in professional isolation, making it impossible for collaborative cultures to develop in our schools.

In Lortie's study of teachers in 1975, his findings reveal, as summarised by Fullan (2001a, p.118), that "the cellular organisation of schools means that teachers struggle with their problems and anxieties privately, spending most of their time physically apart from their colleagues". Unfortunately this is still the experience of many teachers today as Griffin and Shevlin report that while school has changed somewhat from being the accepted, unquestioned 'military model', "the culture of the autonomous, self-sufficient, all-capable teacher has not yet fully given way to a model of a self-aware, willing to learn, collaborative team member who knows that the exciting and complex work of a teacher is not possible without giving and receiving help in relation to one's colleagues" (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007, p.104).

Working in isolation without help from teaching colleagues puts pressure on teachers to be authoritative in their classrooms and fully in control at all times. Teachers place great importance on classroom management and discipline and this aspect of school culture is part of the dynamic of the hidden pedagogy where teacher as social controller is given priority over the theoretical principles of their work (Descombe, in Britzman, 1991, p.48). Newly qualified teachers face into a new career loaded with the same responsibilities veteran teachers have. "Issues of classroom control and discipline are one of the major preoccupations" (Fullan, 2001a, p.118). Teachers are not encouraged to seek help and "their work continues to be characterised by competition and individualism and lacks the type of trusting, caring environment that is more conducive to collaborative practice" (Leonard & Leonard, 2003, p.4).

The way schools are, is a result of powerful groups winning support for their definitions of problems and their proposed solutions. (Tyack & Cuban 1995).The rapid expansion of elementary education in the nineteenth century is a classic example. Established institutional forms have become "fixed in place by everyday custom in schools and by outside forces, both legal mandates and cultural beliefs, until they are barely noticed. They become just the way, schools are" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p.88).

Sarason, referring to what he saw in schools in the 1950s summed up the situation thus "…there were absolutely no forums, no traditions that brought teachers together on a scheduled basis….What I found was a culture of individuals, not a group concerned with pedagogical theory, research and practice. Each was concerned with himself or herself, not with the profession's status, controversies, or pressures for change"(Sarason 1996, p.367). Though sixty years have passed since then classrooms of today bear an uncanny resemblance to those of fifty years ago, not in terms of pupil teacher ratio or resources but in terms of a lone teacher approach to lesson planning and implementation of those lessons. This existing culture of isolation will prevail and policies requiring collaboration will remain fruitless "unless people see it as in their immediate self-interest voluntarily and safely to consider and explore bridge building" (Sarason & Lorentz,1998, p.3).

Whether or not a school has the capacity to develop a collaborative culture will depend on its existing culture. Peterson (2002, p.11) refers to schools as having either a positive or a 'toxic' culture. Schools with a positive culture "often have a common professional language, communal stories of success, extensive opportunities for quality professional development, and ceremonies that celebrate improvement, collaboration, and learning. All of these elements build commitment, forge motivation, and foster learning for staff and students". Schools with a negative or 'toxic' culture have negative subcultures with "toxic" norms and values that hinder growth and learning. "Schools with toxic cultures lack a clear sense of purpose, have norms that reinforce inertia, blame students for lack of progress, discourage collaboration, and often have actively hostile relations among staff. These schools are not healthy for staff or students" (Peterson, 2002, p.11) and hinder the change process.

Hargreaves (1994) proposes that there are four broad forms of teacher culture in schools:

- Individualism, where classrooms are like "egg-crates" or "castles" where autonomy, isolation and insulation prevail, and blame and support are avoided.
- Contrived collegiality, where teachers' collaborative working relationships are compulsorily imposed, with fixed times and places set for collaboration.

- Balkanisation, where teachers are neither isolated nor work as a whole school. Smaller collaborative groups form, for example within secondary school departments, between infant and junior teachers, and class teachers and learning- support teachers.
- Collaboration, where teachers choose, spontaneously and voluntarily, to work together, without an external control agenda. They participate in "comfortable" activities, sharing ideas and materials and more rigorous forms of collaboration which include mutual observation and focused reflective enquiry.

Unfortunately, many teachers experience one of the first three forms of school culture. As Wiburg and Brown (2007) observed in their action research in the United States, "teachers had very little experience working together in substantive ways. They expressed reluctance at sharing lessons and held tightly to special lessons that they had developed through hard work on their own. They focused on lessons, as individual endeavors"(p.9). Working with another teaching colleague requires changes in teaching behaviours and in teaching practice. It requires penetrating the cellular organisation that retards rather than enhances colleagueship (Lortie, 1975, p.56). It requires an understanding of how teachers can build on their knowledge by opening their doors to varied learning opportunities. Attempting to 'open the doors' of teachers' classrooms will require balancing old practices with new ones. New ideas promoting collaboration should be welcomed and explored but not all of teachers' lone practices should be abandoned. It must be remembered that traditional practices have done a good job of educating millions of students over the past two centuries.

2.7.1 Avoiding individualism while nurturing individuality

In promoting collaborative cultures in schools a shadow of disapproval has been cast over the traditional work practice of teachers. Both Lortie, (1975) and Rosenholtz, (1989) refer to the uncertainty teachers experience as a result of their isolated practice which prevents them having the confidence to define and share teaching strategies. David Hargreaves (1980, p.195) reports on the "cult of individualism" in teaching, critically claiming that it "has deeply infected the occupational culture of teachers". He suggests that "excessive individualism can be oppressive, depriving individuals of their need for security, for group collaboration and cooperation, and for a sure identity resting upon social support and collective agreements" (1980, p.196). Examining the

autonomy that teachers have in their own classroom he concludes that "autonomy is the polite word used to mask teachers' evaluative apprehension and to serve as the rationale for excluding observers" (Hargreaves 1982, p.206). Ashton and Webb (1986, p.47), in their research on the working conditions of teachers, report that the insularity teachers experience acts as a buffer protecting them from the criticism of others.

In contrast, Andy Hargreaves (1994), challenges these consistently negative views of individualism put forward by many writers and researchers. Individualism is, he suggests, "a complex social and cultural phenomenon with many meanings- not all of them necessarily negative"(p.171). He makes the distinction between individualism and individuality, drawing on the work of Steven Lukes (1973). Lukes defines individualism as "anarchy and social atomization". Individuality, in contrast, is defined as "personal independence and self-realisation". Hargreaves (1994) associates teacher competence, effectiveness, eccentricity, independence, imagination and initiative with individuality and advises caution in any effort to eliminate individualism as he maintains that in the process, individuality may be sacrificed (p.180). Hargreaves advises tolerance of a certain amount of solitude in our schools as not all teachers will thrive on collegiality and collaborative planning and instead of releasing them from their enforced isolation we are in fact restricting them in their chance for solitude.

> A system that cannot tolerate interesting and enthusiastic eccentrics, that cannot accommodate strong and imaginative teachers who work better alone than together, that calls individualists prima donnas and turns creative virtue into non-conformist vice - such a system is a system devoid of flexibility and wanting in spirit. It is a system prepared to punish excellence in pursuit of the collegial norm.
>
> (Hargreaves, 1994, p.182)

Though isolated from colleagues in their classrooms, Hargreaves (1994, p165) argues that what goes on in the classroom in terms of teaching styles and strategies is inextricably linked with teachers' external relationships with colleagues.

It is not an easy task to develop a culture of collaboration while at the same time allowing a certain amount of individuality to flourish. The power structures within the school as an organisation play an important role in establishing a healthy collaborative culture. While power structures can work for or against the common good, it must be remembered at all times that the rights of the individual and

the protection of individuality can suffer in the face of group pressure. Organising collaborative planning initiatives should take into account the views of all teachers and should result in mapping a way forward including the ideas of all staff members. "Staff development programmes must maintain a fragile balance between building cultures where collaboration and colleagueship are promoted and where individual integrity and artistry are allowed to flourish" (Lieberman & Miller, 1991, p. 108). Therefore what is important is striking a correct balance between individuality and social connectedness as we move from the 'Age of the Individual' to the 'Era of Community' (Feldman, 2000).

In striking the balance collaborative practices should not risk losing the pedagogical independence teachers have in the classroom; independence which often results in the discovery of innovative and creative ways of teaching and learning. It may be important to take Hargreaves suggestion of maintaining a certain amount of individuality a step further and recommend that *all* and not just a few teachers need to hold on to some solitary teaching time in the midst of the development of collaborative work practices. The idea of a teacher working independently is deeply ingrained in us. It is part of our cultural heritage (John-Steiner, 2000). Asking teachers to make significant changes in practice not only affects pedagogical independence but also affects the way teachers view themselves; it affects their core identity.

2.7.2 Teacher identity and agency

Teacher identity can be an important analytical tool for understanding the existing culture of schools (Gee 2000, p.99). Teachers' identity is constructed through participation in the practices and discourses of institutions and communities while appropriating their norms and values (Wells, 2007). According to Erikson (1968), identity is shaped by historical circumstances and in considering the historical roots of the classroom teacher, the image of the isolated, authoritative figure responsible for large groups of students comes to mind. This historical image and role of the early teacher has influenced teacher identity to present times in that teachers have learned to internalise and enact roles and norms assigned to them by the school culture through what are considered appropriate expressions and silences (Zembylas, 2003, p.225). A teacher's identity evolves over the course of their career through the continued interaction between their personal experiences and the social, cultural and institutional

environment in which they function. This identity plays a crucial part in influencing a teacher's emotional well-being and effectiveness (Day, Sammons, Stobart & Kington, 2006).

Teachers need to be aware that there is a perpetual incompleteness about identity (Bakhtin 1981) as it is in constant social negotiation and can never be permanently settled or fixed (Britzman, 1991). Throughout their careers, teachers develop and learn through their social interactions and the meanings they interpret from these interactions. Consequently, their identities change. Lave and Wenger argue that learning and identity are inseparable as they are aspects of the same phenomenon (1991, p.115). Teachers engage in behaviours that shape their identity but Wenger argues that we also define ourselves by practices we do not engage in. In short, we know who we are by what is familiar and what we can negotiate and make use of, and we know who we are *not,* by what is unfamiliar, unwieldy, and out of our purview. (Wenger, 1998, p.164).

In demanding change in teachers' practice, new policies challenge the long-held principles and practices of teachers. These policies can challenge their very identity and make them feel vulnerable, resulting in their unwillingness to take on the new ideas (Lasky, 2005). Glazier (2004) suggests that one of the reasons "we maintain an individualistic notion of teaching is that it prevents us from having to deal with the substantial challenges associated with more collaborative approaches to teaching, despite the transformative outcomes that might evolve from collaboration" (p.617).

What teachers believe and how they think and act is always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures that are reflected in mediational tools such as policy mandates, curriculum guidelines, and state standards (Wertsch, 1991; Lasky 2005).
However, teachers who reflect on their core values and work towards them will have an understanding of who they really are. They will be able to reveal their substantive identity, which according to Ball (1972) is the stable, core presentation of the self as opposed to presenting a situated identity which differs according to the specific situation one is faced with.

For schools to develop as places where teachers are open to change and feel confident about new possibilities it is necessary to ensure that the young people who are beginning a career in teaching are familiar with the concept of identity and its development throughout their career. It is essential that they are equipped with the skills and qualities that are required in coping with change. A teacher's sense of agency will depend on the tools and structures of the social setting in which he or she works. Teachers must have a sense of ownership in relation to their work and realise that they can take responsibility and make positive changes in their own practice. According to Day (1999), teachers have a moral purpose in making effective change because they usually want to do what is best for their students.

Additionally, teachers need to be aware of the importance of life-long learning and the importance of being instrumental in their own future learning. To do this requires establishing emotional affinities with others (Zembylas, 2003, p.233). Teachers need to connect and bond with others through coalitions and friendships that empower them to know their teaching, themselves and others. Beginning teachers need support and mentoring from colleagues to build up and increase their sense of agency (Killeavey, 2006). Failure to provide support means that new teachers become unconsciously mentored into traditional practices. Before teachers begin a teaching career their pre-service education should equip them with some of the skills they will require to collaborate with colleagues and become highly effective teachers.

However, it could be said that student teachers are at a disadvantage from the beginning. The tacit knowledge of teaching that student teachers bring with them from their own school experiences greatly affects their future practice. In effect, they bring with them a 15,000 hour apprenticeship (Lortie, 1975) from their own experiences as a learner and this has a huge influence on the formation of pre-conceived ideas that student teachers hold about teachers' work and teacher identity (Teaching Council Report on Teacher Education, 2009). At pre-service level, students learn about the philosophical theories that promote changes in existing practice. But these theories are "barely able to make a dent in the ideas and behaviours teachers bring with them into the classroom from their own days as students" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p.6). "The persistence from childhood of unexamined practical knowledge of what teaching is,

is one of the most serious barriers to improvement in teaching" (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996, p.13).

The dominant aspects of Irish school culture such as control and transmission of information tend to be perpetuated in schools unless the deeply held archetypal concepts of teaching that students have, are articulated and confronted in the formative years of initial teacher education (Sugrue, 1996).

2.8 The role of teacher education in changing the culture of isolation

Expecting teachers to change their practice from one of isolation to one of collaboration will be a futile request unless the teacher education excites new and continuous learning.

> Unless initial teacher education can prepare beginning teachers to learn to do much more thoughtful and challenging work, and unless ways can be found, through professional development, to help teachers to sustain such work, traditional instruction is likely to persist in frustrating educational reform, and reformers' visions are likely to continue not to permeate practice broadly or deeply.
>
> (Loewenberg-Ball & Cohen, 1999, p.6)

Teachers learn about teaching in their pre-service years and continue to learn throughout their careers. This continuous learning is essential if the culture of teaching is to change from one that is isolating to one that is collaborative.

2.8.1 Promoting collaboration at pre-service level

Darling-Hammond (2006) argues that teacher education matters for teacher effectiveness. Teacher education programmes have often been criticised for their weak content and disconnection from schools, leading to the perception that teachers learn more about teaching through the trial and error of practical experience (Goodlad, 1990; Ballou & Podgursky, 1999). However, for teachers to become adept at solving problems of practice through critical self-reflection, they need to be able to make connections between theories and practice. They need to work from a theoretical knowledge base of what teaching is. Darling-Hammond commends the teacher education programmes she studied for "reinforcing the view of teaching as responsive to learning rather than as implementing a set of routines" (Darling-Hammond, 2006,

p.106). These effective programmes emphasise the importance of collegial interaction for the learning of the teacher and students accepted that peer assistance is a necessary part of their professional development. The study revealed that "when novices participate in this kind of collegial work early in their professional lives they internalise the expectation that working together on improving teaching is the rule rather than the exception" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 110).

In a recent US study of paired-placements for student teachers, (Nokes, Bullough, Egan, Birrell & Merrell-Hansen, 2008), twenty-six undergraduates were assigned to student teach with a partner for fifteen weeks.The findings revealed that teachers who had trained as teams were more likely to operate in a collaborative manner in the future, and therefore increase collegial practices in schools. One of the most beneficial results of the study was that almost all of the student teachers and mentors had positive learning experiences.

> Being placed with a partner created shared experiences, which often led to dialogue and reflection. Not only did pair-placed student teachers reflect on what they were going to do or what was occurring, they also had conversations about what had taken place in the classroom. Working together and then reflecting on their shared experiences often resulted in what Wilson and Berne (1999) describe as shared investment and shared understandings, both essential elements of teacher development.
> (Nokes, Bullough, Egan, Birrell & Merrell-Hansen, 2008, p.2174)

In Britain, a supportive assessment programme exists for training teachers and includes mentors, who provide the day-to-day guidance, training and assessment during a school placement; professional tutors, who usually have a more general responsibility for all the trainees placed in the school; and other teachers, who observe, support and guide trainees when they teach different classes in the school (Training and Development Agency for Schools *(TDA)* 2008).

In Ireland, student teachers at primary level in some colleges engage in teaching practice partnered with another in the first two years of their degree programme. The opportunity to collaborate is provided yet not availed of because despite the 'partnership' each student practices in turn as lone classroom teacher where mastery of content and skills is emphasised. Unfortunately, it is a lost opportunity. Students then become predisposed towards perpetuating a culture of individualism in schools where

there is little to be gained from collaboration with colleagues (Sugrue, 1996, p.170).

It is not sufficient to focus exclusively on initial teacher education in the effort to confront archetypes of teaching (Sugrue, 1996, p.172) and "changing teachers' early preparation is likely to be of limited value unless there are companion efforts to change the norms that govern the school workplace as well" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999, p.384). When young teachers begin their teaching careers they need the support of a collaborative culture.

2.8.2 Mentoring new teachers in collaborative practices

In the past, once teachers reached final evaluation stage they received very little support in terms of career in-service. Sarason addresses the importance of developing professional relationships with colleagues and highlights the dilemmas of beginning teachers who "need and want help, guidance and support uncomplicated by the implied threat of a negative evaluation" (Sarason, 2003, p.86). Current models of good practice that promote and develop collaborative cultures within schools are prevalent in many countries. Mentoring newly qualified teachers is an aspect of all of these successful programmes. Darling-Hammond (2006) recommends that all novice teachers should have reduced teaching loads, yielding time and opportunity to observe other teachers teaching, plan and confer with colleagues, work with their mentors, and reflect on their own teaching. Teaching beginning teachers to work collaboratively from the outset of their careers appears to remove any negativity teachers may feel about sharing their practice. It is seen as a natural part of their teaching career.

Such a model exists in some countries. In Asia a "supportive and thoughtful environment exists for the professional development of teachers and the promotion of potent teaching practices" (Perkins, 1992, p. 224). In China and Japan teachers spend much of their time planning lessons, sharing plans, attending workshops, observing colleagues, watching video tapes of good practice and getting critiques. In Japan beginning teachers are paired with older teachers for at least one year. Professional development is high on the list of priorities and teaching is seen as a lifelong learning process (Perkins, 1992).

In Germany prospective teachers have mentored classroom experiences and in France

beginning teachers take on a teaching position under supervision, much as a doctor does in a residency (Holyoake, 1993). In New Zealand beginning teachers are registered with the 'Advice and Guidance Programme' for their initial two years in the classroom. In-class support from colleagues is provided and beginning teachers are granted release time to visit and observe experienced teachers and also in order to meet with senior staff and with other beginning teachers. Similarly, in the United States the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC*)* was set up in 1987 to develop assessment and related support for beginning teachers. By 1992 INTASC had introduced performance assessment instruments including portfolios, peer reviews, learning logs as well as mentoring programmes.

In Ireland a recent positive development in assisting the performance of newly qualified teachers is the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI).The project has been in operation since 2002 and is a partnership initiative between the Department of Education and Skills, the three teacher Unions, St. Patrick's College (primary strand of the project), UCD (second level strand of the project) and the schools participating in the project (DES website, 2010. Teacher Induction). The key characteristic of the programme is access by the newly qualified teacher (NQT) to a mentor at school level. The mentors are class teachers who have undertaken professional training and have been granted release time to engage in mentoring activities with the NQTs. The NQT receives support on three levels: professional, personal and pedagogical and the project has benefits for the professional growth and development of both mentor and young teacher. The project is evidence of a beneficial, collaborative project between the DES, the three teacher unons, the Colleges of Education and primary schools, which enhances the professional development of newly qualified teachers.

A further development of the project is the launch of the National Induction Programme for Teachers (2010) which offers a support website for newly qualified teachers. Since Sept 2010 the Education Centre Network in conjunction with National Induction Programme for Teachers runs a professional development programme for newly qualified teachers in 21 education centres nationwide and all NQTs are invited to attend. This development means that all NQTs can avail of professional development in their first year in the classroom.

If teachers are to prepare a diverse set of students for highly ambitious learning then continuous professional development which includes the sharing of work practices is a necessary requirement of a teacher's professional life. The ongoing professional development of teachers is essential.

2.8.3 Developing collaboration through continuous professional development

There is an abundance of research to highlight the fact that teaching is a highly complex form of work (Jackson, 1974; McDonald,1992; Rowan,1994; Lampart, 2001). Problems in teaching occur simultaneously and teachers need to multi-task. Devaney and Sykes (1988) suggest that teachers must be "knowledgeable, experienced, thoughtful, committed, and energetic workers" (p.20). They argue that a culture of professionalism must be built in schools and in school districts to stimulate and support teachers' work (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996, p.17).

However, Sarason puts some of the responsibility for professional development on teachers themselves. "A professional person is, among other things, someone whose responsibilities include knowing what others in the field think, do, and have found and reported……A professional person is not one who has stopped reading after finishing formal training. Reading is more than desirable, it is crucial" (Sarason, 2003, p.74). Sarason uses the term professional 'salvation' and states that it cannot come from outside the self. He believes that "reading is one of the better prescriptions for diluting the sense of intellectual-professional isolation as well as the sense that you stopped developing" (Sarason, 2003, p.76).

Hoyle (1980) describes the professionalism of the teacher who reads educational books and journals as extended professionalism. It is a form of professionalism where the teacher becomes involved in various professional activities to further his own professional development. It involves comparing and evaluating his practice and placing it in a broader educational context and it involves collaborating with other teachers. Hoyle contrasts this extended professionalism with restricted professionalism where the teacher, though perhaps inventive and skilful in the classroom, values his autonomy and is not given to comparing his work with that of others.

The OECD examined in-service policy and practice in eight OECD countries in 1998: Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States to identify common positive aspects of in-service programmes that bear fruit and to examine how these innovative programmes might be developed further. The findings reveal that in-service should be a collaborative effort from start to finish involving policy makers, providers and teachers. The study looked at the different environments used to provide in-service courses for teachers and concluded that universities can provide an adequate platform for the updating of subject knowledge. According to English, (1995) and Halpin, Croll and Redman (1990), there is little change in school or classroom organisation as a result of attending outside courses. However, outside courses increase teachers' knowledge and expose them to the professional reading that Sarason deems crucial.

These university based professional development courses that increase the formal knowledge of teachers fall into the first concept of teacher learning in the analytical framework for theorizing teachers' learning designed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, p.255). They make distinctions among three different conceptions of teacher learning. The first concept is 'knowledge- for- practice' based on the premise that the professional knowledge required for teaching comes from authorities outside of the profession itself; the assumption being that it is the university based researchers and scholars who produce the knowledge teachers need to teach well. Henderson argues that this knowledge "is not useful for initiating change but is essential for supporting a predilection for it" (Henderson, 1976, in Lacey, 2001, p.54). It is noteworthy that in Vescio et al's study into the impact of PLCs, the knowledge and experience of teachers as well as knowledge and theory generated by other researchers is honoured. Their review (p. 917) quotes Little's argument which proposes that learning communities will be limited by their own 'horizon of observation' unless teachers are involved in outside professional development courses (2003).

This is perhaps the view of government education departments. The professional development of teachers is the concern of government as policies based on new educational research require changes in teachers' behaviour and practices. As a result, in-service training days are arranged where teachers are required to attend specific courses that provide them with new knowledge that in turn helps them to implement the

new policies. Courses to update subject knowledge are often delivered outside of the school but "efforts to change the ways in which teachers think and the style in which they work have to be based more around the school" (Walshe, 1998, p.33). The Inspectorate Report, 'Succeeding in Reading' (DES, 2005, d, p.29) recommends that most in-career development (ICD) should be implemented within schools on an ongoing basis, enabling the particular needs and circumstances of each school to be addressed in a more coherent manner, as well as making ICD more accessible to teachers. Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) suggest that we say goodbye to quick-fix workshops and instead create contexts in teachers' work lives that assist and sustain meaningful changes. They advocate that staff development be grounded in the mundane but very real details of teachers' daily work lives and point out the necessity for teachers to attend to the details of their own instructional behaviours. This type of teacher learning is the second concept in Cochran-Smith and Lytle's analytical framework of teacher learning and is referred to as 'knowledge-in-practice'. This knowledge is gained through the experience of teaching and through deliberate reflection and inquiry into that experience, thus enhancing the status of teachers' practical knowledge.

Elmore, (2000) points out that "most educational reforms never reach, much less influence, long-standing patterns of teaching practice" (p.35). Why are new educational ideas so slow to permeate existing educational organisations? New theories of learning proposed by educational researchers merely add more knowledge-for-practice onto teachers' formal knowledge, without influencing practice. Cochran- Smith and Lytle's (1999) third concept of teacher learning, 'knowledge-of-practice', bridges the divide between formal and practical knowledge in that it involves the construction of knowledge as part of the pedagogical act. Teachers inquiring into their own practice are reflective practitioners who "make judgments, theorise practice, and connect their efforts to larger, intellectual, social, and political issues as well as to the work of other teachers, researchers and communities" (p.273). Therefore both off-site and on-site professional development is essential as one compliments the other.

For on-site professional development to be effective in promoting a more collaborative approach to teaching, teachers need to examine their current teaching methods through reflective inquiry. In all of the effective teacher education programmes studied by

Darling-Hammond, there was an emphasis on the students' ability to engage in reflective activities through the use of teaching portfolios, logs, journals, reflective essays, research inquiry, autobiography and self-reflection. These programmes "view their primary responsibility as helping pre-service teachers learn how to be reflective practitioners who can be proactive in their own professional learning" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p.110). But what is meant by reflective practice and how does it have the capacity to bring about school change and make a real difference in the development of schools for the future?

2.9 Reflective practice

Reflection allows us to develop a greater level of self awareness about the nature and impact of our own performance (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993), which is essential before ever attempting to share the practice of others. The reflective practice of teachers is not a new concept. The idea of reflection in education first emerged in the writings of Dewey, who suggested that there is always something new to be learned from each lesson and every working day (1933). He defined reflection as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9)

With specific reference to teacher reflection, Ghaye and Ghaye, (1998) describe reflective practice as a research process in which the fruits of reflection are used to challenge and reconstruct individual and collective teacher action. Brookfield, (1995) proposes that reflecting on our teaching practice in a critical way only means something if it leads to the creation of classrooms and staffrooms that are crucibles for the learning of democratic habits (p.217).

Sugrue (1996) proposes that teachers need to continually develop an elaborate understanding of the teaching process and a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire. In order for teachers to understand the full complexity of teaching, Rath (2002, p.143) suggests that we "need to create professional spaces for teachers to generate ongoing research on, and evaluation of, their own practice". Rath highlights the importance of reflective journaling among teachers and states that it provides "an *intra professional* tool for individual practitioners to expand their understanding and management of the

self in relationship to their work as educators" (p. 140). The Revised Primary School Curriculum advises that the teacher should be committed to "a process of continuing professional reflection, development and renewal" (Introduction, p.21).

Schon (1983) argues that reflective practice poses a threat to the dynamically conservative system in which teachers work and live. Very often teachers are expected to respond to new educational demands and act in a technical manner delivering pre-designed packages which inevitably reduces teaching to skills, planning meetings, supervising others, preparing courses and reviewing the curriculum. The danger here is that teachers agreeing to teach in such a manner become mere educational workers and 'pedagogical thoughtfulness' (Van Manen, 1991) has little place in the teaching process. Fostering a commitment to reflective practice enhances teachers' thoughtfulness about their work. Pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact of teaching are 'unlearnable' as mere behavioural principles, techniques or methods. "To become a teacher includes something that cannot be taught formally: the most personal embodiment of pedagogical thoughtfulness" (Van Manen, 1991, p.9). Van Manen proposes that pedagogical thoughtfulness is a multifaceted and complex mindfulness toward children which includes an interpretive intelligence, thoughtful maturity and self-critical openness. It may be, as Van Manen suggests, impossible to teach this thoughtfulness but it is possible to nurture and foster this pedagogical thoughtfulness in teachers through self-study and reflection.

Schon (1983) stresses the need for inquiry into the epistemology of practice and encourages teachers to reflect on their practice by naming the things that need attention and framing the context in which they will attend to them. This process he refers to as problem setting (p. 40). It resonates with Dewey's early writings on reflection. Dewey (1933, pp. 4-9) viewed the process of reflection in five stages:

- A felt difficulty, during which the normal flow of activity is disturbed and the routine way of doing things fails to solve the problem.
- Problem definition, where the problem is identified and defined.
- Suggestion of possible solution, which involves consciously studying the circumstances of the predicament, and analyzing the means and resources available for its resolution.

- Time for reasoning, when the learner thinks through the hypotheses, testing and evaluating the likelihood of success.
- Further observation and experiment where the learner acts, testing a hypothesis to see if it will work to resolve the problem or not.

Similarly Schon divides reflection into stages: knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Knowing-in-action refers to the theories about practice that teachers hold and develop themselves through the experience of their own teaching. Teachers use this knowledge all the time in their teaching and very often it is unconscious, tacit and unarticulated common sense. Knowledge-in-action is value laden and it is only through reflection that teachers can come to understand the values, beliefs and assumptions on which the whole of their own practice is based.

Reflection-in-action is described by Schon (1983) as a common, yet extraordinary process. He believes that for some reflective practitioners it is at the core of their practice (p. 69). It happens in the midst of action and may require rapid decisions when the existing stock of knowledge is no longer adequate in helping teachers to teach in a confident and competent manner. The teacher must do a piece of experimental research, then and there, in the classroom. He must be ready to invent new methods and must endeavor to develop within himself the ability to discover them (p. 66).

To understand and benefit from the fundamental structure of personal inquiry underlying performance it is necessary to look closely at the process of reflection-in-action. In other words reflection on 'reflection-in-action' is necessary if a teacher's personal professional practice is to develop successfully. Reflection after the event is what Schon refers to as reflection-on-action. "It is a deliberate, conscious and public activity principally designed to improve further action (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 5).

Using a reflective journal to describe and raise questions about everyday actions, interactions and experiences is one effective way for teachers to "gather information about professional practice and personal action theories (Osterman & Kottkampf, 1993, p. 78). Peters (1998) equates the process of self-discovery to 'stepping through the looking glass'

> The looking glass represents whatever assumptions we hold that prevent us from framing a problem differently, from viewing the same situation from a different perspective. The shift in focus which allows us to see our assumptions with new eyes is the very act that facilitates our ability to see past the assumptions, our ability to step through the glass as it were.
>
> (Peters, in Newman, 1998, p. 31)

In the process of reaching the other side and seeing new possibilities Peters did not neglect the exploration of her assumptions; she 'relaxed into' them in order to look at them. Kegan and Lahey (2001, p.80) emphasise the importance of *looking at* rather than *looking through* our assumptions. They refer to our 'hidden immune system', a dynamic process by which we tend to prevent change and they propose that if we want a "deeper understanding of the prospect of change we must pay closer attention to our own powerful inclinations *not* to change" (p.1).

Reflective practice should therefore guide us to be creative and constructive and enable us to initiate new and better actions and events (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 41). But making sense of one's practice is not just a process of having a private conversation with yourself about your teaching. It also involves coming to know through teacher talk and the sharing of experiences (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p.6).

Teacher talk is important and talk resulting in teacher inquiry generates possible alternatives to practice as well as different interpretations of ideas (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003, p.51). Professional conversations are much more than shop talk. They involve the co-construction of knowledge by the participants who focus on addressing the problems in their practice in the hope of improving their practice. These critical conversations are not icing on the cake of professional development but rather they are the cake (Adger, 2002, p.28). Teachers learning from one another in this way provide an example of what Wells (1999, p.333) describes as an extended version of Vygotsky's ZPD, in that teachers provide "horizontal support" for each other. It is socio-cultural theory in action.

There is little doubt that reflective practice can lead to improvement in teaching practice and "the plethora of small changes made by critical teacher researchers around the world in individual classrooms may bring about far more authentic educational reform than grandiose policies formulated in state or national capitals" (Kincheloe,

1991, p.14). Teachers working together and talking constructively about their work become instrumental in the change process.

> We especially need structures and thinkers that can generate new possibilities and imagine new worlds. We need thinkers who can stay engaged in dialogue with the most complex problems and who have the mind capacities to solve these problems. We also need thinkers who can collaborate productively with many different actors coming from different cultures.
>
> (Rath, 2002 p. 181)

2.10 Developing schools as professional learning communities

Why do teachers begin to work together? What makes them change their traditional practices? Perhaps the most important condition for educational change to occur is for teachers to have a reason for change. "Teachers need a compelling reason to begin collaborating to improve instruction" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 41). Lieberman and Miller (2001, p.viii), argue that *purpose* for change has long been neglected in professional development literature. Hargreaves (1994, p.23), reports that such great attention has been focused on the change process our attention to the purpose of change is relatively impoverished. If change is to be effective and sustainable teachers must have both purpose and desire for change.

> If we can understand teachers' own desires for change *and* for conservation, along with the conditions that strengthen or weaken such desires, we will get valuable insights from the grassroots of the profession, from those who work in the frontlines of our classrooms, about *how* change can be made most effectively, as well as *what* we should change and *what* we should preserve.
>
> (Hargreaves, 1994, p.11)

Teachers who desire to make changes to increase the success of their students and subsequently their schools face the difficulty of sustainability. How do they continually find the time and energy to keep going for as long as it takes? Supportive collaborative cultures help because they push for greater accomplishments and avoid the debilitating effects of negative cultures (Fullan 2005, p. 26). Fullan maintains that it is not the hard work involved in change that tires us out but the negative work. This is what makes the innovation difficult to sustain as "it is easier to opt out of a bad process than to try to correct it….it is less trouble to sweep conflict under the carpet than to confront it" (p.100). It is almost impossible to make real changes operating as a lone innovator. Collaborative work cultures are critical for the implementation of reform and essential

for success. According to Fullan, (2001a), real reform in schools happens when there are changes in teachers' beliefs and understandings, changes in teachers' methodologies and changes in teaching resources. Similarly Gallego, Hollingsworth and Whitenack (2001), in their research into reforming educational cultures, suggest a framework for reform they call 'relational knowing', stating that it is an essential pre-cursor for educational reform. They define it as knowledge of curriculum and instruction, knowledge of the self and others in relationships and knowledge of critical action. Schools that develop as professional learning communities have a greater chance of reform when they address the areas highlighted by Fullan (2001a) and by Galego et al (2001).

Research shows that despite the positive contribution they can make to school improvement and student achievement, PLCs are rare in most education systems (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.113). Building high-functioning teacher learning communities is a slow steady process that requires time, space and resources, including human resources. PLCs must be recognised and valued as powerful building blocks for both teacher and student learning and not viewed as the utopia of educational visionaries. Having the time to collaborate, the support of colleagues, particularly support from the school leader, and a focus on learning are important factors in the development of PLCs (Vescio et al, 2008).

2.10.1 Supportive leadership

Strong leadership is essential to ensure that there is effective change in schools (Day, 1999 & 2004; Fullan, 2001 & 2005; Hargreaves, 1994 & 2005; McEwan 2009). The studies summarized earlier in this review suggest that leadership should be strong, inclusive, facilitative, strategic, supportive and shared. Fullan maintains that quality leadership and quality learning go hand in hand and therefore encourages principals to be pro- active and not use perceived system limitations as an excuse for non-action.

In the past, school principals have been the leaders in implementing change within their schools and success has partly depended on the relationships each principal has with other staff members. Strong leadership is an essential factor for change to occur in schools but the ability of principals to be innovators of change is limited by the amount of time each principal has available in the already overloaded day to day administration

and management of the school.

Fullan advises school leaders to adopt progressive practices and invite the people with the problems to be the solution makers (2005, p.103). This requires a radical shift in thinking. Principals need to share ownership of the school with colleagues, demanding skills of cooperative teamwork, in planning and delivery (Touhy, 1999). Recognising the potential of staff members can be a valuable insight and utilising this potential in the area of instructional leadership can reduce the principal's workload while simultaneously advancing the professional development of teachers. "The key to developing leadership is to develop knowledge and share it; if it is not mutually shared, it won't be adequately developed in the first place and will not be available to the organisation in any case" (Fullan, 2001b, p.132). How can principals and teacher innovators share their knowledge and ideas?

2.10.2 Access to an inquiry group

It is extremely difficult for young teachers to feel empowered by their own reflections and to make changes leading to improvement without the support of colleagues. The question then arises as to what conditions are necessary to assist teachers to become reflective practitioners in schools that develop as sustainable learning communities?

Lieberman (2003, p.vii) supports Fullan's view and suggests that teachers need "access to some kind of group, either inside or outside their school, so that an inquiry stance toward teaching becomes a way of life". Having an inquiry group with whom teachers can share their findings helps to clarify teachers' thinking through preparation, presentation, questioning, discussion and debate of their work. An inquiry group pushes and extends thinking about practice in all its members. Kegan and Lahey (2001, p.150) propose that "one of the best ways we can sustain and deepen a productive relationship with our inner workings is through fashioning new 'conversational pockets' or 'language communities' " where what a person does matters to others and what others do matters to that person (p.194). When teachers belong to an inquiry group, they pay attention to their practice and become more conscious of their actions. There appears to be an inbuilt element of accountability or rather mindfulness (Langer,1998) where teachers find new energy in new contexts, develop the ability to reframe a situation and take risks and welcome change instead of feeling fearful, helpless and restricted.

When supportive, collaborative environments are characteristic of on-site professional development, they are considered to be effective in bringing about change (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003; McLaughlin, 1994; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Teachers must feel supported as they discuss research-based innovative techniques before they can implement those techniques in their classrooms (Gersten et al. 2010, p.697). As well as collegial support and access to an inquiry group other factors must be considered.

2.10.3 Time as an issue

In schools where these conditions for change are in place the next step is ensuring that adequate resources are available to teachers. "How much time teachers get away from classroom duties, to work with colleagues or just to reflect on their own, is a vital issue for matters of change, improvement and professional development" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.15). The way schools are organised leaves little room for teachers to plan their collaborative work. "Scarcity of time makes it difficult to plan more thoroughly, to commit oneself to the effort of innovation, to get together with colleagues, or to sit back and reflect on one's purposes and progress" (Hargreaves, 1994, p.15).

Hargreaves, (1994) proposes that teachers are prisoners of time. For primary school teachers, contact time with students is given priority over every other issue because almost all of their scheduled time is allocated to the classroom and their work is therefore conceived as being exactly that - *classroom work*. Because teachers are based in the classroom "they have few built in opportunities or expectations placed upon them … to collect data, share practice with colleagues, or collectively reflect in depth 'on' and 'about' their teaching and its contexts" (Day, 1999, p. 43). But providing time for contemplative reflection is an essential part of teacher development (Day, 1999, p. 49). There is a limit to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991).

Yet time is not a fixed quantity. It can be captured and manipulated by teachers who are eager to move beyond the constrictions that fixed time schedules impose. Teachers can then become partners in time with others who are involved in positive educational change (Hargreaves, Adelman & Panton, 1997, p. 82-87). However the short release

times or informal meetings that can be put in place require that much preliminary work is done and that afterwards the teacher heads home with the bones of a collaborative plan, all of which needs writing up and organisation. All of the methods impose "a racehorse pace that teachers must sustain" (Perkins, 1992, p. 224) and teachers are in danger of inevitable burnout.

Educational reform impacts on teachers' time with their students. Time that is adequate in quantity and rich in quality tends to be elusive (Cambone, 1994). Committed teachers are often reluctant to shorten their teaching time to do other work as they have such an extensive curriculum to cover. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have studied time in schools and applied the principles of Zerubavel's work (1981 and 1985) on the structure of time to schools. They point out that time in schools is very structured and the set time cycles within schools have strong resilient boundaries that cannot be transgressed without incident. How teachers experience their time should be of primary concern to reformers, for any substantive change in schools hinges on teachers and their willingness to engage in that change (Sarason, 1971).

Teachers who take the time to develop their collective capacity to meet the needs of their students do so with what Elbot and Fulton (2008) describe as 'intentionality'. They share values, beliefs and behaviours and work *interdependently* to achieve common goals, realizing that there is little hope of success if they work in isolation (Dufour et al, 2004; Hord, 2008). When teachers share the common goal of success for all students, they must focus strongly on student learning.

2.10.4 A collaborative focus on student learning

The studies presented in the table earlier in this review clearly point to the importance of student learning being the central focus of teacher collaboration. In DEIS schools this is particularly important. Pupils who experience material and social disadvantage do not have access to the same educational opportunities of their more well off peers, despite a standardised school system, (Hillman, 1996, p.3). "The way parents care for their children, teach them skills and values, and guide them in their encounters with the world outside the home lays the foundation for children's later emotional, social and intellectual development" (Riordan, 2001). Pupils who have had inadequate home support in their early years rely more on effective powerful programmes of early and

continued intervention throughout their schooling than do pupils from more advantaged backgrounds (Ramey & Ramey, 1998, p.112).

"A review of a century of investigations into literacy teaching (Chall, Jacob, & Baldwin, 1990) makes it clear that the most important variable at school in making a difference for students is the teacher" (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p. 294). Effective school experiences that help students to acquire missing skills are essential. These children living in areas of high economic disadvantage require expert teachers. How teachers teach is of paramount importance (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson & Rodriguez, 2003). Any attempts to address the problem of educational disadvantage must focus on the relationship of teaching to learning, ensuring that teachers understand the importance of quality teacher-child interactions and are aware of how to create opportunities for these interactions to take place in their classrooms, through the cohesion of learning-support and classroom programmes (Kennedy, 2007, p.213).

One strategy that addresses pedagogical approaches in disadvantaged schools is teaching in small groups (Cohen,1994; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2000; Emmer & Gerwels, 2002; Florez & McCaslin, 2008). Small group work provides the opportunity to ensure that teaching is intensive, highly focused and well planned. The amount and quality of teacher-child interaction increases as less time is needed for class management (Gutfreund 1979; McGough, 2007). Florez and McCaslin's study (2008) into small group work found that students were "active, compliant participants who supported one another's learning, who sometimes found their experiences personally meaningful, and who were concerned with both achievement and affiliation. Students rarely represented competitive themes and never described rejection, being ignored, or giving up" (p.2448).

Smaller classes or groups may sound like a good idea but it is not enough to tackle disadvantage by providing extra teachers without focusing on the relationship of teaching to learning. As Conway (2002) suggests, the nature of pedagogical practices cannot remain relatively unquestioned, uncontested, and unexamined. Alexander (2005) suggests that talk is the most pervasive and powerful tool for cultural and pedagogical intervention in human development and learning because it mediates the cognitive and cultural spaces between adult and child, between teacher and learner,

between society and the individual, between what the child knows and understands and what he or she has yet to know and understand. Therefore "one of the principal tasks of the teacher is to create interactive opportunities and encounters which directly and appropriately engineer such mediation" (Alexander, 2005, p.2). Unfortunately teachers rather than students do most of the talking in classrooms and they tend to control what is said. Teachers working in disadvantaged primary schools may see the need to question their pedagogical practice more clearly than their counterparts working in other schools as they attempt to address the continuing low achievement of their pupils. Small groups may provide more chances for student talk than whole class teaching but the teacher must be aware of the importance of student talk for student learning.

Working with colleagues in an attempt to improve the achievement levels of pupils provides the opportunity to plan well structured programmes that focus on how we teach rather than what we teach. Pedagogy rather than curriculum becomes paramount. Collaborative programmes provide a platform for teachers to share their work and increase the flow for teachers in that they can become fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). Changes in teachers' practice as a result of participation in collaborative practices may lead to positive changes in the way children experience schooling and thus greater success for these children.

Cunningham (2006), Kennedy (2008), and the NSEF report (2009) all advocate a framework for literacy that places planning and assessment high on the priority list. Vescio et al (2008) found that effective schools shared a common feature i.e. a persistent focus on student learning and achievement by teachers. They suggest that teachers critically examine the results of their efforts in terms of student achievement. Teachers must be able "to articulate their outcomes in terms of data that indicate changed teaching practices and improved student learning, something they have not yet established as common practice" (2008, p.82). Comber and Kamler's research (2004) into successful literacy programmes in disadvantaged areas provides evidence revealing how engaging in collaborative activities including professional reading, data generation, analysis and classroom redesign with their mentors "enabled teachers to …. engineer pedagogic designs that made a difference, not only to student attitude and self-

esteem (although these in themselves are important), but also to the quality and quantity of children's writing and reading" (Comber & Kamler, 2004, p 308).

Implementing a framework for literacy therefore should not be a matter of using prescribed pre-designed programmes. Kennedy (2008) highlights the importance of teacher autonomy when it comes to designing programmes. Each school is unique and programmes may be designed according to each school's needs. Yet these successful programmes should be shared and disseminated. However, teachers will need to adapt and change certain aspects of any programme in order to make it 'fit'. Belonging to an effective professional learning community provides teachers with self-efficacy and a sense of agency to make those informed changes.

This review has highlighted the way that schools change from the inside out in their attempts to develop a more collaborative culture. However it is important to note that top-down efforts may also play a part in shaping a culture of change. In the current climate of educational change, pressures from the DES cannot be ignored. Schools are now recommended to adopt a more inclusive approach, to differentiate and to focus on each student's learning. Though lacking the means to ensure fully that school reform occurs, new policies from the DES are a source of knowledge for schools and teachers and may be influential as a predilection for change.

2.11 From policy to practice

In the Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999), the Learning-Support Guidelines (2000) and the Special Education Circulars (2003 & 2005) the DES recommends that classroom teachers and learning-support teachers work together to promote an inclusive approach to educating their pupils. Schools regularly receive recommendations for improvement from the DES through educational circulars. Such recommendations are regarded as policy as text. The 2005 Special Education Circular, SP ED 02/05 recommends that support in the classroom will be an essential component of any learning programme devised for pupils with SEN and primary responsibility for the pupil will remain with the class teacher in consultation with the learning-support teacher (p.22). A call for change in the traditional model of withdrawal of pupils with SEN has been made by the DES.

The SP Ed 02/05 circular is an example of policy that represents normative guidelines for action by setting out how things should be done (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). The success of new policies will depend on how they are interpreted and implemented at ground level. "There is no equivalence of meaning between a policy and its actual realisation within an organisation; it is 'recreated' and 'interpreted' by practitioners in the light of their own personal and institutional contexts" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). Top down reform coming from innovators outside schools tends to show little understanding of teachers' everyday lives, their practices, beliefs and sources of frustration and satisfaction. Schools are perceived as places that can be instantly nurtured when in fact schools are like "healthy plants, needing good soil and careful tending over long periods of time" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 113).

Therefore, it is very difficult to fit new policies into the existing frameworks. "Old policy programmes that were once 'shiny and new' now compete, merge, complement, embarrass and sit uncomfortably next to more recent initiatives" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001, p.97). When implementing new policies based on the new learning theories, teachers bring to bear their "own particular interpretative frameworks" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001, p.99). Changes in policy will not automatically lead to changes in practice. "Systems do not change themselves- people change them" (Fullan, 1993, p.7).

Traditionally, government education departments have done little by way of teacher professional development to promote teacher collaboration. Teachers have been made aware of the need for change through policy documents and new curricular demands. The teachers who are faced with the policies at ground level are now expected to create conditions in their classrooms that promote collaborative learning and are conducive to productive group projects but teachers cannot be expected to create and sustain contexts for productive learning unless those conditions exist for them (Sarason, 1996, p. 367). Additionally, the resources needed to implement changes are not always available to teachers.

This perhaps explains why, despite the legislation and recommendations from the DES, Ireland lags behind its European and international counterparts in respect of implemented inclusive practices (Meegan & MacPhail, 2006, p.53). The 1998 Education Act, and the 2004 Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act

(EPSEN Act), though specifically addressing and providing for the education of those with special needs, have yet to be fully realised in terms of sufficient resources being made available.

Schools have difficulty translating policies of inclusion into practice. In a comprehensive study of learning-support provision in Ireland, de Búrca's findings (2005, p.204) show that in-class support is seldom provided in Irish primary schools, with only 20% of schools providing any form of in-class support. As Griffin and Shevlin (2007) report "Given the relative lack of experience of many mainstream schools in the area of special educational needs and the recent advent of inclusive practice to Irish schools, it is hardly surprising that many schools feel ill-equipped to cope with this new situation" (p. 61)

It may be possible that DEIS schools are leading the way in this respect. The Inspectorate report (2009), on effective literacy and numeracy practices, states that most of the schools they looked at had moved away from the practice of withdrawing pupils from the mainstream classroom and instead, teachers worked together in the classroom, implementing programmes that cater for differentiated needs. This is an example of practice mirroring policy whereby the teachers who look for ways to improve student achievement develop new ways of working, ways that are espoused in educational policy. However without the support of all the characteristics of a PLC, it is unlikely that policy would influence teachers' practice to any great extent.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand and highlight the need for collaboration in our schools, generate theory about its dynamics and appraise ways in which it might be beneficial to student and teacher learning. Collaboration has been proposed as an effective educational approach, arguing that teachers planning, teaching and assessing a programme of work collaboratively for pupils with SEN, will achieve more than teachers doing so alone. This chapter must be perceived in light of understanding the changing work of teachers and what real change in teachers' work requires. Collaboration between teachers for the benefit of all poses a contrast to the traditional view of school learning. It requires that teachers embrace a socio-cultural view of their own learning and that of their pupils, valuing the informal, incidental and natural

learning that occurs during social interactions (Eraut, Alderton, Cole & Senker, 1998), where "learners learn how to use the cognitive tools of their cultural community through participation in social activity" (Hall & Murphy, 2008, p. ix). Therefore the socio-cultural framework of this study provides us with a principle for promoting collaboration as well as a means to understand it.

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that teachers working together as a group in the fullest form of collaboration become the professional learning community of their school. This study hopes to find out if this is happening in DEIS urban primary schools. Can the collaboration that is taking place in these schools be described as the fullest form of collaboration? Are these schools developing as PLCs, witnessing effective changes and improvements in the practice of teachers where student learning becomes the central focus? When fuelled by their successful efforts teachers tend to continue the collaborative process. Therefore is teacher collaboration both a process and an outcome of PLCs?

Much of this research review of teacher collaboration involved research into PLCs. However, as yet, PLCs are rare in schools and do not feature as policy responses to improved student outcomes (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). The literature proposes that the predominant practices of Irish teachers are deeply rooted in the tradition of isolation and individualism (OECD,1991) and classrooms remain largely secret gardens where what teachers do in terms of best practice remains in large part, a 'black-box' (Conway, 2002). Therefore the possibility of finding evidence of PLCs in the Irish context may seem even bleaker than doing so internationally. However, I propose that the collaboration researched in this study between class teachers and learning-support teachers which is framed by this literature review has the potential to develop PLCs in DEIS urban primary schools and challenge the idea that Irish teachers are less inclined to open up their practice than their international counterparts.

Chapter 3 - Research Methods

This chapter describes the methods chosen for this research project. It aims to give an honest account of how the research was conducted. Each step of the research process is informed by the theory underpinning the various research methods. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of educational research which frames the research process of this project.

3.1 Researching in the field of education

Historically, educational research used a positivist approach in that it was linked with measurement and experimental design and though there is evidence to suggest that an opposing interpretative view was held by some educational researchers in the early part of the twentieth century, the traditional scientific approach dominated research in education right up to the 1970s (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Investigators adopting this approach to educational research which was replaced with post-positivism after the mid-twentieth century (Mertens, 2005), relied mostly on surveys and experiments both of which are classified as quantitative research methods. "The driving force for much of this research was the desire to emulate in social research the precision and level of understanding characterised by the physical sciences" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.22). Using this positivist/post-positivist approach requires that researcher 'objectivity' is essential at all times and the researcher must ensure that the data collected is not 'contaminated' through personal involvement with the research subjects (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.6).

Taking a positivist approach can create a dilemma for the educational researcher. The field of education belongs to the broader field of social science and its subject matter varies fundamentally from that of the natural sciences (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.23). Social scientists are concerned with people as individuals and as members of social communities and many social scientists maintain that the universal laws that apply to the natural sciences are not always appropriate when dealing with the complexities of human nature. Investigators who find a deficiency in the positivist approach propose that because people differ from inanimate natural phenomena and also from each other, qualitative methods of research are more appropriate (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007, p.7). Kierkegaard (1846, trans.1992) goes so far as to

suggest that quantitative methods contribute to the dehumanisation of the individual. This is quite an extreme critique of the use of quantitative methods in the social sciences. Evidence gleaned from statistical data measuring many phenomena associated with humankind has increased our knowledge of humankind. However, qualitative methods acknowledge that the subjects under investigation belong to the world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing and thus tend to have a less rigid structure. It is understandable then why qualitative research methods are often favoured over quantitative methods in the field of education in recent years.

Educational researchers using the interpretative approach regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them. The researcher must interact with the research participants and become the main research instrument, immersing themselves in the lives or settings of the participants using multiple qualitative ways of data collection including, interviews, narratives, observation, ethnography and case studies (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.6).

One approach used in interpretative research which has become increasingly popular in the teaching profession since the 1970s, is that of action research. It is "a common-sense approach to personal and professional development that enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work, and to create their own theories of practice" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p1). Kurt Lewin was the first to construct a theory of action research in the mid 1940s and described action research as a "spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of the action" (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988, p.8).

The question arises then as to the reliability of using an interpretative approach in educational research. All researchers have experienced an education system and each brings their own biography to the research situation. Participants behave in particular ways in their presence (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007, p.171). Will the assumptions and values of the researcher mask the participants' perspectives and meanings or influence them in any way? (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 56). Because researchers are inescapably part of the social world that they are researching their influence on the study throughout the research process is unavoidable (Hammersley &

Atkinson 1983, p.14). What is important is that the researchers acknowledge and understand what influence they may have on the research and they should hold themselves up to the light by monitoring their own actions, reactions, biases and developments throughout the research process, thus being reflexive researchers (McCormick & James, 1988, p.191).

3.2 Setting this study within an educational research framework.

"One of the biggest constraints on one's development as a researcher is the presumption that there is a right method or set of techniques for doing educational research" (Elliot, 1990, p. 5). Each research study, including this study, is unique and personal in that it is deeply rooted in the experiences and concerns of the researcher. Rather than favouring one method of research over another, it is important to choose the method that is most appropriate for the research study about to be undertaken. The choice of method depends on what we are trying to find out and therefore no method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other (Silverman 2005, p.6). Thus, each research study has its own particular research design.

What must be examined to establish how a research study will be carried out are the specific research questions. In looking carefully at the research questions the most appropriate and clarifying methods can be pinpointed. This process requires looking at the "big picture" as well as paying great attention to detail (Creswell, 2003, p xix). Very often a combination of methods is necessary.

The research questions of this study were outlined in the introductory chapter as follows:

- What are the dynamics of teacher collaboration in disadvantaged urban primary schools?
- In what ways are teacher collaboration and teacher learning related?
- In what ways does teacher collaboration influence students' opportunities for learning?

Probing the dynamics of teacher collaboration entailed gathering evidence on all of the following sub-questions.

- Is collaboration between teachers happening in schools?

- What does collaboration looks like in its enactment?
- What skills are necessary to sustain a collaborative environment?
- Why do teachers choose to work collaboratively or why do they choose not to?
- What are the challenges and what are the benefits of teacher collaboration?

Relying on one research method alone would fail to provide full answers to the research questions. It was essential to collect data initially from a large number of teachers and provide some statistical evidence. To comprehensively answer the main questions and to provide more explicit answers to the sub-questions, it was necessary to gather rich descriptive detail from schools where teachers were managing to set up and sustain collaborative practices. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were required. Therefore, my research questions demanded that a mixed method approach be used for this study.

"Mixed methods research is relatively new in the social and human sciences as a distinct research approach" (Creswell, 2003, p.207). In deciding to use a mixed methods approach, the researcher uses a social survey, an experiment, official statistics or a structured observation as well as using one or more of the many approaches that qualitative research methods offer. This mixed methods approach also known as multi-method, convergence, integrated or combined, has added advantages in that the results of one method may inform the other method (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). This study followed such a sequential procedure.

3.3 A three phase study

The following table summarises the three phases of the mixed methods approach used in this study.

Table 3A: Three phase study

Phases of study	**Methods used** **(How was data collected in each phase ?)**	**Purpose** **(Why was data collected in each phase?)**	**Means of analysis** **(How was data examined?)**
Phase 1 Postal Survey	Quantitative- Postal survey of 338 DEIS urban primary schools: 3 questionnaires sent to each school. – one for principal, one for class teacher, one for LS teacher	To establish if collaboration between class teachers and LS teachers is happening and how and why it is happening and if not, why not.	PASW software programme and manual log of information from open-ended questions.
Phase 2 Interviews and Observations	Qualitative- 4 snapshot case studies of DEIS schools: Interviews with principal and one LS teacher. Observation of collaborative lesson in each school.	To find out how collaborative practices develop, what they look like in their enactment and how they impact on teacher and student learning.	Thematic analysis and narrative analysis of interview data Observation notes for each school compared and contrasted.
Phase 3 Case Study	Qualitative- Case study of one DEIS school: Longitudinal study of literacy project. Focus group interview Reflective journal entries. Staff reviews.	To gather rich descriptions of a long-term collaborative project in one school in order to understand how collaboration is developed and sustained.	Narrative analysis and thematic analysis of data gathered. Statistical analysis of results of literacy project.

In the following paragraphs I give an overview of each of the three phases of the study. Later sections provide a more detailed account of each phase. The first phase of the research consisted of the initial postal survey which allowed me to collect data that partially answered the research questions. However, survey data provides evidence that is largely teachers' self-reports. It was therefore necessary to gather some observational and participatory empirical evidence to test the hypothesis upon which this thesis is based, namely that collaborative practices between teachers provide an effective platform for teachers' professional development while also providing a more effective learning environment for pupils.

The data collected from the survey provided enough information to identify schools where teachers were working in collaboration. This led to the second phase of the research process where I visited these schools, observing collaborative practice, interviewing the teachers involved and collecting documents.

The third phase in the research process of this study uses the qualitative tool of the case study. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case (Stake, 1995, p.xi). It provides examples of real people in the real world with whom it is easier to identify rather than with abstract theories. The researcher uses multiple sources of information to collect detailed data of a case. Yin (2003, p.86) recommends six sources of evidence that provide information for the researcher- documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artefacts. A case study can be intrinsic or instrumental. An intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself as the researcher needs to learn about that particular case. An instrumental case study, which is the type used in this study, focuses on an issue or concern that can be understood through careful examination of a particular case (Stake, 1995, p.3). The concept of teacher collaboration is the focus of the case study in this research project.

The case study is included in this study because it provides further rich detail on teacher collaboration over a long period of time and therefore supports the validity of the findings from the first two phases. The third phase involved tracing the development of collaborative practice in my own school with a major focus on a literacy project that my colleagues and I initiated in 2006. The project is still ongoing and student assessment results from the project are examined in detail for the purpose of this study. This collaboratively designed and delivered, literacy project was initiated with the specific purpose of raising early literacy achievement. This study seeks to establish if the collaborative literacy project contributed to raising literacy achievements. A successful outcome would promote the use of collaboratively designed and collaboratively delivered programmes in schools where literacy achievement levels were previously very low and difficult to raise.

This third phase of the research includes action research into my own practice as my journal entries document the important developments as well as the difficulties that I

experienced while collaboration with colleagues increased. My research into teacher collaboration began with action research in 2002. It was an initial action research project conducted from 2002 to 2004 that led to the research idea for this project. The original project concerned the development of collaborative practices between teachers in my own classroom. Having researched the area and becoming familiar with the literature on teacher professional development, professional learning communities and introducing change in schools, the question arose as to how many other schools like our own were attempting to make changes by working collaboratively. Were other schools familiar with the DES circulars and guidelines that recommend collaboration, had they tried new ways of working, what were the obstacles that either prevented them from change or made change difficult to embrace and had these new ways of working increased student achievement? These were the questions that emerged, as yet unanswered in any Irish research study. Answering these questions involved launching a large scale project requiring both quantitative and qualitative methods. The remainder of this chapter describes each phase of the research process in detail.

3.4 Phase 1: The postal survey

The 'questionnaire' is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information (Wilson & McLean 1994). It provides structured, often numerical data that can be comparatively straightforward to analyse and can be administered without the presence of the researcher. A structured questionnaire consists of all closed questions making the analysis of the responses easier and more rapid but the researcher must ensure through piloting and subsequent refining that a full range of possible responses is included.

An unstructured questionnaire consists of open-ended questions where the respondents are not bound by pre-set categories of response and are free to write what they wish in response to a question. Such a format can be very useful if the possible answers are unknown or the questionnaire is exploratory (Bailey, 1994, p.120). However, open-ended questions may result in the collection of irrelevant and redundant information. Such an unstructured questionnaire will almost definitely take up much of the researcher's time at the analysis stage as the responses are difficult to classify and they will not compare easily across respondents (Cohen, Morrison & Mannion, 2007, p.322).

The researcher can opt instead for the semi-structured questionnaire described by Cohen, Morrison and Mannion as a powerful tool. This type of questionnaire has a clear structure, sequence and focus in that the researcher sets the agenda but the respondents have the chance to reply in their own terms (2007, p.321).The questions may be mixed in that some are closed and others open-ended. This semi-structured questionnaire was chosen for this study.

3.4.1 Designing the questionnaire

To increase the reliability of information gathered about each school in relation to collaborative practices, more than one source was needed. Therefore three questionnaires were designed, one aimed at principals, one aimed at learning-support teachers and one aimed at class teachers. (Appendices 1, 2 & 3) The questions stemmed from the research questions already outlined and included both knowledge questions and attitude questions (Mertens, 2005, pp.190-91). The knowledge questions sought to elicit how much was known by respondents for example in relation to familiarity with the learning-support guidelines, while the attitude questions sought out opinions on subjects such as observation by colleagues. Many dichotomous questions were asked where a 'yes' or 'no' response was sufficient. The statistical analysis of these questions was more manageable than questions with a wide rating scale. Similar questions were asked of each respondent but it was necessary to word the questions differently depending on whether the respondent was a principal, a learning-support teacher or a class teacher.

Table 3B presents an overview of the survey items. The numbered questions fit into the categories listed in the table.

Table 3.B: Categories of survey items

Category	Questions in LS teachers' questionnaire	Questions in Class teachers' questionnaire	Questions in Principals' questionnaire
Demographics	Questions 1-5	Questions 1-4	Questions 1-8
Familiarity with policy	Questions 6- 8	Questions 6-7	Questions 9-10
Organisation of learning support: Planning & Teaching	Questions 9- 25	Questions 8-26	Questions 11-24
Teacher dialogue	Questions 26-31	Questions 27-31	Questions 25-28
Reflective practice	Questions 32-35	Questions 32-35	Questions 29-32
Observation of practice	Questions 36-39	Questions 36- 39	Questions 33-34
Professional development	Questions 40-43	Questions 40-43	Questions 35-40
Attitude to collaboration	Questions 44 - 45	Question 44-45	Question 41
Barriers to collaboration	Question 46	Question 46	Question 42

From the table above, it is clear that the questionnaire for the principal differed considerably from the other two. This is explained by the need to gather more information from principals in relation to the demographics, the school staff and the organisation of the school in general. Class teachers and learning-support teachers were asked about their own practice, hence more questions were asked of them in relation to their ways of working. Many questions needed to be worded differently, for example, to establish if the school engaged in in-class support methods the questions were worded thus:

- *The principal was asked* – Is there any in-class support provided by learning-support teachers in your school ?
  Yes ___ or No____ .
- *The learning-support teacher was asked* – In relation to supporting the learning of your pupils do you
  - Always withdraw the children for support ____
  - Provide in-class support only _____

    - Withdraw and give in-class support _____
- *The class teacher was asked* – Does the learning-support teacher
    - Always withdraw the children for support ____
    - Provide in-class support only _____
    - Withdraw and give in-class support _____

Attention was paid to the layout of the survey, the font and formatting, question organisation and sequence and completion instructions (Mertens 2005, p. 182). The survey items sought to address the first research question in revealing the dynamics of teacher collaboration in DEIS urban primary schools by probing the organisation of learning–support in schools, teachers' planning and teaching practice, teachers' knowledge, teachers' reflective habits and teachers' attitude to collaboration.

3.4.2 Sampling procedure

The context of this study is one of urban disadvantage. The targeted population for the survey was all of the DEIS urban primary schools. According to the DES list of urban disadvantaged primary schools there were 338 schools on the list in 2006. The intention was to collect data that would be representative of DEIS urban primary schools only and not to generalise from this sample to the whole school population. With just 338 schools listed, it was possible to survey all of the 338 DEIS urban primary schools. Therefore it was not necessary to define a smaller sample of schools. However it was not possible to survey the entire teaching population of DEIS urban primary schools and a sample of teachers had to be selected.

Bearing in mind the specific focus of this study – collaboration between class teachers and learning-support teachers – it was necessary to survey class teachers and learning-support teachers. For this reason one class teacher and one learning-support teacher from every DEIS urban primary school was surveyed. In addition the principal of each school was surveyed as it was necessary to glean information about each school that only the principal had ready access to. This type of sampling is referred to as stratified purposeful sampling (Mertens, 2005) where the chosen participants are selected according to certain criteria.

The three questionnaires were sent to each school, one to the principal, one to a learning-support teacher and one to a class teacher. I believed that this sampling strategy also increased the reliability of information gathered about each school in relation to collaborative practices. With more than one source used, the findings from each school could be cross checked provided that more than one of the three questionnaires was returned.

3.4.3 Piloting the questionnaire

Before the questionnaires were sent to the 338 schools, the questionnaire was first piloted. Piloting or pre-testing a questionnaire to check for clarity in questions, instructions and layout is crucial to its success. Areas of ambiguity are illuminated and the researcher is able to refine the questionnaire before it is circulated to the selected sample of the population (Bell, 1999).

The questionnaire used in this study was piloted by distributing 15 questionnaires to colleagues and friends. As I am a primary teacher myself, I had access to other teachers and I asked acquaintances to complete the pilot questionnaire. I contacted three Principals, six learning-support teachers and six class teachers and asked them to complete the questionnaire. I also included the cover letter for the three principals to review. Oppenheim (1992) recommends that everything about the questionnaire should be piloted. I asked each respondent to inform me of any unclear questions and asked if they had any suggestions on how to improve the format of the questionnaire to make it more attractive. The idea in piloting the questionnaire is not to collect data per se, but to learn about how it can be improved (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.30).

Two of the principals told me they would be prefer to have specific instructions in regard to selection of the responding class teacher. In the cover letter, I had asked the Principal to pass the other two questionnaires to a learning-support teacher and a class teacher, without specifying which class teacher. Both principals said it would be easier to have the class teacher's questionnaire marked for a specific class teacher. One principal stated that in leaving the decision to the principals, the class teacher who is very interested in or in agreement with the concept of teacher collaboration may be the teacher chosen by the principal to complete the questionnaire, possibly resulting in a bias in the findings. Therefore, I chose to mark the questionnaire for 2nd class teachers.

The reason I decided on 2nd class was mainly because national standardised testing of children is required by the DES at the end of 1st class and not before then. Schools have the results of these standardised tests and use them to compile the caseloads for learning-support. It is evident from the standardised testing that certain children are entitled to learning-support. These children may not have been in receipt of learning support previously. As the questions in the questionnaire concerned the collaboration between learning-support teachers and class teachers, giving it to a class teacher of an age group that were younger than 2nd class could possibly have provided little or no information on the school's learning-support practices, as the infant class teacher may have had little or no contact with the learning-support teacher.

In addition there was the problem of junior and senior schools. There are many urban primary schools especially in the Dublin area that are either senior or junior schools. The senior schools may begin with 1st , 2nd or 3rd class, and the infant or junior schools finish with Senior Infants, 1st or 2nd class. In choosing 2nd class, I was not eliminating either senior or junior schools completely from the study. For those schools that did not have a 2nd class I gave them the option of choosing the class nearest to 2nd class in their school.

Once the pilot questionnaires were returned, changes were made, based on the feedback given to me by my colleagues and on how the questions had been answered by the respondents. There was one area of ambiguity in the question on 'reflective journaling'. I had asked all respondents if they reflected on their practice and then followed that question with – "Do you use a journal or a learning log or any other method to record the important events or interactions that occur in your working day?" Eleven of the fifteen respondents stated that they did keep a journal of their practice. From previous discussions with close colleagues I believed that writing up in reflective journals was a rare practice among teachers. The positive response to this question appeared unusually high and so to clarify the responses to the question, I contacted four of the respondents by telephone and asked them about their answer to the question. All four had taken a different meaning from the question than I had hoped to convey – they assumed I was asking about a work diary, which consists of a log of work completed, meetings, appointments etc. To make my meaning clearer I changed the series of questions on reflection. I first asked - "Do you keep a daily log/ diary of your work?" I then asked –

"Do you reflect on your practice?" and finally – "Do you use a *reflective* journal or learning log to write about the important events or interactions that occur in your working day?" In this way, the ambiguity in the question from the pilot questionnaire was hopefully avoided in the revised questionnaire.

A second change that was made was in the answer options to –"Do you think that a journal, learning log, or videotape of your work would contribute to improvement in your practice?" Yes ___ No ____. One of my colleagues suggested that I include the option of 'Unsure' in the answer, which I did. I added this 'Unsure' option to other questions as a result. However, the option was only given where there may have been a genuine uncertainty as in the example given above. I wished to avoid a situation where the respondent would chose to claim ignorance on a topic as opposed to giving an opinion (Mertens, 2005, p.183) So questions such as - "Do you think it is important to talk about your work? , were not given the 'Unsure' option.

The third change concerned a question on observation – I had asked the class teachers and the learning-support teachers – "Have you ever had a colleague observe you working? Yes ___ No____ . One colleague informed me that he had never been formally observed by a colleague but that he had worked in class with a colleague which was a form of informal observation. I therefore included – formally/ informally/both, as an option in the answer.

3.4.4 Responses to the questionnaire

Questionnaires were posted to the 338 disadvantaged urban primary schools in the country, (Appendices 1,2, & 3), including a cover letter (Appendix 4), and an SAE for each respondent This was to ensure confidentiality for each respondent as some respondents may have been reluctant to give honest answers if questionnaires were returned through their principal. I saw this as a validity threat and sought to rule it out. Each questionnaire was coded to facilitate the identification of non-respondents. The questionnaires were sent out on 23rd February '07 and respondents were asked to complete by March 12th. At the end of March I sent a follow up letter to non-respondents (Appendix 5). This included a return slip giving schools the option of returning the slip which informed me as to why they chose not to complete the questionnaires. I would have liked to have been able to send a further follow up letter

before I asked for reasons for non-completion but as a lone researcher personally funding the survey, costs had to be kept to a minimum.

After the follow up letter, I received completed questionnaires from 180 schools out of the 338 schools contacted. This was a response rate of fifty-three percent, which initially seemed quite low. The reason that lower response rates are problematic is, of course, that people who do not respond may well be different from those who do. Low response rates therefore can create sampling bias; the lower the rate, the greater the risk of such bias. However, after the follow up letter, a further 25% of schools either returned uncompleted questionnaires or the return slips. All but one school stated that they did not have time to complete questionnaires and some also felt weary of questionnaires. Most of this cohort wished me well in my research. Only one school stated that the topic was irrelevant to their school. This was informative as it led me to believe that the cohort that had not filled out the questionnaire did find it relevant, were not dismissive of working collaboratively and therefore would have had similar answers to the cohort of those that did complete the questionnaire. There was no reason to believe that the schools who did not respond were in any way different to the schools who responded. All were DEIS urban primary schools. Lack of time was the main reason for non-completion. Therefore I assumed that the respondents and non-respondents were similar. According to Jones (1995) a 50% response rate is acceptable in this instance (Mertens, 2005, p.121). Also, I had not needed to select a sample for the survey at the outset. All DEIS urban primary schools had been surveyed and I now had responses from more than half of them, which would lead to a realistic representation of the situation in DEIS urban primary schools.

3.4.5 How the responses were analysed

As soon as the responses were returned, each was numbered for future reference. Statistical data was recorded manually at first and then entered electronically using PASW, the statistical analysis software programme. It was therefore possible to present some of the data from the questionnaires in visual format using tables, pie charts and bar charts. However, much of the data was obtained from open-ended questions and this was logged manually at first and frequencies calculated from the log sheets that were used to record each question's responses (Appendix 6). The results were then recorded in a data-file using PASW making it possible to check for inconsistencies and

impossible values. The Chi squared (χ^2) test was used to test for associations between categorical variables. All statistical analyses were performed using PASW Statistics 18.0. All tests were two-sided and a p-value<0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

3.4.6 Limitations and difficulties

In conducting the survey, there were certain difficulties and possible limitations that have to be acknowledged. Firstly, it is possible that there may have been acquiescence or the tendency to agree with items in the survey. Collaboration is now a 'buzz word' in education and teachers may not have wished to take an opposing view to a popular trend. The order of the questions was set out in a logical manner but the order may still have led to certain responses, where one question slightly informed another.

In the cover letter, I needed to give some information about the study but the question always arises as to how much information is enough and how much is too little? The inclusion of 'Please feel free to be as honest and open as you wish. Any additional comments you wish to make will be most welcome' aimed at encouraging openness and honest opinions. The anonymity of the respondents also helped in relation to gleaning honest information. Sending three questionnaires to each school, each with its own SAE helped to ensure that respondents were not influenced by the possibility of principals or others reading their responses.

3.4.7 Identifying sites of collaborative practice

As already stated, the response rate to the survey was 53%. Completed responses were received from one hundred and eighty schools out of the three hundred and thirty-eight schools who received the questionnaire. To establish how schools were operating in relation to collaborative practice it was necessary to have a response from the principal as the information given by the principal concerned the whole school. Much of the information from the learning-support teacher and the class teacher concerned their own individual practice. One hundred and twenty-five principals responded to the survey of which ninety-two were accompanied by responses from one or two teachers. To identify schools where teachers are working collaboratively and to ensure that the responses were valid it was essential to compare the qualitative data provided by two or three staff members. Therefore the responses from ninety-two schools were examined, looking specifically at three areas - were teachers planning together, were they teaching

together and had the school set up a Special Education Team. Comments from principals were also helpful as some gave lengthy accounts of what was happening in their schools. Finally twenty-four schools were identified from the questionnaires as schools where a collaborative environment possibly prevailed.

With limited time and acting as a lone researcher, it was not possible to visit all twenty-four schools. However in order to obtain empirical evidence of the development of collaborative practices in schools I believed it was necessary to look briefly at a few samples rather than focusing on just one school. I therefore decided to choose four schools as sites of inquiry. One of the four schools was my own school, which would also be the site of the in-depth case study. To select three additional schools as sites for interviews, it was decided at this stage to send letters (Appendix 7) to the first eight schools on the list initially and hope that at least three responded positively to the request for further participation in the study. Six schools responded to the letter, four declining to participate, stating their reasons. Two agreed to participate. I then contacted the two schools who hadn't responded to the letter, with a phone call to each principal, and one more school agreed to participate. It is important to point out that these schools were identified as schools where collaborative work practices between teachers were in place. However, the purpose of looking closely at these schools is not to portray exemplary teachers and schools or to place these teachers on pedestals above everyone else (Hargreaves, 1996). The danger here is that the practice of teachers in these schools will be considered 'best practice'. Sugrue argues that rushing into perpetuating and disseminating 'best practice' ties the future to the present and the chance of 'what might be' is lost (2008, p. 67). He proposes the idea of 'craftsmanship' espoused by Sennet (2006, p.158) which suggests doing something well for its own sake.

3.5 Phase 2 : Interviews and observations

To examine the phenomenon of teacher collaboration more closely in an effort to understand how and why it develops in schools, it is essential to look closely at the practitioners themselves. "If you want to understand what a science is you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do" (Geertz, 1983). What was hoped therefore was that the interviews and observations would

provide evidence that portrays what the collaborative work practices of teachers look like and help us to understand their impact on teachers' lives and their significance for children's learning. It is hoped to highlight the positive contributions that collaborative practices can make in improving the educational opportunities and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils when collaborative programmes are designed according to each school's individual needs.

3.5.1 Characteristics of interview and observation sites

The four chosen schools were contacted by telephone and a date was agreed to visit each school for one full day. Table 3C presents data which gives a picture of the size and staffing of each school. Schools and teachers have been given a pseudonym in order to protect the identity of schools and teachers. The school names have been chosen in order to make it easier for the reader to identify the school in question throughout the chapter. The images of lavender, ivy, holly and oak have been selected as fitting similes for the schools according to the data collected. Lavender School is an all girls' school with a strong feminine influence. The evidence gathered in Ivy School reveals that it is well on the way to becoming a PLC with collaboration creeping into every corner! Hollybush School appears to have a thorn or two in its culture. Oak Tree School is a school that has been developing collaborative ways of working for over seven years. Its collaborative roots appear strong.

Table 3 C: Description of the four DEIS urban schools

School Name	DEIS Band	Pupil Gender	No. of pupils	No. of class teachers	No. of support teachers	Principal interviewed	LS teacher interviewed
Lavender primary School	2	All girls	190	9	6 (Including 3 lang sup teachers)*	Patricia	Phil
Ivy Lane School	1	All girls	260	12	9 (Including 1 lang sup teacher)*	Rose	Bernie
Hollybush School	1	Co-ed	195	10	3.5 (one shared with a neighbouring school)	Bríd	Karen –(works between 2 schools)
Oak Tree School	1	Co-ed	185	10	5.5 (one shared with a neighbouring school)	Liz	Estelle

* *Language support teachers are appointed in schools where there are children of different nationalities whose first language is not English. They can play a very significant role in the development of in-class support programmes in schools.*

Three of the schools are quite similar with an enrolment number of just under 200 pupils. 'Ivy Lane' is a slightly bigger school with 260 pupils. The four schools have between four and nine support teachers. The staffing conditions in these schools are very different to many smaller schools that have access to only one shared learning-support teacher. These staffing conditions may enhance the possibility of the development of collaborative practices.

Table 3D : Data collected in each school in Phase 2 of Study

Data	Lavender School	Ivy Lane School	Hollybush School	Oak Tree School
Interview with Principal	Patricia	Rose	Bríd	Liz
Interview with LS teacher	Phil	Bernie	Karen	Estelle
Observation lesson	Litercy Lift-off in Junior Infants	History lesson in 6th class- KWL graphic	Literacy Lift-off in Senior infants (adapted)	Peer tutoring reading lesson in 5th/6th class
Documentation collected	Literacy lift-off plan & progress records	KWL sample sheet	Litercy lift-off term plan and progress records	Peer tutoring sample record sheets

Table 3D presents an overview of the data collected in Phase 2 of the study. In each school I firstly interviewed the Principal, then interviewed a learning-support teacher and the latter part of the day was spent observing some on-going in-class learning support where two or more teachers were working collaboratively. I asked teachers for some documentation of the work programmes and this was added to the evidence gathered in each school.

3.5.2 Designing the interviews

Interviews can range from highly structured situations with a planned question format to a very informal talk with little or no structure except for a focus on some areas desired by the interviewer. Various writers suggest different types of interviews but most of those suggested fall into one of three forms – the structured interview schedule, the focused interview and the free story (Miller, 1991, p.159). The structured interview has fixed responses from which the respondent chooses an answer. The focused interview has a set of questions planned by the interviewer but the respondents are free to give their own answers. The free story interview has no predetermination of questions; questions emerge from the natural course of the interview. For this study, the focused interview was considered to be the most appropriate.

The interview is a social encounter, constructed by both the interviewer and the interviewee (Walford, 2001, p.90). According to Kvale (1996, p.125), interviewing follows an unwritten script for interactions, the rules for which only surface when they are transgressed. Therefore much responsibility lies with the interviewer to ensure the interview is conducted carefully and sensitively. Interviewers should be knowledgeable in the subject area, have clear, short questions, clarify the meanings of the answers when they are given and verify his/her interpretation of the answers throughout the course of the interview. The biases and values of the interviewer should not be revealed and no judgements should be made during the interview. The interviewer needs to be skilled in communication, know how to keep the conversation going and be adept at 'active listening', picking up on facial and bodily expressions. The ethical dimension of the interview must be considered, ensuring consent of subjects, permission to record interactions and confidentiality. The interviewer needs to communicate clearly the nature of the interview and give the interviewee the opportunity to ask questions (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007).

Approximately one hour was allocated for each interview though some were longer depending on the length of the answers of the participants. As interviewer, I worked from an interview protocol which I designed after the analysis of the survey findings (Appendix 8). Eight interviews were conducted in total and all were recorded with consent of the participants. A series of questions was planned but the respondents were free to give their own answers. The views and opinions of the respondents were required to explore, to add to, and to enrich the descriptive data collected in the questionnaire, in relation to collaborative practice. I sought to conceptualise the existing culture of collaboration in these schools and by reflecting on it and narrating it, I hoped that I and others could learn from these sites of 'good practice'. In using this ethnographic approach, the aim was to learn from these teachers rather than just studying them (Spradley, 1979).

Interview questions opened up topics and allowed the participants to construct answers in ways that were meaningful for them. Many of the responses were probed more deeply in the course of the interview. Each of the interviews was recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed. I acknowledge that the

interpretation of the data is only from one possible point of view and other meanings and understandings are imaginable (Peshkin, 2000).

3.5.3 Analysis of interview data

The transcripts of the interviews were typed verbatim and hard copies were analysed by colour coding the different sections according to named categories. Similar to logging the qualitative data gleaned from the survey, the manual task of transcribing, recording and coding information was an onerous task but on completion, I felt that I knew and understood the data I had collected through active involvement with it. The different categories were also copied and pasted electronically into document files.

The following themes were used to categorise the data–

- Collaboration – its evolution, motivation, impact and challenge.
- School's culture, goal and vision.
- Teaching and learning practices including teacher and student learning
- Problems in the school regarding learning- how they are addressed
- Learning policies and learning-support provision
- Planning – schedules and time allowance

Once the information was categorised into files, it was then possible to identify similarities in the participants' responses as well as identify individual experiences. Thus much of the information was analysed using a thematic approach.

3.5.4 Observations and documentation

As outlined in Table 3D I observed a collaborative lesson in each of the four schools where two or more teachers taught a lesson in one classroom. These observations are documented in Appendices 9, 10, 11 and 12 and present a picture of how each lesson was conducted and what was involved. It is important to point out that the principals and teachers appeared very flexible in relation to the plan for data collection. All of them asked what I wished to see and with whom I wished to speak and the final plan was decided only on the day of the visit. From this, I interpreted that the lessons I observed were part of the normal procedure of the school and not something contrived to facilitate the researcher. Also, as a practitioner myself, I felt that I would quickly realise whether or not the pupils were used to the arrangement.

3.5.5 A narrative approach

At times throughout data collection in the schools the participants gave accounts of events that were instrumental in changing their work practices and their school's way of operating. These accounts are analysed through the use of narrative. Using a narrative approach means focusing on the stories told by individuals (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of one or of a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2007, p55), and "gives prominence to human agency and imagination" (Riessman C.K., 1993 p.5). Telling stories about past events is a very natural human activity and informal interviews where the questions are open-ended and not fixed within a structured format will very often consist of stories about events told by the participant in order to emphasise a point he/she wishes to make. In analysing these stories, the researcher needs to 'restory' them into a framework that makes sense, providing a causal link between ideas within a chronological sequence (Creswell, 2007, p. 56).

An individual's story though told in terms that seem natural to the speaker, is packed with values and assumptions as culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story (Riessman, C.K. 1993, p.5). Riessman points out that the way a story is told will affect its meaning, as words spoken in a whisper convey something different to those same words spoken loudly. "Narratives are interpretive and, in turn, require interpretation….Our analytical interpretations are partial, alternative truths that aim for 'believability, not certitude, for enlargement of understanding rather than control' (Stivers,1993, p. 424)" (in Riessman, 1993, p.22).The narrative approach can be slow and painstaking. It is a challenging method that requires the researcher to pay attention to discourse and context. It has been a useful analytical approach suitable for some of the research data in the second phase of this study. Narrative analysis was also used in the third phase, which was the case study in Oak Tree School.

3.6 Phase 3 : Case study

"Case study research is an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (Merriam, 1988, p.2). For this study, an instrumental case study approach was appropriate to inquire into the educational phenomenon of teacher collaboration. The responses to the closed questions in the questionnaire have answered the "what" and 'how many" type questions while the open-ended questions,

interviews and observations have provided data that goes someway towards answering the "how" and "why" type questions (Yin, 2003). The next step was gaining further information that provided rich thick descriptions of the occurrences and trends of collaboration in one school and using this information to identify ways to develop and sustain collaborative cultures in all schools. Conducting a case study at this stage helped to gain a deeper insight into the whole concept of teacher collaboration. The case study is encompassed by the larger study and the overall report is based on the pattern of evidence from the questionnaire, the interviews and the case study. The overall report allows for a merging of findings and a comparison of the results from all of the methods.

The selected site of the case study is that of the school I work in. Our school has developed 'ways' of working collaboratively over the past seven years. In conducting a qualitative case study of Oak Tree School, I have aimed to ensure that the case study consists of the four essential properties of a qualitative case study as outlined by Merriam (1988, p.11):

- Particularistic, in that the case itself is important for what it reveals about teacher collaboration and for what it might represent.
- Descriptive, in that the case study is a rich thick description of teacher collaboration.
- Heuristic, in that the case study illuminates the readers' understanding of teacher collaboration.
- Inductive, in that the case study reveals new relationships, concepts and understandings, pertaining to teacher collaboration.

Overall the case study here strives to understand the meaning of teacher collaboration through reporting and interpreting the experience of teachers who are practically engaged in the phenomenon. I hope that describing the case of my own school in relation to collaboration among teachers, will produce explanations that "are generalisable in some way, or which have a wider resonance" (Mason, 1996, p.6). According to Yin (2003, p.10), the goal in doing a case study is to expand and generalise theories and not to enumerate frequencies. Stake (1995, p. 8) points out that the real business of case study is particularisation with the emphasis on the uniqueness

of the case itself. “Case studies, in not having to seek frequencies of occurrences, can replace quantity with quality and intensity, separating the significant few from the insignificant many instances of behaviour” (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007, p. 258).

In this case study, I draw on my own reflective journal entries, written accounts from staff of collaborative projects, a focus group interview, test results and samples of pupils’ work as evidence to trace the path of development of one professional learning community.

3.6.1 Background to the case study

The site of this case study is that of Oak Tree school, where I have been teaching now for twenty–seven years. Our school is a DEIS Band 1 school, built in 1984, with twenty teachers. The wider staff includes six SNAs, one child-care worker, one secretary, one caretaker, three cleaners and three crèche workers. A new principal, Liz, was appointed in 2000. She had worked as a class teacher in the school since 1984. The school’s enrolment numbers had begun to decrease in the years prior to her appointment and this was a serious concern for her. Initially, Liz tackled the physical appearance of the school inside and out and changed the dreary and worn décor, turning the school into a bright, clean and modern one, with a strong emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene. This boosted the morale of the staff as they welcomed the changes and as a result became enthused to support Liz in her efforts to turn the school around. The school staff has many teachers who have taught there since its inception, despite the usual difficulties of staff turnover that disadvantaged schools face (Zabalza, 1979; Ingersoll, 2001; Hanushek, 2004; Dolton & Newson, 2003). Research shows that low staff turnover can be associated with positive pupil outcomes (Purkey & Smith, 1983). This has been one of Oak Tree’s strengths in that the teachers enjoy working in the school and have built up a relationship with and knowledge of the wider school community.

Another grave concern for Liz was the consistently low scores in the annual standardised tests in literacy and numeracy. A number of children in every standard never scored at all on these tests. Some children went through classes from Junior Infants to second class without grasping basic phonics and letter names. Teachers in the junior classes were challenged and frustrated with the children who seemed impossible

to teach and teachers in the senior classes from third to sixth had come to expect that there were some children who would just never read!

Two members of staff and the principal were engaged in voluntary professional development courses – one Diploma and two Masters in Education. They discussed the literacy problems within the school with other staff members and decided to try a new approach to early literacy. This involved greater cooperation between teachers and required putting a systematic structured literacy programme in place for the children in the junior section of the school. This programme is the central focus of the case study.

3.6.2 Focus of the case study

Oak Tree School, as a DEIS Band 1 school was offered the Reading Recovery Programme in 2006. One of the learning-support teachers, Estelle, became the Reading Recovery tutor, benefiting from on-going professional development in the local Education Support Centre. One year into the project, having experienced success with this intense one to one literacy instruction, Estelle became convinced that there was a better way to teach literacy in the Junior classes than whole class teaching.

Meanwhile, I worked as a learning-support teacher and in 2006 early intervention became part of my brief. Early literacy instruction was a concern. Having worked as an infant teacher for many years, I had developed collaborative ways of working with the support teachers. I was keen to adopt any innovations that would improve our teaching of literacy.

In the school, Estelle and I were assigned to support Literacy in the Junior Infants, in Senior Infants and in 1st class. We sat with the teachers of each class grouping and designed a framework for teaching Literacy, a framework we believed would provide better learning opportunities for our pupils. Special Needs Assistants were included as tutors in the framework. Estelle tutored the SNAs in how to explore phonics with the pupils using the magnetic letters.

In the infant classes, each Friday morning became ‘Literacy Morning’. Each class was divided into ability groupings of approximately six pupils and each group was assigned to a tutor. We had class teachers, learning-support teachers, traveller support teachers,

English language support teacher, and SNAs, all as tutors. In a time frame of approximately 70 minutes, letter instruction, phonic instruction, phonological awareness, familiarisation with text, listening skills, comprehension skills, writing skills and expressive drawing skills were all practised. The US National Reading Panel Report 2000, found that there are five important strategies in effective teaching of reading:

- Phonemic awareness instruction
- Explicit systematic phonics instruction
- Repeated oral reading practice with feedback and guidance
- Direct and indirect vocabulary instruction
- Comprehension strategies instructions

(National Reading Panel, US, 2000).

In Oak Tree School a typical literacy morning Junior Infant lesson would be as follows:

- 15 minutes on letter and phonic instruction – using individual magnetic boards and letters, Jolly Phonic programme, letter and phonic games.
- 10 minutes Phonological awareness – exploring rhyme, syllables – use of song and nursery rhyme and instruments.
- 15 minutes on familiarising with text- using levelled readers for each child– finding front cover, back cover, where story starts, moving left to right and from top to bottom.
- 15 minutes on listening skills- listening to a story –one book used, tutor reads the story, asking questions which increase vocabulary and comprehension, and asking pupils to predict and infer.
- 15 minutes on writing and drawing skills- practice letter formation of new letter. Revision of letters done. Writing a word/words from the story. Drawing of their own picture/interpretation of the story.

Lessons for Senior Infants were based on the above concepts but at a more advanced level. A literacy lesson designed according to the structure outlined above was taught each Friday morning from 2006.

In 2007, a first class intervention programme known as 'Literacy Lift Off' was put in place. Estelle, working as the Reading Recovery tutor, developed the programme based

on the Reading Recovery lesson. This approach to literacy teaching was developed in New Zealand by Holdaway, Watson and others during the 1970s and grew out of Marie Clay's work in developing the Reading Recovery approach. This approach still forms the basis of all infant teacher training in New Zealand and is incorporated in the handbook Reading in Junior Classes (Ministry of Education, NZ, 1991). The New Zealand literacy programme was one of several which influenced the National Literacy Strategy in the UK, especially its Literacy Hour (Hurry, Sylva & Riley, 1999). In Ireland, the approach is called 'Literacy Lift-Off' and many schools involved in the Reading Recovery programme have now started to use the 'Literacy Lift-Off' approach. The name 'Literacy Lift-Off' was coined by a Reading Recovery Teacher in Cork, circa 2006. However, Estelle introduced the programme to our school having studied its success internationally. Our programme differs to the 'Literacy-Lift-Off' programme used by other schools in that it wasn't handed to us as a 'package to deliver'. It was developed according to our own school's needs.

The programme involves dividing the first class into groups and each group moves from station to station. The initiative ran for the school year, three afternoons per week. Ten minutes is spent at each station and each station is manned by a tutor.

- Station 1: Phonic instruction
- Station 2: Familiar book reading
- Station 3: New book reading
- Station 4: Dictation and writing

As the months progressed, the reading stations included more and more comprehension strategies. We introduced a language development station also where oral work developing comprehension and vocabulary became the focus. Therefore, by 2010 our 1st class literacy initiative had 5 work-stations and had developed considerably from its early beginnings. It is now also in operation in 2nd class since 2008 at a more advanced level. In Oak Tree school teachers in classes from Junior Infants to 2nd class teach early literacy skills using an intensive collaborative approach.

It was hoped that this collaborative literacy project would yield positive results for the young pupils whose low literacy skills were the main concern of the project. The pupils involved in the project entered Junior Infants from September 2006. It was necessary to

examine the results of the national standardised tests of pupils before and after the programme began. It was possible to examine their literacy skills by comparing the results of the Middle Infants Screening Test (MIST) which we carry out in our school every year at the end of Senior Infants. A sustained improvement in results would possibly indicate that the collaborative literacy programme was contributing to the raised literacy achievement levels of pupils.

It is important at this point to refer to the internal validity of the comparison of results. It is not possible to say that the changes in the dependant variable are due to the effect of the independent variable; in other words that the improvement in results is attributable to the change in teaching methods. The improved results could possibly be attributed to other reasons. In 2005, the school changed from a single sex boys school to a co-educational school. As research in the Irish context shows girls perform better than boys in Literacy achievements (Eivers et al, 2004, PISA 2009). Therefore we would expect to see an increase in overall Literacy results after their entry to the school. However, if the results of only the boys are examined there is an obvious improvement in the test results. But it could be argued that the mere presence of the girls in the class improved the learning or the attendance to learning of the boys. It is also possible that the children tested in the later years were 'more able' children. However, the 6th class Micra-T results (2009) of the cohort from 2003 show that the group consisted of pupils who achieved in the 80th and 90th percentile range which implies that the 2003 cohort were no weaker than any other class. However, their early literacy learning levels were poor.

Due to the fact that the results from a different cohort of pupils is examined in each case, it is true to say that the conditions of the testing in the earlier years differ with the conditions in the later years. Thus it would only be possible to say that the improved results were due to the effects of involvement in the Literacy project if the conditions remained exactly the same. Without a control group I am limited in claiming the effectiveness of the change in teaching practice and the validity of the research design used is open to threats from other concurrent events which might act as confounding variables (Mertens, 2005).

However in answering the second research question of this study: In what ways are teacher collaboration and teacher learning related? - the assessment results are important. The teachers in the school themselves believe that the improved achievement levels of the pupils are a direct result of their new ways of working. This is an important factor of this case study. The teachers have learned new ways of working through collaboration with colleagues. Their new ways of working require collaboration in planning, teaching, and assessing the programme. The work encompasses methodologies of small group work, station teaching and peer tutoring. The literature review confirms that all of these ways of working intensify the teaching practice of the teachers and increases their learning opportunities which results in better teaching and benefits for their students.

In addition to the literacy project the other sources of evidence from the case study include a focus group interview, reflective journal entries and other documentary evidence. Much of this evidence is collected through action research.

3.6.3 Action research within the case study

The case study of my own school includes an active inquiry into my own practice. As a reflective practitioner, I journal my practice and this documentation holds many descriptions of incidents where the difficulties and benefits of working collaboratively were encountered. The case study encompasses this action research. According to Kemmis and McTaggert (1990) and Zuber-Skerrit (1992), action research consists of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on everyday events in a rigorous and systematic way. It is designed to bridge the gap between research and practice (Somekh, 1995, p. 340) as it aims to "bring about practical improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices" (Zuber-Skerrit, 1996, p.83).

Action research has become increasingly popular in the teaching profession since the 1970s, contributing not only to practice but also to a theory of education and teaching that is accessible to other teachers (Stenhouse, 1979). Robertson, Trotman and Galbraith (1997, p.10) suggest that improvement in practice is the most important benefit of action research. It is arguable that development of theory is equally if not more important. Teachers have always been seen as the expert practitioners rather than

the expert knowers, even amongst themselves, which has led to the persistent failure of research to impact on practice (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007, p. 298). According to McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p3), teachers need to have confidence in themselves as creators of new theory and must be seen by others as having the capacity to do so. Educational theory created by teachers is valuable because "it is done by people who are studying themselves and their work, and asking questions about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they can improve it" and also because "theory generation is at the heart of the policy- making that provides new direction for the profession" (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, pp.3-4).

3.6.3.1 The assumptions and values of the researcher

At this stage, it is important to examine my own role as the researcher and identify my own personal values, assumptions and biases as I bring them with me on the research journey. According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman, (1998), these can be useful and positive rather than detrimental to the research process. But it requires that I as researcher, be very aware of my values, assumptions and biases and a reflection process which traces the path of how I have come to these 'ways of knowing' at this point in time will clarify why I hold certain values and assumptions and establish if I am in fact living in the direction of my values or working against them. McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p.116), define our values as our ontological beliefs, aspects of how we perceive ourselves in relation to others. "The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p.319).

Caring about whom you teach and what you teach is for me one of the most important values a teacher can have. According to Day (2004), caring relationships between teachers and students are the glue that binds successful teaching and successful learning. Throughout all of my years as a classroom teacher, I cared deeply about the children's learning and development and was interested in their lives and stories. As the class teacher, I had ultimate responsibility for the children's learning and believed as Noddings proposes that "our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (Noddings 1995, p.28). Failing to teach some children to read and write often left me feeling guilty in that I felt I was neglecting my duty of care to these children. Discovering that working collaboratively

provided better learning opportunities for these children allowed me to work more towards the direction of my values.

I am aware that I bring certain biases to the study as I am a proponent of collaborative teaching practices. These biases may shape the way I view and interpret the data. Having worked collaboratively for a number of years now, I value collaborative practice and assume that it is a worthwhile practice for teachers to engage in. But it is important that I give a voice to those who have different views on working collaboratively by presenting their opinions in an objective light. The responses from the open-ended questions in the questionnaires, provided insights into why some teachers prefer to work alone, and these are given voice and free standing in the findings. As the researcher my role must include the possibility of being open to contrary findings.

I realise that studying my own organisation and exploring the practice of my own colleagues, was doing what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call 'backyard research' and that it could have led to compromises in my ability to disclose information. Hence, multiple strategies of validity were needed to create confidence in the accuracy of the findings. The strategies recommended by Creswell (2003, p.196) were helpful for this purpose and included triangulation, member checking, rich thick descriptions, clarification of researcher bias, presenting negative or discrepant information, and prolonged time in the field.

3.7 Reliability, validity and ethical considerations

For the researcher, it is essential that the issues of reliability, validity and other ethical issues are addressed throughout the study as failure to do so could undermine the findings of the research study. When using qualitative methods the terms 'reliability' and 'validity' are often replaced with terms such as 'trustworthiness' and 'truth' (Mertens, 2005; Silverman, 2005; Flick 2006).

3.7.1 Reliability or trustworthiness

The meaning of reliability differs depending on the type of research carried out. In quantitative research, the researcher is concerned with dependability and consistency over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents. The researcher needs to

establish that the findings of the study would be the same if the study was repeated on a similar group in a similar context. The positivist researcher can test the reliability of a study by using standardised tests eg. the test-retest method, the equivalent/alternative test method, or the split-half method or Cronbach alpha method (Cohen, Morrison & Mannion, 2007). However, using the term 'reliability' within a qualitative study is questionable as instrumentation, data and findings will not be controllable, consistent and replicable. When studying human action, conditions can never be replicated as identities and social conditions change over time. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using terms such as 'dependability', 'credibility' or 'trustworthiness' instead. The strength of narratives, ethnographies and case studies is in their uniqueness and therefore it would be impossible to try and replicate these types of research studies. Yet, qualitative researchers should strive to ensure that their findings are dependable, credible and trustworthy. Bogdan and Biklen, (1992), propose that researchers accurately and comprehensively record what is actually occurring in the natural setting under study by using varied instruments for data collection, which record multiple perspectives and interpretations. This process is commonly called 'triangulation' and involves the researcher drawing on a combination of data collection techniques rather than one technique only. Studying a phenomenon from more than one standpoint using both quantitative and qualitative research methods will increase the possibility of the richness and complexity of the phenomenon being fully explored. Consequently, the more sources tapped for understanding, the more believable the findings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p.24). Denzin (1970) refers to several types of triangulation: time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation. In this study various data collection techniques were used to explore the phenomenon of teacher collaboration to ensure that the evidence revealed was trustworthy: a postal survey, interviews, observations and documentary evidence. Therefore the particular type of triangulation used in this study is methodological triangulation, referred to as a mixed method approach in the research design of the study.

3.7.2 Validity or truth

According to Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, (2007, p.131), the concept of validity in research has widened in recent years. Researchers cannot ensure that their research is one hundred percent valid or true as even quantitative researchers do not have a 'golden

key' to validity (Silverman, 2005, p.211). There is always an element of interpretation involved even when using hard quantitative measures as the act of analysis is in itself an interpretation (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p.12). Maxwell (2005, p.107) suggests that quantitative researchers "generally attempt to design, in advance, controls that will deal with both anticipated and unanticipated threats to validity". Therefore, quantitative research has an inbuilt measure of standard error which is acknowledged by the researcher before the collection of data begins.

Qualitative researchers on the other hand cannot 'control' any plausible threats in advance and it is only when the research begins that any validity threats or ways in which you might be wrong, can be ruled out. Silverman advises showing as much as possible to the research audience because "unless you can show your audience the procedures you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusions valid, there is little point in aiming to conclude a research dissertation" (2005, p.224).

Maxwell (2005, p.109), proposes that researchers test the validity of their conclusions by looking for evidence that could challenge the conclusions or could make the potential threats implausible. He recommends a number of strategies that can be used to identify and rule out validity threats which include the intensive long-term involvement of the researcher in the study, the collection of 'rich' data that gives a revealing picture of what is going on, the searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases and reporting of these in the study and the use of triangulation. Such strategies were used in gathering the evidence for this study It is the evidence gathered that will rule out validity threats and thus render the study as a credible, honest, rich and in-depth piece of research.

3.7.3 Ethical considerations

In any type of research, the researcher is required to strike a balance between the demands placed on them by being the scientist in search of truth and the rights of their subjects. No participant should be put at risk and their wishes must be respected at all times. Researchers should gain the informed consent of participants before the research begins which means that the participants are well informed of the nature of the research project in advance and their refusal should be accepted if they so wish. To proceed with a research study without the consent of the participants can lead to participants feeling

angry, used and exploited when the results of the research are published. The involvement of participants in the project should be voluntary and the researcher should take into account the effect of the research on them so that their dignity as human beings is preserved at all times (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007, pp.51, 58 & 128).

Ethical issues impinge greatly upon qualitative research as usually there is intimate engagement with the public and private lives of individuals (Mason, 1996, p.166-167). Kelly (1989) proposes that of all the research methods, action research is the one where one's ethical antennae need to be especially sensitive. In action research, the researcher's actions are deeply embedded in the organisation and he/she needs to show respect for colleagues. Kelly (1989) proposes that if we record the everyday interactions of teaching colleagues it may seem like a betrayal of trust to reveal them as evidence especially if the results are negative. She suggests that the researcher share the written evidence with the teachers involved and ask for their opinion but she acknowledges that this can be problematic if teachers are not supportive of the aims of the research study. Kelly asks "how does one write an honest but critical report of teachers' attitudes, if one hopes to continue to work with those involved?" (Kelly, 1989). Similarly, Hitchcock and Hughes (1989, p.46) discuss the difficulties facing teachers doing action research and ask the questions "When is a casual conversation part of the research data and when is it not?" and "Is gossip legitimate data"? The researcher must step back from the research situation and analyse carefully what the appropriate ethical response to a situation might be. Hitchcock and Hughes recommend that teacher researchers develop a rapport with their subjects that will lead to feelings of trust and confidence. Establishing good and effective field relations is an essential ingredient of action research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p.49).

For this study, all participants gave informed consent. As the researcher I attempted to build up good relations with the schools where I conducted the interviews and observations. The initial contact letter was followed up with an informal telephone call to the principal and then a second call to arrange visitation dates. On each visit, I brought refreshments for staff, as it was important to show my appreciation of their participation.

Whilst conducting the Case Study in my own school I became very conscious of the evidence in my reflective journal. Many of the entries recorded conversations and dialogue with colleagues and these had proved instrumental in the development of our collaborative environment. Therefore I was keen to include them in the main body of the thesis. Once the conversations and dialogues were written up as part of the narrative I asked my colleagues to read the pieces and asked for their permission to include their contributions in the study, bearing in mind any reservations they had. This, as I had hoped, avoided any betrayal of trust.

Creswell (2003, p.55) suggests that researchers gain the permission of the 'gatekeepers' or individuals in authority, respect the research sites, seek the support of the participants during the research and protect the privacy of the participants should harmful data be disclosed during the data collection process. It may be necessary to use aliases or pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the individual (p.66) and the researcher must ensure confidentiality if it has been promised. A further ethical issue raised by Creswell is the importance of sticking to the facts in the writing up process and never to invent findings to meet the researcher's or the audience's needs (p.67).

All of the ethical issues that are inherent in a research project were appropriately and adequately addressed for this study as "ignoring ethics can harm your subjects, your colleagues and ultimately your own reputation as a professional researcher" (Grieg & Taylor, 1999, p. 155).

The following three chapters are framed by the research questions. They present and analyse the data collected throughout the three phases of the research process and aim to represent a portrayal of collaborative practices and their effects on teachers and students in DEIS urban primary schools in Ireland.

Chapter 4 - The dynamics of teacher collaboration

> *Collaboration is a complex and demanding activity. It requires developing trusting, collegial relationships; dealing with conflict; and maintaining clear focus. In urban schools, teacher leaders help this process to succeed by knowing how to build collaborative relationships, how to mediate conflict as it develops, how to deal with confrontation in a productive way, and how to maintain the focus on students.*
>
> (Peterson,1994, p.12)

The research question of exploring the dynamics of teacher collaboration is borne in mind throughout this chapter, as the findings presented here seek to establish how schools succeed in developing collaborative work practices by defining what relationships, structures and conditions are most important in both developing and sustaining a collaborative environment. Each step of the research process answers the question in some way. Many responses from the survey are recorded in percentages and some of the quantitative data is presented in the form of tables and bar graphs. Qualitative data, collected from the survey, the interviews and observations and the case study is presented in conjunction with the quantitative data, where relevant. The data presented and analysed here gives a picture of the dynamics of teacher collaboration in DEIS urban primary schools. The descriptions of collaborative practice raise the question whether or not real collaboration is taking place. The data provides answers to the following questions:

- In what ways is policy influential in promoting collaborative practice in schools?
- To what extent is collaboration between teachers happening in schools?
- Why do teachers choose to work collaboratively or why do they choose not to?
- What does collaboration look like in its enactment?
- What are the perceived challenges of teacher collaboration according to teachers?

4.1 Knowledge of and responses to DES policy

In Chapter two it was proposed that teachers working with the same children will be more effective working collaboratively than they will be if working in isolation. An inclusive programme can be successful when all staff commit to work collaboratively and to share expertise (Westwood, 2003, p.4). This finding of the survey supports this

view as the vast majority of respondents (92%) in the survey were of the opinion that a collaborative approach to the planning, teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy programmes is more effective than teachers working alone. Teacher comments in the survey concur:

> Two heads are better than one.
>
> We must all sing from the same hymn sheet.
>
> It makes sense to work together.
>
> Working together is in the best interests of the child- it's what we're paid to do!

Of the principals of these DEIS urban primary schools, 94% agreed that the recommendation for collaboration by the DES was a reasonable one with the remaining 6% feeling that the DES needed to consider the time issue involved for teachers before requesting them to make changes in their practice. However, none of the principals disagreed with the policy principles upon which the recommendation is based. Thus it seems that both principals and teachers support collaboration in theory.

All respondents were asked if they were familiar with the Special Education Circulars which advocate major changes in the provision of learning-support in schools. Principals and learning-support teachers stated that they were very familiar, with 95% and 92% respectively claiming knowledge of the circulars. However, only 65% of class teachers were familiar with the circulars. In relation to the Learning-support guidelines, 97% of learning-support teachers and 69% of class teachers were familiar with the guidelines. In both instances, the findings suggest that class teachers are the group most unfamiliar with these documents. How can we be sure this is not due to chance? A chi–squared test was run in PASW to ascertain whether the difference in familiarity with the circulars and guidelines between the groups was statistically significant. Table 4A shows the results.

Table 4A: Number and % of respondents familiar with Special Education circulars and Learning-support Guidelines

Familiarity with	Principals No. (%)	LS teachers No.(%)	Class teachers No. (%)
Special Ed circulars			
YES	118(95.2%)	109(91.6%)	61 (64.9%)
NO	6 (4.8%) *	10(8.4%) *	33 (35.1%) *
LS Guidelines			
YES	N/A	116 (96.7%)	65 (69.1%)
NO		4 (3.3%)	29 (30.9%)

(* Chi-squared test result: $\chi^2 = 14.992$; df =2; p = < .001)

The p-value being less than 0.05 implies that statistically there is a significant difference between the groups in regard to their familiarity with the literature. The class teachers tend to be less familiar with DES policy in relation to teaching pupils with learning difficulties.

This is an important finding as both documents draw attention to the significant role of the class teacher in relation to children with learning difficulties. The guidelines refer to the class teacher as the person with primary responsibility for the learning of every child in the class (p.42) while the Special Education circular 02/05 advocates a staged approach to learning support where the class teacher intervenes at Stage One, planning and implementing a differentiated programme within the classroom. If over 30% of the class teachers are unaware of the recommendations within these policy documents, the possibility exists that they are unaware of their responsibilities and therefore the responsibility for children with learning difficulties is handed over to the learning-support teacher, a situation that according to Gartner and Lipsky is very prevalent in schools today (2005, p.181). On the other hand, the possibility exists that learning-support teachers, who in this survey had on average 21 years experience as opposed to class teachers who had an average of 10 years experience, may uphold the view that the education of children with learning difficulties is very specialized, a task that learning-support teachers are more qualified to carry out. The class teachers then, lose confidence in their own ability to teach all the children in their charge (Thomas and Loxley, 2001, p.26) and disregard the requirement that all teachers should be capable in

the design and delivery of a broad, balanced curriculum (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007).

Despite the fact that over 30% of class teachers were not familiar with the policy documents regarding their responsibilities to support special education learners, 85% of them were aware of the DES recommendation for ensuring there is a balance between in-class support and withdrawal in relation to learning-support. All of the learning-support teachers were aware of this recommendation and 80% of principals encouraged their staff to adopt this approach. A large number of principals (61%) believed that new initiatives and recent DES policy had made teachers more aware of the necessity to collaborate. It is important at this point to return to the initial finding in this section where 92% of respondents agreed that a collaborative approach is more effective than a teacher working alone. It is important to remember this when looking at the findings in response to DES policy, as it shows that teachers believe working with colleagues helps solve the ongoing problems of professional practice as opposed to engaging in different work practices simply because it is mandated by policy (Goodson, 2003, p.132). One principal commented on the dangers of top-down reform:

> I have huge expectations for current initiatives. But a top-down legislative approach never really works. What it loses out on is the embedding of a rationale in the ethos of a school. If a school doesn't have a rationale for collaboration, then many of the actions become mechanistic- fulfilling a requirement as opposed to exciting an expectation

Therefore it is important that staff in schools agree with the underlying principles of collaboration as well as justifying their reasons for adopting a collaborative approach.

In the past decade there have been a number of official government reports and policy documents that have helped change the face of special education. The documents represent a significant shift towards the creation of inclusive learning environments. Schools have been challenged to respond to these policies (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007, p.2). This study asked if the organisation of learning-support provision in schools had changed as a result of recent DES policy? Table 4B shows the responses.

Table 4B

% of respondents who stated that the organisation of LS in their schools had changed as a result of DES policy recommendations

Has organization of LS changed	Principals	LS teachers	Class teachers	P-Value
Yes	87%	85%	57%	< 0 . 001

(Chi squared test result: $\chi^2 = 7.822$; df = 1; p = < .001)

Principals in 87% of the schools stated that their school's organisation of learning-support provision had changed as a result of recent policy, with 85% of learning-support teachers stating likewise. However, class teachers were not as definite in their responses as only 57% stated that changes had been made, 1% stated that no changes were made and 42% did not know if any changes had been made in the organisation of their school's learning-support provision. A Chi squared test gave a p-value of less than 0.001, which implies that the difference in response is statistically significant. Overall, class teachers appear to have the least knowledge and input into the whole area of learning-support provision in schools. The question arising here is if class teachers' lack of knowledge results from their exclusion by principals and learning-support staff from involvement in school based learning support policy making.

Learning-support provision needs to be addressed as a whole- school issue ensuring that all parties contribute to the development of a school policy but it is difficult to translate a whole-school policy into daily accepted practice. While learning-support staff have a major function, they must perform their roles in consultation and collaboration with everyone in the school community (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007, p. 242). As Gartner and Lipsky propose, what is required is a change of attitude from seeing the education of children with learning difficulties as 'special' and the education of children without learning difficulties as normal and expected (2005, p.184).

The survey asked learning-support teachers to state the duration of their positions. The findings reveal that 45% of learning-support teachers have stayed in the learning-support position for five years or more. This situation can mean that the specialised knowledge these learning support teachers have, is rarely transferred to mainstream.
The chances for others to develop their knowledge in the area of specialised education

are limited unless the current cohort of learning-support teachers, either work collaboratively sharing the same workspace, or return to mainstream as classroom teachers, better equipped to cope with differentiation. It is not a case of specialist skills being unnecessary but rather moving towards an overlapping of roles where both class teacher and learning-support teacher complement each other in experience and expertise (Lacey, 2001, p.67).

Having established then the extent to which schools are influenced by DES policies promoting collaborative practices, it is necessary to find out how much collaboration between teachers is taking place in DEIS schools and what this collaboration looks like. Is the 'reading' and enacting of policy inextricably bound with the traditional way of doing things in the school, rendering the impact of the policy minimal or ineffective (Ball, 1994; Thomas & Loxley, 2001).

4.2 The extent of collaborative work in DEIS schools.

The term 'teacher collaboration' is used in many DES policy recommendations (Revised Curriculum,1999; Learning Support Guidelines 2000; Special Education Circulars 2003 & 2005). However, the policies recommending collaboration imply nothing about either the content or quality of instruction (Fullan, 2001a). Therefore there are many interpretations and the term 'teacher collaboration' tends to be over used and laden with meaning. Teachers might engage in planning with colleagues. Others might engage in teaching with colleagues. The collaborative planning or collaborative teaching may be seldom or frequent. The nature of the collaborative work may vary from being informal to being strictly scheduled, with a variety of models used. Therefore in reporting on the findings of whether teachers are collaboratively planning and/or collaboratively teaching in DEIS schools, it is also important to report on the frequency and nature of the collaboration.

Additionally one of the key assumptions of this study is that collaboration between teachers is possible in DEIS urban primary schools because staffing conditions are more favourable with more learning-support/ resource teachers available to support pupils. Table 4C gives a picture of the size of the schools that responded to the postal survey and shows how the larger schools have a greater number of support teachers.

Table 4C : Size of DEIS urban schools

Number of teachers on staff	**1-5 teachers**	**6-10 teachers**	**11-20 teachers**	**>20 teachers**
% of schools that responded	4%	13%	44%	39%
Number of support teachers	**1 support-teacher**	**2-3 support teachers**	**4-5 support teachers**	**>5 support teachers**
% of schools that responded	4%	24%	32%	40%

Of the schools that responded to the survey, 83% have eleven or more teachers on staff which is much higher than the national average where only 22.8 % of schools have over eleven teachers (DES, 2010). From Table 4C above, it is evident that DEIS urban primary schools are considerably larger than schools nationally with 32% benefiting from the support of four or five support teachers and 40% benefiting from the support of more than five support teachers. The national average number of support teachers is just 3.5 (DES, 2010). This finding supports the earlier assumption that staffing conditions are slightly more favourable in DEIS urban primary schools.

4.2.1 Are teachers planning collaboratively?

Before teachers can engage in collaborative teaching that involves a sharing of skills and expertise, it is essential that teachers meet to formalise a plan of work. Learning-support teachers are now required to consult with class teachers, parents and other concerned parties in drawing up individual education plans (IEPs) for children with special educational needs. An individual education plan involves designing a plan of work for the child with special needs that sets out specific targets to address his/her needs. The targets set down in the IEP should clearly show how the class teacher, the LS teacher, the parents, the child and any other parties can contribute to ensure that the targets may be reached. It requires collaborative effort. This is a provision of the EPSEN Act 2004. Some sections of the EPSEN Act have already commenced and the remaining section, relating mainly to the statutory assessment and education plan process, was to be implemented over a five year time frame that began on the 1st of October 2005. However, due to the current financial state of the country which has put a limit on available resources, implementation of the remaining sections of the EPSEN Act have been deferred and may take many years to be realised. Despite this, teachers

are now aware that they can no longer continue to work in complete isolation. They have to plan with colleagues and parents in relation to pupils with special educational needs. This study found that 77% of schools have compiled IEPs for SEN pupils and also individual profile and learning programmes (IPLPs) for pupils receiving learning-support. However, it is questionable if in fact real collaboration has taken place. Have the IEPs been planned collaboratively or have learning-support teachers devised them without sufficient consultation? This survey asked if class teachers and learning-support teachers met with each other to plan IEPs collaboratively:

Table 4D: Do class teachers and LS teachers meet to plan IEPs collaboratively?

Respondents	Yes %	No %
Principals	97%	3%
LS teachers	98%	2%
Class teachers	91%	9%

The findings are positive in relation to collaborative planning between teachers, with over 90% of all respondents indicating that collaborative planning does take place. However, for collaborative consultation to occur, teachers must firstly find the time to plan with colleagues.The data revealed that 87% of teachers met on an informal basis, with teachers finding it very difficult to organise meetings. The data showed that 90% of learning-support teachers would welcome more planning time and 93% of this cohort would use more planning time to plan collaboratively. This finding shows a move towards collaboration as it differs from Lortie's findings in 1975 where the majority of teachers interviewed said that if they were allocated more time, they would spend it planning for themselves in their own classrooms, rather than working with colleagues (Hargreaves, 1994, p.167). 10% of learning-support teachers would not welcome more planning time, including 3% who believe that teaching time should not be shortened and used for planning. Of the learning-support teachers surveyed, 40% stated that they met with class teachers once a term or less. 22 % met monthly, 10% met fortnightly and 26% met on a weekly basis.

As there is no allocation of planning time within the teacher's work-day, it depends on the school itself to come up with its own ideas to facilitate planning time. Principals and teachers mentioned that after- school time has to be used but as this is voluntary, it

can be difficult to sustain and the frequency of meetings varies. Here are the comments of some teachers:

> I have found, the richness of thought, the ideas and the enthusiasm of younger teachers come to the fore when planning together. We plan together once every 5-6 weeks for Literacy, thanks to the kindness of the infant teachers who supervise classes. This is not enough time and it is unfair to the infant teachers who need this time for their own planning.
>
> We have a very progressive staff…..We are hoping to hold monthly meetings outside of school for SEN. Staff will be very involved and upskilled in relation to SEN. All team members will be up to date.
>
> For some teachers, school is a 9.00 to 3.00 job – end of story! Someone needs to take the initiative….Vision is important….Training to work collaboratively sounds brilliant to me but people must be willing.
>
> Ideas for 'time to share ideas' would be most helpful to us. There must be a creative way of doing this!

These comments show that some schools have found ways to schedule planning time but many more are unable to devise a schedule. The data reveals how it is very much up to the schools themselves to come up with a solution and though this system may result in some schools coming up with innovative ideas, it leaves many lagging very far behind. The fact that policies do not specify how collaboration will happen adds to the difficulties that schools face. It highlights the gap between policy as text and policy as practice (Ball, 1994).One principal stated that collaborative planning between class teachers and support teachers had been scheduled into weekly timetables but during a whole school evaluation, the inspectors advised that the practice be discontinued. In contrast, in another school, the inspectors affirmed the practice of collaborative planning. This data shows the lack of a unanimous approach by the DES inspectorate in relation to providing planning time for teachers and the frequency of such planning and also points to a lack of a coherent vision about collaboration and the practices that support it.

It can be deduced from the findings then that most teachers in DEIS urban primary schools are collaboratively planning education programmes for pupils with learning difficulties and it has already been established that almost all principals and teachers believe that the joint efforts of class teachers and learning-support teachers offer a better service to the students in their care. DEIS schools have moved some way towards incorporating a system of collaborative planning into the organisation of their schools. Therefore teachers are working on the same programme with the child with SEN and

this has obvious benefits for the child. However this element of collaboration doesn't extend to classrooms and teachers remain in their familiar workspace within their comfort zone (Day, 1999). As pointed out in Chapter two, joint collaborative work at classroom level, is perhaps the most difficult element of collaboration between class teachers and learning-support teachers. The following section reports on the extent to which teachers are taking that step out of the comfort zone into collaborative teaching practices.

4.2.2 Are teachers teaching collaboratively?

To establish if the practices of teachers reflect their theoretical principles, respondents were asked if they had taken collaboration a step further by engaging in collaborative teaching. The following table shows the results.

Table 4E
Do you engage in collaborative teaching?

Respondents	**LS teachers %**	**Class teachers %**
Yes	58%	38%
No	42%	62%

(Chi squared test result: $\chi^2 = 33.046$; df = 2; p = < .001)

Despite the fact an earlier finding showed that over 90% of teachers are planning collaboratively, it is clear from Table 4E that only 58% of resource teachers go into the classroom to support the pupils with SEN and only 38% of class teachers have experienced this form of support from the learning-support teacher. The result of the Chi squared test shows that the difference in response between the two groups is significant. Can it be assumed therefore that learning-support teachers are more open to collaborative teaching than class teachers? It must be remembered that only one learning-support teacher and one class teacher from each school was surveyed. These teachers may not necessarily work with the same pupils, and the class teacher may work with a different learning-support teacher who has chosen not to use in-class support. This may explain the difference in the findings. Considering that 98% of learning-support teachers engage in collaborative planning while only 58% engage in collaborative teaching, it appears that teachers are slow to leave their comfort zone to

share the same workspace as colleagues. However, these findings show that DEIS urban primary schools are engaging in more collaborative work than schools nationally as reported by DeBúrca (2005). Her study found that only 20% of learning-support teachers were providing in-class support. The conditions in DEIS urban primary schools are very different to those in the smaller rural schools and from the table above it is evident that there is a higher level of collaboration among teachers in these DEIS urban primary schools. In addition the move towards collaborative teaching challenges the notion of the prevailing 'legendry autonomy' (OECD, 1991) of the Irish teacher. The following section examines the nature of the in-class support that is provided by learning-support teachers.

4.2.3 Models of in-class support

Turning our attention to the practice of collaborative teaching in schools, we note that 58% of learning-support teachers use some model of in-class support. Respondents were asked to be more specific on this issue and were asked what kind of in-class support was used. Data shows that schools used a variety of strategies. Teachers did not rely on one model only.

Table 4F: Models of in-class support used by LS teachers

Model of in-class support	% of learning-support teachers using this method	Level of collaboration required
Group-work	76%	high
Individual support during whole class teaching by class teacher	32%	low
Co-presentation of material	33%	high
Other	21%	high/low

From the table above it is clear that teachers use more than one model of in-class support. Group- work tends to be the most popular model with 76% of learning-support teachers engaging in this type of in-class support. One method of group-work is parallel teaching (Hawkins, 2000) and requires the learning-support teacher to work in-class with the class teacher, both working with a different group. The groups may be mixed ability where each teacher teaches similar content but the reduced pupil, teacher ratio allows for more time to be given to those who need help and guidance. Alternatively

the groups may be homogeneous where the content is differentiated according to each group's ability level. Station teaching is another form of group work where groups of pupils move from station to station. The groups may be homogeneous or mixed-ability and three or four teachers work may together in the classroom, each responsible for one station. Each teacher needs to be familiar with the work that is going on in all of the groups and therefore a high level of collaboration is required.

The individual support model or the 'Teach Assist' method (Cook & Friend, 1995), where the class teacher presents the material to the whole class while the learning-support teacher circulates to support particular pupils is used by 33% of learning-support teachers. One class teacher found that she could learn a lot from using this approach:

> Class teachers can learn effective strategies for working with all children in their class from having teachers who are qualified in special education come in and support the children in the classroom.

However, this can be quite a difficult method as very often, the presentation of the material by the class teacher takes up most of the time and the class teacher can feel as if he/she is doing all the work. The level of teacher collaboration may be low. This was evident from some of the comments:

> The fact that the class teacher has ultimate responsibility can mean that support teachers sit back and watch their teaching.

> Class teachers can't let collaboration increase their workload. SEN team must bring support programmes into the classroom – but not just sit in on class, that's very important.

These comments may point to the fact that real collaboration where teachers strive together toward the same outcome in ways that directly share the work and the thinking involved in a successful learning situation is not happening in many schools. Teachers have few models for collaborative collegial practice where both take responsibility for the planning, enacting and evaluation of student learning. The above comments are also indicative of the traditional model of teaching that still prevails in classrooms today. Collaborative practices do not sit comfortably next to the model of full frontal whole class teaching, where teacher talk dominates. Such a model is often ineffective (Saranson, 2003, p.55) and is a result of teachers continuing to fit in with the traditional 'grammar of schooling' (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Collaborative practices may be easier to implement in a classroom where the teacher differentiates instruction rather than a

classroom where whole class teaching dominates, as there may be an organisational framework already in place, for example, varied maths groups or reading groups.

Co-presentation of material was used by 33% of learning-support teachers. This model embodies the core idea of team teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995) where both teachers share the instruction of students. The teachers might take turns leading a discussion, or one may speak while the other demonstrates a concept. The teachers who are teaming also role play and model appropriate ways to ask questions. This high level collaborative approach requires a high level of mutual trust and commitment and can be difficult for teachers as much preparatory work is necessary.

Other methods such as peer tutoring, re-teaching or pre-teaching (Hawkins, 2000) were used by 21% of learning-support teachers. The data from the survey provides statistical evidence of collaboration in DEIS urban primary schools. In the visits to the schools, richer data was collected, where detailed accounts of how teachers worked collaboratively were provided.

4.2.4 Understanding in-class support

During the visits to the four schools the interviews with the four learning-support teachers provided descriptions of how each teacher worked collaboratively with others. The four accounts are narrative representations of how each teacher chose to work in their own schools, and therefore reveal their meanings of collaborative practice. Their accounts reveal the nature of the in-class support as identified in Table 4F and also whether there is a high or low level of collaboration involved.

Firstly, I spoke with Phil, a learning-support teacher, in Lavender Primary School.

> **Phil:** I go into the classroom to do support maths, in-class, in 4th class, dealing with the three weakest children. They come to the back of the room, sit with me when I go in and I do what is going on in that classroom maybe at a lower level, depending on the topic. The teacher teaches for about 30 minutes, and then I go in for the last twenty minutes. The teacher teaches whatever's to be taught for the day but I'm always aware of the topic for the week and I would be getting my own stuff ready for the children because I know the level they're at so I go in with a worksheet ready for them or whatever but I only go in there at the activity time as those three children would not be able for the activity of the general class. It's very good, and it seems to be working, and the children are not as frustrated because they're not given something that's way beyond them.

Phil enters the classroom to support the children at the maths *activity* time only. She takes the pupils to the back of the room and works quietly with them on an alternative activity. The level of teacher collaboration is low in this instance. The question arises here as to whether real collaboration is taking place?

In chapter two, collaboration was defined as the fullest form of working together which occurs when people strive together toward the same outcome in ways that directly share the work and the thinking involved in a successful learning situation. Does Phil's way of working collaboratively ensure a successful learning situation? In this case, there seems to be a rather imbalanced situation in the classroom. If the children were seated at their usual place and both teachers circulated and supported pupils where necessary, the teachers could use the system of 'complementary instruction' as described by Bauwens and Hourcade (1997) and discussed in chapter two, and this would ensure a more shared and balanced learning environment. But here the pupils are taken to the back of the room and given an easier activity. This raises the whole issue of inclusion. The system operated by Phil and the class teacher appears to be 'exclusive' rather than 'inclusive', putting the weaker pupils' difficulties in the spotlight rather than fully including them in class activities. Hall et al recommend that "as more and more schools come to prioritise inclusion, we need to keep interrogating the (often unintended) reproduction of excluding meanings and practices that can go on alongside the production of newer, more egalitarian ones" (Hall, Benjamin, Nind, Collins & Sheehy, 2003, p. 556). The situation described here by Phil is possibly an example of how schools and teachers enact a new DES policy, in this case fulfilling the requirement of in-class support, while bound to the traditional way of doing things.

The second description is from Ivy Lane School, where Bernie described her way of working collaboratively, which is very different to that of Phil's.

> **Bernie:** I go into the Maths class and work for an hour with Anna (*class teacher*), so that I'm near the child that needs support. I'm there for them. Then anyone that needs help, I go around helping them and that way we keep an eye on the ones that are falling behind. I take them out on a Thursday for extra support and prepare them for the test on Friday. I just go over where they have fallen down. Then we give a weekly test on Friday and anyone that gets 100% or if it was very difficult, anyone that gets an A, I'd take them for extra tuition on the following Monday. So it's just a motivation thing. Sometimes the weaker kids would get the100%. Normally I'd have about 8 kids in that class.
>
> Later in the day, I go back to Anna, she's normally doing religion for their Confirmation, so I'd take any child who has difficulties aside to go through the prayers, go through some

of the questions, and try to bring it down to a basic level. I take them aside in the room, to do the same as what the others are doing, but at their own pace .
Then I've another group for study skills. We're blitzing at the moment coz the literacy level is…(*uses hand gesture to show low level)…* so I prepare them for the entrance exam and for the study next year. First, I give the vocabulary we need for the topic to Anna. She teaches the class in general and I take my small group here to my room and go over and over it until they know it. Then my group have to go back to Anna's group and they act as leaders to four class groups. They discuss the topic with them in the smaller groups. Both of us move around the groups, helping and discussing. We use the KWL method. That's for the study skills and the topic could be history, geography or English.
And we had to do First Steps together in the class, twice a week. Now we don't always stick to this time- table but in general, we do. Then when she's going to PE , I'd go with her and if anyone's not able to do something, I'd take them aside and do it with them.

Bernie has a very different system in place to what Phil described. We saw from Table 3A that Bernie's school, Ivy Lane, is in the fortunate position of having nine support teachers on the SET to support the children in the twelve mainstream classes. Bernie has been assigned to work exclusively with the 6th class teacher and they have a very good working relationship where there is a high level of collaboration. Because she is assigned to work with one class only, Bernie is in an ideal situation for collaboration to take place. There are many forms used by the two teachers: complementary teaching, pre-teaching, re-teaching and peer tutoring and team teaching. Bernie withdraws different pupils and not always the weakest pupils. Because she is supporting the learning in one class only, she can do a lot of re-teaching of skills as in the P.E class and the religion class. In this situation the pupils become accustomed to having two teachers working with them constantly. The support teacher does not focus on the weak children only, and therefore avoids the in-class situation of always highlighting the same pupils' difficulties. Bernie's description of her extensive collaborative practice is very different to the practice of a 'traditional teacher' and her engagement with it reveals how she and the class teacher have developed a sense of agency in relation to their practice.

The third description is from Hollybush School. Karen shows how her work has incorporated a lot of in-class support into her practice. She works between two schools.

Karen: I would do an awful lot of in-class support . In my base school I'm responsible for two 5th classes and also a Senior Infant phonic programme. In my second school I have three pupils in 1st class with IEPs , so they have specific learning difficulties. I'm involved in the Literacy –Lift-Off Work Stations with them twice a week. Also I'm responsible for First Steps writing in my base school as I'm the First Steps writing tutor, so I would model First Step lessons in 3rd, 4th and 5th. every week.
I model a genre. At the moment now I'm finishing up 'Report' , so I would actually model how to teach the whole sequence of report. And I've had to do that this year, but next year

> it'll be different because those teachers are supposed to continue on themselves. They've seen me go through the process.

Karen has been engaged in professional development workshops for 'First Steps' and is now using the classroom as a learning environment for her colleagues, where she is the tutor. Teacher observation of the methodologies she uses to teach a writing programme has meant that Karen has opened her practice to critique by colleagues. This reflects a significant change in the 'closed door' aspect of teaching culture. However it is important that there is room for dialogue throughout the session, rather than having a 'how to do it' approach to the new writing programme. Karen has learned from her professional development courses and is now supporting teachers in their efforts to translate new ideas for writing instruction into practice. This situation provides an example of both off-site and school based professional development.

The fourth example is from Oak Tree School where learning-support teacher, Estelle, describes her in-class support.

> **Estelle**: I do in-class in Senior Infants –sometimes whole class phonics before we break into reading and writing groups with the class teacher and 2 SNAs as group tutors. And I do three afternoons a week in 1st class – that's the Literacy Lift –Off – with the class teacher, another LS colleague and one SNA.
> The organisation of the programme has to be done. We're used to it now so it becomes a system.. If you're organised from day one and you know what levels the children are at, it's easy. It becomes easier but you have to be organised from Day One.

Taking the four narratives into account, it is possible to say that Bernie has perhaps the ideal collaborative system in place, working at a high collaborative level with one class teacher only. The other three learning-support teachers have more demands on their time and being organised and 'locked' into a planned programme enables Karen and Estelle to engage in effective in-class support. They use work-station teaching and group work, working with two or three more adults on a new programme. It appears that new programmes incorporating collaboration make it easier for teachers to share practice as Phil pointed out when she compared the type of in-class she is involved in with the Literacy Lift-Off programme.

> **Phil:** The type of support that I give in the classroom is not clearly defined. It's a very individual thing .It depends on the type of personality. There aren't clear guidelines for it like there is with the Literacy Lift Off. There you have to have four teachers or four staff anyway going around, moving around in stations and it's a very designed, clear

> programme. The Literacy Lift Off is so very structured that it is very acceptable to everybody. If there was a programme for 5th and 6th that was similar in design I think every teacher in the country would take it onboard. If there was a programme with very clear guidelines, so many minutes long. Those sort of in-class support programmes would take off with 100% support from teachers, whereas in-class support where the guidelines are not as clear and where the work being done may not be as clear because teachers don't have time to sit and talk, have the meeting and know exactly what the support teacher is doing, lacks clarity

The literacy programme is structured so that all teachers have a task and work equally in the classroom. However, the question arises here if these programmes are in fact depoliticising teaching and turning teachers into mere educational technicians, who become routinised and trivialised deliverers of pre-designed packages (Ball, 1995; Goodson, 1999). In theory, it appears so, but in practice teachers are much more than technicians. They are persons and moral agents who carry pedagogical responsibility for the pupils under their purview and always operate in the context of the ever changing circumstances of daily classroom life (Van Manen, 1999, pp, 82-84). Karen and Estelle do much more than just enacting a pre-designed programme. They plan their work with the class teachers, using their own planning templates. They record progress and address the difficulties on a daily basis. They are not being simplistic and applying someone else's knowledge to their own practice but rather they are professional in their approach to using the programme, understanding the art and skilfulness of teaching particular children in particular settings (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p.4).

This raises the issue of how teachers view their work. Phil saw the need to be given a programme to deliver as opposed to designing or modifying one that suits the school's needs as Karen and Estelle have done in their schools. They have shown a sense of agency in relation to making the changes that are required. Does Phil see herself more as the educational technician, rather than a critical thinker who has the power and ability to create new or adapted programmes? Are many teachers caught in the trap which Chomsky describes as a "form of indoctrination, that works against independent thought in favour of obedience" (2000, p.24) or is it a situation where new programmes that have worked elsewhere are identified as best practice and teachers become blunt tools of policy by implementing the exact programme in their own schools without dialogue and debate with colleagues on what might be best for their own school (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p.722). When teachers share knowledge about a successful

new programme there must be opportunities for educational dialogue rather than showing others how things are done. Glenn (2006) proposes that educators are being handed the golden egg of potential creativity and flexibility and autonomy, but they are rejecting it in favour of a mass-produced plastic egg in the form of the templates for teaching that Carr and Kemmis talk about (1986). She believes that teachers should be encouraged to re-interpret curriculum as being fluid and dynamic.

Alternatively, could it be as Phil describes, merely a practical issue, where teachers have little time available to plan and organise learning programmes? Karen and Estelle use the pre-designed programmes but change and adapt as necessary showing that having a script does not deny agency but rather it takes the 'messiness' out of thinking through issues that are very complex and contested. It is evident from the data that new programmes such as Literacy Lift-Off, seem to provide a context for change, giving teachers permission and opportunities to collaborate, be exploratory and be learners.

In the four selected schools, lessons involving teacher collaboration were observed. Table 4G provides an overview of the lessons which are described more fully in Appendices 9-12 of this study. The table clearly indicates how pre-designed programmes are being used by teachers and therefore the question arises as to how significant a role they play in the professional development of teachers. They provide the opportunity for teachers to work together, an opportunity that has been absent from teachers' traditional lone practice. Therefore, it could be argued that using these prescriptive programmes promotes rather than denies teacher agency because they provide teachers with shared learning opportunities and in adapting these programmes to suit their own schools' needs, teachers show innovation and creativity.

Table 4G: Overview of observed collaborative lessons

School	Observation lesson	How many teachers/adults	How many pupils	Type of collaborative teaching involved	Organisation of lesson was done by
Lavender School	Litercy Lift-off in Junior Infants	5: class teacher, LS teacher, 2 other support teachers and 1 SNA	20	Station teaching	LS teacher and class teacher
Ivy Lane School	History lesson in 6th class-KWL graphic used	2: class teacher and LS teacher	21	Pre-teaching Team teaching Supportive teaching	Class teacher and LS teacher
Hollybush School	Literacy Lift-off in Senior infants (adapted)	3: Class teacher, LS teacher and 1 other support teacher	16	Station teaching	LS teacher
Oak Tree School	Peer tutoring reading lesson in 5th/6th class (adapted)	2 : Class teacher and LS teacher	18	Supportive learning activities	LS teacher

In all of the observed lessons, it was clear that a high level of planning and organisation was involved. In two cases the learning-support teacher arrived into the classroom with their pre-prepared box. The programme had been planned and agreed upon collaboratively but the day-to day organisation was done by the learning-support teachers. Both of these teachers felt that the class teachers' workload was already over-burdened and had no problem taking on this daily work as they enjoyed the lessons and saw the positive results of their labours.

4.2.5 Planning the in-class programme

A positive finding of the survey was that 91% of learning-support teachers collaboratively planned their in-class support programme with class teachers. Table 4G showed that the planning/organisation is often done solely by the learning- support teacher and interviewees report likewise in the following paragraphs. It is important here to highlight the difference between planning a programme and organising a lesson.

Teachers may plan collaboratively at the beginning of a month or term and set down targets and a programme of work but very often the daily or weekly organisation is done by the learning- support teacher.

The cohort of teachers who use in-class support were asked when the planning for in-class support was done. They selected more than one option. Table 4H summarises the responses which show the nature of the collaborative planning.

Table 4H: When does planning for in-class support take place?

Planning for in-class takes place:	**% of those using in-class**
At break-times	38%
Before and after school	48%
In class while pupils work independently	53%
A quick word at the classroom door	48%
Scheduled time-slot without the pupils	25%
Other	10%

It is evident from the table that teachers do not rely on one particular time to plan their in-class schedule. They use a variety of methods. As one respondent wrote –"We grab whatever chance we get"! This is the nature of teachers' work, very often a racehorse pace that can be difficult to sustain. A scheduled time slot for planning was the least used method of collaborative planning with only 25% of learning-support teachers managing to schedule planning time.

In the following narratives, Karen and Estelle describe a hectic schedule and focus on the need for good planning and organisation, believing it is the key to a successful in-class support programme.

> **Karen:** LS is very specialised work. There's a lot of preparation, a lot of extra material to be read, a lot of preparing beforehand and a lot more specialised activities. It's before school, after school, at break-times – whenever we get the chance. Well I find I am always running and racing.
> I always write down everything and we keep these templates and we write down what the children are doing and we write down who has a problem and we use these documents as evidence of success and to monitor how they're improving. And the template is the link between us as well.

> **Estelle**: You have to be organised. Like when you go in at ten past, it starts at ten past and it goes on for forty minutes. There is organising with the programme, with the phonics and word attack skills, that has to be all ready before I go in and when they break into the

> reading groups the books have to be organised and the children have to know the group they're in. The children are used to that so they go straight to their group. So organisation is the key in that.
> Well I would talk to the class teacher on a regular basis so we'd be in touch .This is all in school hours so trying to fit it in during the day is a challenge.
> Everything goes back into the box and you go back and organise for the next day That happens 3 days a week. And the day to day planning is done very quickly. It's done in the morning or sometimes after the session. Well you just have to be fast. There is a time factor.

The evidence here indicates that teachers are already planning before school begins, during lunch- breaks and after school hours. For many teachers, teaching is much more than a 'nine to three' job as new programmes require teachers to collaboratively plan the lessons. Karen and Estelle mention the amount of organisation that is required for in-class support to take place and their descriptions show how this can become the responsibility of the learning-support teacher despite the original collaborative plan.

In two of the schools that were visited, the learning-support teachers used class time to plan with the class teachers:

> **Phil:** The teacher might talk to you in the class for five minutes while the children are working but we find that very difficult. It depends on the class and how young they are. The older they are the easier it is. You can give them work to do but generally in the lower classes it's quite difficult.
> Lunchtimes are used a lot for planning and break- times, and first thing in the morning.
> I find I would much prefer a meeting outside the classroom, even in senior classes because the teacher is forever being disturbed. It's not fair to her, for true planning so that she can have a free mind.
> The most important thing is an overall plan. A plan for a length of time, a decent length of time and shared goals for the children, an agreed set of targets and ownership of what you're doing.

> **Bernie:** The fact that I'm working in the classroom an awful lot of the time means we can plan together. Last year and the year before I had to take time out from the class with the teacher but now we give the class work to do, and we sit down and do it together and it's done quickly because we know where we're going, we can see what's working and what's not working so that's another reason why I think it's better to stay in the class rather than withdraw the whole time.

Obviously, teachers using in-class support do not rely on one particular time to plan their in-class schedule. As one survey respondent wrote –"We grab whatever chance we get"! This is the nature of teachers' work, very often a racehorse pace that can be difficult to sustain. Teachers use a variety of opportunities to plan, a time when the children are working independently, a quick word at the door, break- times and before and after school. A scheduled time slot for planning was the least used method among

those who use a variety of methods with only 25% of teachers managing to schedule a time to plan the in-class support programme.

All four in-class support descriptions have revealed that planning is vital for teachers who work together. Considering the emphasis all four teachers put on the importance of planning, the issue of longer official working hours for primary school teachers arises. Imposing longer working hours on teachers may provide them with the planning opportunities they so clearly require but there is a danger that any externally imposed constraints will leave little space for personal direction in their profession (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p.722). The present planning situation as described by the interviewees may be far from ideal but it does allow the teachers to be autonomous in the planning of their work and it gives them the freedom to make decisions about their work. Therefore, when the responsibility to engage in effective teaching lies on the teachers themselves, most appear to be instrumental in their own professional development, in that they organise meetings, collaboratively plan a programme and collaboratively teach that programme. However, there are some teachers who do not plan for in-class support.

4.2.6 Providing in-class support without a plan!

Some class teachers (21%) and some of learning-support teachers (9%) stated that they never plan for their in-class work, citing lack of time as the reason. These teachers stated that in-class support worked without planning as the class groups worked independently of each other. This implies that 21% of class teachers have handed over the responsibility of a certain group of pupils to the learning-support teacher, expecting the learning-support teacher to plan alone for the in-class group work. This type of in-class support cannot be successful for every pupil as a fragmented approach is still in operation despite the shared work-space. The class teacher is not taking responsibility for every pupil's learning and lack of discussion with the support teacher implies that she is unaware of pupils' progress or difficulties. However, the class teacher may be under the impression that this constitutes successful in-class support especially if the lesson content is taken in linear sequence from the class textbook or other work-book because he/she can quickly mark the progression but the emphasis tends to be on increasing pupil knowledge rather than developing pupils' skills and abilities.

Another cause for concern is that 9% of learning-support teachers engage in in-class support without a plan of work. These teachers stated that they simply 'fall in with' the teacher's work and help out by supporting those who need it. This is also an insufficient approach to in-class support as the learning targets for pupils with special educational needs must be met by the content of the in-class work programme. The pupils also lose out as extra materials that will enhance their learning are not organised in advance.

Working in either of the above situations without a plan of work will result in an inadequate in-class support programme. It is possible that teachers who fail to plan together may not yet value the importance of planning. As with any change, it is a slow developmental process. The following reflective journal entries reveal how one teacher in Oak Tree School, over the course of four years, changed his attitude to planning.

> Today's meeting with Liam was a revelation! He is not so keen to come aboard on the planning issue. He can't see himself giving time over to planning as he says it will infringe on student teaching time. At the moment he plans haphazardly at the door etc and there is no recording of it. It's amazing that he is not dissatisfied with this way of working. However he eventually agreed to try it out. I hope he realises the value of it and sees how much more can be achieved with a good collaborative plan. (Reflective Journal Entry – **4/4/03**)

> Liam came to me today about this term's collaborative planning schedule. He is scheduled to meet with Marie for 2 ½ hrs. He said it won't be enough and he will need to meet with her after school as they have so much to plan. As he spoke, I realised how far we all have come! (Reflective Journal Entry – **2/2/07**)

The two entries record Liam's changing attitude to collaborative planning. As time has moved on he has become more involved in collaborative programmes with others, and has come to value and need his planning time. The collaborative culture in which he works has played a role in his professional development.

It has been established then that collaborative planning and collaborative teaching is happening in many DEIS schools. However, there are some schools where tradition prevails and learning-support teachers rely solely on withdrawal of their pupils for support. It is important to give voice to these teachers and attempt to understand why they chose to work in this way.

4.3 Reliance on the withdrawal method of support

As the Learning Support Guidelines (2000, p. 46) suggest, over-reliance on the predominant withdrawal model of learning-support provision has its disadvantages as the pupil is removed from his peers and fragmentation in the programme of work is a possibility. Provision of learning-support should not result in the isolation of the student from his peer group or exclude him from meaningful participation in classroom activities (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007, p.245). Yet, this study found that 42% of learning-support teachers rely completely on the withdrawal system of learning support. Learning-support teachers and class teachers were asked why withdrawal of pupils for support was always used in their school and there was quite a variation of responses. Respondents were free to give their own reasons. Half (50%) of these respondents stated that withdrawal is either less distracting, more effective and intensive as a method or a better option for learning-support pupils, despite the research that states otherwise. 31% stated that withdrawal was the method traditionally used in their schools and staff preferred it because they were more comfortable with it. 15 % stated that it was an easier method, with less planning, less movement of resources and less time-tabling involved. The remaining 4% mentioned other reasons –"withdrawal is best practice", "in-class has been tried in our schools but it didn't work", "classes are too small for another adult", and "class teacher needs a break or chance to work with the better group".

An interesting fact in these findings is that 50% believe the withdrawal model to be the best model as it is less distracting for the children and more beneficial for them in every way. Yet these teachers stated that they had never experienced a successful model of in-class support, implying that their belief in withdrawal as the best model of learning-support is based on their successful experiences with the withdrawal method. The practice of in-class support is deemed inferior, which as Rogoff suggests, is a question of prejudging without appropriate knowledge, based on reliance on unexamined cultural assumptions (2003, pp14-15). These teachers have indeed found withdrawal to be effective, have found it beneficial, have found that it works well for the pupils. However, they cannot substantiate their claims that it is *more* effective, *more* beneficial and works *better* for the pupils than any other method as they state that they have tried no other method or have tried them in ways that were unhelpful. Thus, these unexamined assumptions act as powerful cultural obstacles to change. Without a

context to challenge these assumptions it is unlikely that schools will embrace collaborative practices since these teachers are committed to conserving the status quo. An assumption taken as a truth, guides behaviour and continues to do so, acting as the dynamic immune system by which we continuously manufacture non-change (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p.76).

Many respondents (31%) stated that they used withdrawal because it has traditionally been the tried and trusted method used in schools. Teachers have continually built upon their practical experiences in this area and the withdrawal system of learning-support is an accepted norm in Irish schools. It has become the blueprint that learning-support teachers are supposed to follow, the "organisational sea anchor providing predictability and stability" (Ott, 1989, p.37). Teachers mentioned that they felt more comfortable with this traditional way of working. It is thus very daunting for many teachers to try working differently. It requires a move out of the comfort zone that teachers have in working alone, into a sharing of the same workspace with colleagues, which may challenge the identity of the teacher, whose perception of their professional role is one where the teacher works alone, in full control of his/her classroom.

Though in-class support was experienced by only 38% of class teachers, a further 30% were unhappy with the withdrawal only method and would prefer if the learning-support teacher used in-class support as part of a more balanced form of support. The main reason for sticking with the traditional method of withdrawal was that this method was traditionally used in their schools by the learning-support teacher. In contrast, 88% of the learning –support teachers were satisfied with their way of working. Why then do teachers in some schools make changes in their practice, while teachers in other schools do not? The following section explores why schools make changes in their practice in relation to the support of pupils with SEN .

4.4 Using a balance of in-class support and withdrawal

The survey revealed that teachers who use in-class support balance this method with the withdrawal system. Respondents stated that it is necessary to use both methods as one method proves insufficient in meeting pupils' needs. 48% of teachers felt that using a balance of both methods is very beneficial as it is an effective way to meet the needs of pupils. 27% felt that in-class support lends support to class teaching, facilitates

flexible groupings and enables borderline pupils to receive support. 18% mentioned that in-class support is more inclusive and allows the learning-support teacher to get a true picture of how their pupils perform in the class situation. Only 7% stated that the reason they use a balance of in-class support and withdrawal is because it has been recommended by the principal, an inspector or the DES. This finding is significant as it shows that almost all of the collaborative practice that is currently developing between teachers in primary schools is not 'contrived collaboration', (Hargreaves, 1994) where teachers collaborate only because they have been forced to do so by school administration.

The teachers who prefer to use the withdrawal model of support, cited 'noise level' as the main reason they would prefer withdrawal. When two or more teachers work in the same room, awareness and consideration of others is essential. Teachers working with smaller groups do not need to use their 'teacher voice' and this issue should be discussed prior to beginning in-class support (King, 2006, p.12).

Overall, teachers using a balance of in-class support and withdrawal find that it is a more inclusive approach to meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, is supportive of class teaching and targets a greater number of pupils who require support than does a reliance on the withdrawal system of support. But how can schools change from reliance on withdrawal to using some form of in-class support.

4.5 The evolution of in-class support

Changing teaching practice from one that is solitary to one that is collaborative involves major educational reform. As explored in Chapter two, educational change can be extremely difficult to implement. The gap between policy as text and policy as practice becomes very apparent if insufficient attention is paid to the practicalities of the policy. Schools require both the human resources and the material resources to influence change. However, there must be a shift in teachers' beliefs and understandings, before the use of new teaching methodologies and resources become a reality (Fullan, 2001a).

In the following narratives, the interviewees trace the evolution of in-class support in their schools in the way they perceived its development. Principals and learning-support teachers from the four visited schools describe the way change came about and

how and why it was implemented in their schools. The accounts refer to changes in teachers' beliefs, changes in methodologies and changes in resources. Changes in teachers' beliefs appear crucial to development of collaborative practice and the recreation of teacher identity emerges throughout the various accounts. It re-emerges as the four learning-support teachers describe the impact and challenges of collaboration in later sections. The use of new methodologies and the availability of resources also prove essential to the changes that took place in the schools.

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4.5.1 Case 1: Lavender Primary School

> **Phil :** The class teacher requested that I come in for Maths but I would also say it was decided from an overall perspective that the children would stay in and not be withdrawn too much. We do in-class because at first, the department suggested it, many, many years ago. At least ten years ago they started to suggest that it was better than withdrawal and we would agree because the children that we're talking about need help in so many areas of the curriculum they would miss out on all of the interaction and the bonding with all of the other children if they were constantly withdrawn. The Principal and the vice principal here would believe that too.
>
> I didn't find the change difficult really. I just think that I'm kind of adaptable really, an adaptable type of person and I would try anything. I'm willing to try anything new and give it a try and then discuss afterwards how you feel about it and see whether it worked or whether it didn't work. I'm that type of person. Now some people might be more rigid or afraid to try it but I've always been willing to try something new. I take my job very seriously and I take my responsibility to the children very seriously and I'm always trying to do the best I can for every child in my care. I suppose I'm kind of adaptable really, and if the teacher wants to do something different I would say "that's fine, let's go with something different", I would always agree, I'm easy. Of course I have changed my way of working but then I've matured and everything else. Your whole being changes with time. But I think I was always very responsible (*laugh).*

According to Phil, in-class support came about in her school as staff became aware of the DES recommendations and the principal and vice principal were also influential. The interesting revelation here is in Phil's description of her self. She acknowledges the change in her 'whole being' over time. Her life experiences and interactions have repeatedly recreated her identity, testament to the constant social negotiation of identity (Britzman, 1992) and the inseparable aspects of learning and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, Phil states that she did not find the change difficult as she is an 'adaptable' person, 'easy', willing to try anything. This description of her self as a certain type of person is presented as a natural given, seemingly impervious to any actions or interactions she may experience. This core identity (Gee, 2001), or substantive identity (Ball, 1972), presents a stable picture of how one thinks about him or her self. As new information and experiences challenge the existing notion of identity, people need to feel a stable sense of self. Otherwise they would experience a

constant state of uncertainty or discontent (White, 2009, p.816). Therefore, talking about identity in this stable way enables us to cope with new situations in terms of our past experiences (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). It may help to explain why some teachers find change difficult because they hold on so tightly to the stable self. Teachers' ways of working are inextricably linked with their substantive identities, part of which, have been inherited through the passing on of ways of acting and thinking, known as the traditions of teaching. Choosing certain pedagogical styles and methods of classroom organisation, while rejecting others, constitutes an important part of a teachers' professional identity.

> What I am, therefore is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history…..and whether I recognise it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.
>
> (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 206)

The act of abandoning former practices in favour of new programmes, can strip teachers of their perceived identities, that is to say, the way they see themselves as the traditional teacher, and leave them very vulnerable and unsure of what lies ahead. Working in collaboration with others can offer the collegial support that empowers teachers to reflect on and make changes in their practice because it provides the opportunity for constant professional dialogue where teachers can share with others, learn from others and develop a sense of agency to realise future possibilities within their teaching practice.

Phil's principal, Patricia, was asked how she would account for development of in-class support in the school:

> **Patricia:** The Literacy Lift-off is a successful in-class programme that we have here. There was recognition on the part of the staff that early intervention was crucial in raising literacy levels. I suppose over the years we would have raised (*pause*), an educational debate, for want of better word about the whole area of learning- support, about how children learn. So the input of the staff and the preparation they put in has brought about the use of that in-class support.
>
> It took us about a year of talk. What we would generally try to do is use the in-school management team. If there are issues that come up or areas that we need discussed, the in-school management team would take two or three of the other staff to feed on that information and get feedback from them.

Patricia's comments are indicative of how the change process is more tortoise-like than hare-like because it involves *slow learning* in context over time (Fullan, 2001b, p.121). Patricia uses the in-school management team to disseminate information and attributes

change in methodologies to her staff. "In the fully functional collaborative school, many (indeed, all) teachers are leaders" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991, p.70). Recognising leadership qualities and fostering team spirit among staffs will not only relieve the heavy burden already falling on principals but will create a collaborative environment where teachers are enthusiastic and creative about making changes that improve the performance of their students and consequently enhance the culture in their schools.

4.5.2 Case 2: Ivy Lane Primary School

> **Bernie:** It came from both of us really. Anna had seen me working as a resource teacher working with two other classes for the past two years….and with one class I used to do a little in-class support …but in the other it was all withdrawal …so I suppose she knew my experiences with it and I had just found that it worked better when I was in-class.
> Some teachers would find it very daunting to begin with….so it is up to the class teacher to lead the way. I suppose it depends an awful lot on the personality of the teacher going in.

Due to the situation where Bernie works exclusively with one class, she is able to use a system balancing withdrawal with in-class support. In this situation it is very obvious that in-class support was a reasonable and practical option as there are two teachers working exclusively with this class for the duration of the school year. Relying on withdrawal alone would mean that the children needing leaning-support would spend too much time away from their peers. The development of in-class support has come about firstly due to the number of resource staff available and secondly due to the compatibility of the teachers involved.

Bernie and Anna devised the schedule of working together. They operate a system where two teachers share their work equally. It is in fact quite an ideal model of collaborative practice for teachers but one that very few mainstream teachers are in the fortunate position to experience in their teaching lives. In Sheil, Morgan and Larney's 1998 study of learning support provision in Ireland, the average caseload of learning-support teachers was found to be 46 pupils (p.171). DeBúrca's later study (2005) states a slightly reduced figure on average, but caseloads were still considerably high (p.154), and support teachers worked with many different classes. It is therefore unusual to have a situation such as 'Ivy Lane' where one support teacher works exclusively with one class. In fact, much of the research data on collaboration in schools (Jordan, 1994; Brock & Griffin, 2000; Lacey 2001; Gartner & Lipsky, 2005; Thomas & Vaughan, 2005; Griffin & Shevlin, 2007) has been collected in special education settings where

staffing conditions differ to mainstream in that three or four adults may be working with one pupil.

Bernie refers to the importance of 'personality' type, which resonates with Phil's references to identity. She states that some teachers may find the idea daunting and 'going into' a class will depend on one's 'personality'. Bernie believes that changing one's practice as in working collaboratively can only occur if one has a certain 'personality'. This notion of personality has connotations of natural givens and biological determinants, which cannot shift or change (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In accepting this idea of fixed identity, the notion of developing schools into professional learning communities becomes impossible, as some teachers will never be open to changes in practice. Changing Bernie's notion of personality to one of identity, which is constantly shifting, makes change a real possibility. Identity is a key influencing factor in a teacher's sense of agency because it affects how teachers understand and interact with change (Lasky, 2005).

Bernie's principal, Rose, gives her reasons why in-class developed in their school:

> **Rose:** I think in this school it happened very gradually actually. The number of resource teachers here highlighted the waste of resources that was going on sometimes. When you have a lot of resource teachers, timetables become unmanageable. Pupils are constantly withdrawn. So it really came into focus when people couldn't manage their timetables, and it just seemed like some children were being over targeted and some children just weren't coming into the net. So in-class support became a solution to that.
> Some teachers might have found it quite difficult to change, particularly teachers who would be more traditional or teachers who have been in the system a while. They would have found the notion of in-class work more difficult. But teachers are professionals and they know that one of the hallmarks of professionalism is the ability to adapt and I've found that people have done it very well. They see now that there's a team out there, a team that can support you and if you're struggling because you need to focus on a child, you can get more expertise and help. Those kinds of supports are there with in-class support.

Her account attributes the development of in-class support to the fact that her school has a large number of resource teachers, and therefore teachers found that in-class support became a solution to too much withdrawal and unmanageable timetables. This statement from Rose supports the findings from the postal survey which revealed that teachers in DEIS schools engaged in more in-class support than teachers in non-DEIS schools.

Similar to Patricia, the principal in Lavender Primary school, she sees the development as a very gradual process. New ideas take a long time to become part of a school's culture as they must become embedded in people's hearts and minds over time (Fullan, 2008).

Rose refers to the teachers who found it hard to change but describes their ability to adapt as one of the 'hallmarks of professionalism'. This ability to adapt shows an acceptance of emerging identity. It is also comparable with Stein and Book's study on emotional intelligence (2000), where *adaptability* is listed as one of the essential elements of emotional intelligence.

4.5.3 Case 3: Hollybush Primary School

Karen, the resource teacher describes how in-class support became part of her practice. She works between two schools, her base school and a neighbouring school but she is not operating as a lone learning-support teacher in either school. Each of the schools she works in, has a number of support teachers, 3.5 and 5.5 respectively.

> **Karen**: Well when I got into resource, I was between two schools and I was doing only withdrawal in my own base school .Then when I went to the second school I saw in-class support in operation and was asked to be involved. I just realised how quickly the children's problems could be dealt with. When they're in smaller groups you're able to pinpoint the difficulty. So what I saw in one school led to a different practice for me.
> I approached my principal first and she was delighted because she had been thinking about it and she had heard it and she wanted it brought in and she asked me to do it in Senior Infants. So I have been doing it in Senior infants over the last three years. Then one of the teachers went to Reading Recovery and she does the Literacy Lift-Off with 2nd class now. When we got the graded books this year, -we invested a lot of money in graded books- then I decided I'd do Literacy groups with 5th class.
> It's all about resources too in that the lack of resources kind of stunted us initially as we did not have the books to do group work but we invested an awful lot money, €9,000, in getting the graded books and from then on it was possible. So the resources are very important.

Karen attributes the development of in-class support in her school to three main factors. The first is her own professional development through peer observation and subsequent involvement in the in-class programme in her second school. Teachers taking up new posts can acquire new knowledge and skills in a very short time as they are exposed to new practices. Previously they may have been unaware of the gaps in their knowledge (Ashcroft, 1992). Learning from observation is a valuable form of professional development for teachers that is now used in many teacher induction programmes as part of a system of peer review (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Research has shown that it

is not ideal to work between too many schools (DeBúrca, 2005) but there can be opportunities there to observe and engage in a wide range of methodologies, as Karen's account shows. Shared learning- support teachers who learn from other schools can then share their observed practices with colleagues.

The second factor mentioned by Karen is the support of her principal and the third factor is the availability of resources. It is important that teachers, who develop collaborative practices with colleagues while engaging in new programmes, have the support of their principals and the resources, to fully implement their newly planned programmes.

Karen's principal Bríd, describes how in-class support developed in the school:

> **Bríd:** In every class now we have in-class support in some manner or form and that has been my goal that has taken ten years to achieve. We had to start quite small but we got there! In-class support developed when one or two teachers had experimented here and good feedback had come back from other members of staff. Seeing in-class work in a class encourages others.
>
> The most successful programmes are the Phonics one and the Literacy groups. It came really from the Reading Recovery. There was a belief and commitment to both programmes by the resource teachers. They were very committed to seeing it work. Teachers that really believe in a programme would be the main driving force for the work going on. To get teachers going, you have to match them with teachers who are onboard, to initially sell it. There would still be those who say 'it's my room and I'm in charge of everyone' but really I would say in 90% of the school we would be operating a fairly good collaborative structure.

As in the cases of the first two principals, Bríd talks about the slow process of real change and comments on how some teachers find it almost impossible to abandon traditional practices and share their work space. She advises starting small and using 'teacher to teacher' learning as an effective way to 'sell' a new initiative. The Reading Recovery programme offered possibilities for change. She attributes the success of the new programmes to teacher commitment and belief in the programmes, describing these teachers as the main driving force behind the initiative. Committing to a new way, to a change in the way we do things, takes more than just talk. It requires a strong focus. It means 'doing' the change every day (McEwan, 2009, p. 61). This is what committed teachers do in their schools.

4.5.4 Case 4: Oak Tree Primary School

Estelle, a learning-support teacher is also a trained Reading Recovery (RR) teacher and attributes the use of in-class support to the development of her own knowledge.

> **Estelle**: I had been working with the Reading Recovery programme for a couple of months when one day in my room I just thought "You know if the children can read like this for me on a one to one, maybe we could work something similar with a bigger group". It just dawned on me the damage that the class reader was doing to children who are weak readers and fair readers. Their reading was not developing. They were reading the same words, finger pointing, very slow reading and they were not being exposed to any texts in school. So I decided on the PM+ readers. I had a look at them and I thought you know if the children were reading these they would see the same words repeated in different stories. The stories were very nice, enjoyable. And I could see what success the RR programme was bringing to the individual children. I said it would be great if that system could be introduced into a classroom, to try it on a trial basis and we tried it in Senior Infants last year and they took to the stories straight away .They loved them and within weeks I could see the progress that the children were making. So I thought why not have it both ways.
>
> Outside sources might have some influence in starting a programme like this but I think it's most important that it comes from us within the school. That's number one for me. It has to come from the staff themselves first, no matter who comes in from outside. I do think it must come from a willingness within the staff.

Estelle's account reveals a reflection on her practice. Her story shows her frustration with the 'old' method of teaching reading, where many children are 'damaged' by the demands of a class reader. Her reflective thinking about her practice informed her subsequent actions. Her professional development has been influential in making changes to her practice. Estelle's account reveals how this extended professionalism, in which teachers participate voluntarily, can influence thinking and subsequent action in relation to their working practices. It is important to have a "productive balance and creative swing" between off-site learning and work-place learning (Imants & van Veen, 2009). From this evidence then, is it possible to suggest that teachers who never willingly participate in professional development courses, become 'stuck in a rut', and their professionalism is restricted as they value classroom autonomy and are not given to comparing their work with that of others (Hoyle, 1980). Teachers lacking professional development are in a rut, maybe not quite 'withering on the vine' (Sarason, 2003, p.73), but stale in that they continue to use the same methodologies year after year, unreflective on their practices and unquestioning of their effectiveness?

Estelle's principal Liz gives her reasons for the development of in –class support in Oak Tree school and takes up the thread of extended professional development.

> **Liz:** In-class support means changes for teachers. I think what influences teachers most is the needs they see on the ground every day in the school. The most meaningful change is change that happens from within. We all saw as a staff that our results weren't increasing. Our results were very poor. We just saw the need on the ground to do something different.
>
> We're aware that we teach in a disadvantaged area but you can't sit down and blame that for everything. The teachers have to change the way they teach. The teachers that have engaged in professional development have made a huge difference to the school, for the better. They can see the other side of the fence and

> are very anxious to get over there. So that was one of the reasons we changed to using in-class support.
> One in-class programme that comes to mind as being successful is the Literacy Lift-Off Reading stations in 1st class. The experience of the Reading Recovery programme and the successes of that were concrete to it. Again I think the commitment of the staff members that were involved in it made it work. They were willing to give of their time. I'd say as teacher leader in the school I do have an influence, in that if I felt something was for the good of the children in our school and if I felt it was appropriate for a disadvantaged area, I would have a very strong influence in it, as all principals should have. I do expect a lot of the SEN team and thankfully they are committed. I would find it very challenging if I had a very staid SET who wouldn't embrace the challenge of change.

Liz's reasons very much mirror what Estelle has to say. Teachers in Oak Tree school felt the need to start doing things differently due to the low achievement levels of the pupils. Liz regards the professional development of Estelle and other teachers as instrumental in the development of in-class support. For Liz, these teachers are effective teachers and are the heart of the school (McEwan, 2009, p.50). Liz also mentions her own leadership qualities and the influence she has on staff when it comes to taking on something new. The influence of the principal is an essential element of leadership. Principals are vital players affecting the development of learning communities that give teachers opportunities to collaborate (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.80). Liz praises the commitment of her SEN team and acknowledges their willingness to embrace change.

In the focus group interview in Oak Tree School, the teachers involved in the collaborative programmes were quick to point out that their principal and influential others had an important role to play in developing collaborative practices within the school:

- **Annie:** You'd wonder if we'd ever have in-class support in this school if Jenny and Estelle hadn't started it off. It is only because they pioneered it, and went away and studied all about it and got it up and running. I think first of all you need someone to become proficient at it and then educate the rest of the staff….and get it up and running.

- **Eilís**: Yes it's all about co-operation really.

- **Alice:** But you need a specific aim for it. I never even heard of in-class until I came here. …but you need a specific plan…like divide the class in two, you take half, I take half and then have specific aims.

- **Eilís:** Not just doing it for the sake of doing it.

- **Alice**: You need to be very organised.

- **Susan:** It comes back down to preparation. And it's communication and collaboration between all the teachers

- **Annie:** Yes ….I think it's the staff as well…..all credit to Jenny and Estelle and to those people who went off to professionally develop themselves. I know we might laugh or scoff at the way others still are teaching but I know I could very well still be teaching like that.

- **Theresa:** Let's just say that it does boil down to attitude….If there's a whole school approach to 'Let's do in-class', location or whatever doesn't matter.

- **Annie**: Well definitely and I think Liz is fantastic.

- **Susan:** She'll put her head around the door and say 'Look at all the work going on here, I love coming into this room.'

- **Annie:** You have to say she's fantastic because I know I have a friend teaching in disadvantage and her principal….isn't a patch on Liz and I tell her stories about Liz , about what we're doing and what Liz has got for the school, the resources….and she's nearly crying hearing this…. Liz is great, a great supporter….she'll get all the resources for you ….it's a big, big factor.

- **Alice:** It's a great sign of a good principal.

- **Theresa:** And it makes things very relaxed here.

The interviewees in all four schools have offered various explanations as to why and how collaborative practices have developed in their schools. As Fullan (2001a) suggests effective educational reform will not take place unless there are changes in teachers' beliefs, methodologies and use of resources. The interviewees spoke about the availability of resources and how essential they are to make change possible. They acknowledge the determining role of the principal in securing resources for the school. They have become involved in new prescribed programmes and these programmes have provided opportunities to try out new methods. Teacher agency, shaped by emerging teacher identity and professional development, was mentioned in all schools as a catalyst in making changes that promote effective teaching. Many of the collaborative initiatives can be attributed to the off-site professional development of individuals. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) commend off-site professional development as it provides opportunities for teachers to "access knowledge for content instruction, to rethink their practice, and to experience learning in a community of peers" (p. 65). This type of professional development can function as a training ground, preparing teachers to initiate or participate in school-based learning communities (Piazza, McNeil & Hittinger, 2009).

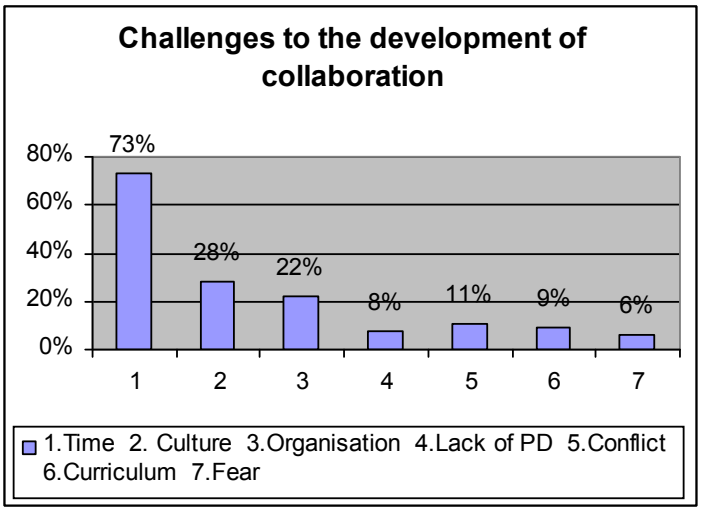
Many of the interviewees mention the slow pace of educational reform. There are many challenges involved and teachers who lead the change process meet many obstacles along the way. The following section examines the challenges that face schools and teachers in their attempts to improve their ways of working.

4.6 The challenges of collaboration

The majority of learning-support teachers (89%) stated that they would welcome the chance to work in class with a colleague. Though 59% would welcome the chance occasionally, only 36% would do so on a regular basis. This finding is interesting considering that 42% of them rely completely on the withdrawal system of support and stated earlier that they were satisfied with their way of working. Teachers appear to be willing to try out in-class support but because in-class support requires changes in the way teachers work, they are perhaps unsure of how to begin. According to King, (2006, p.14), teachers "need training in shared teaching methodologies prior to implementing in-class support" and therefore, there is a need for professional development for teachers in this area. However, training in in-class support methods, though necessary, may not be enough to ensure true collaboration. DES in-service where tutors preach to a supposed captive audience and teachers are the 'sitting-ducks' assumes the 'one size fits all' model of in-service delivery. Teachers need in-service that will scaffold the professional skills of reflection, communication and 'teasing out ideas' with critical friends and colleagues where everyone is empowered to improve their practice through negotiation, dialogue and inquiry (Rath, 2009). Of the principals questioned in this study, 71% believe that the majority of teachers have the expertise to plan literacy and numeracy programmes with colleagues but the isolating context of teaching prevents the development of worthwhile collaborative partnerships.

Chart 4a highlights the challenges that the respondents in the survey believe hamper the development of collaboration in schools.

Chart 4a : Challenges to collaboration



It is important to point out that this question on the barriers to collaboration was an open-ended question in the survey. Teachers were not given a list of possible challenges to choose from and therefore teachers wrote what was foremost in their minds. The chart shows that time was mentioned by 73% of the respondents and other factors were cited by merely a minority. Many teachers who concentrated on the time issue may not have reflected further on the issue to establish if any other barriers existed for them as in this example from one respondent:

Time, time and time again!

As the time issue appeared to be foremost in teachers' minds, factors such as school culture, relationships, organisation, curriculum and professional development were cited by only a minority of respondents and the important issue of school leadership was completely overlooked by respondents. The overlooking of leadership in addition to the low percentages recorded in the findings should not be taken as indicators of their lack of importance. Research identifies leadership as crucial to success of school reform initiatives (Fullan, 2001b, & 2005: McEwan 2009) and the interviewees spoke about the importance of supportive leadership. It could be argued here that teachers unaccustomed to reflective practice, fail to recognise the important underlying issues and perceive the lack of time as the only barrier to the development of collaborative practice. This in itself is an important finding of the study resulting from the use of an open-ended question.

4.6.1 Availability of time and organisation of schools

According to 73% of respondents in DEIS urban primary schools, *time* is the greatest barrier to the development of collaborative practices. This finding supports Hargreave's suggestion, -"if there is a single thing that teachers always need more of, it is time" (Hargreaves, Adelman & Panton, 1997, p.79). Time is an elusive yet necessary resource for teachers. Traditionally the Irish primary teacher's work is primarily classroom work, with no opportunity for planning either alone or with colleagues. Many schools are closed shortly after the children leave and teachers have become accustomed to planning their work at home.

Of the teachers questioned 22% felt that the way schools are organised makes it very difficult to schedule planning time that in turn would facilitate the development of a more collaborative culture. Committed teachers are often reluctant to shorten their teaching time to do other work as they have such an extensive curriculum to cover and indeed 9% of respondents in this study felt that curriculum overload inhibits the development of collaborative work practices. Hargreaves (1994), points to the fact that– "Teaching is a never-ending story. The work is never over; the job is never done. There are always more books to mark, more assignments to prepare – and more care to give to one's pupils" (p. 147).

4.6.2 School culture as an obstacle to collaboration

The culture of a school influences how teachers and students think and act and it is a significant factor in the implementation of school reform (Bulach & Malone, 1994; Hargreaves,1994; Stoll,1998; Fullan 2001b; Elbot & Fulton, 2008). Fullan proposes that 'reculturing is the name of the game' (2001,b, p.43). It is a continuous task, hard and labour intensive, taking much time to accomplish. But it is essential to transform the culture of schools to ensure that successful change takes place.

In this study 28% of the respondents felt that the isolating aspect of teachers' work, which is part of the culture of teaching, militates against the use of in-class support. Teachers referred to feeling self-conscious in front of colleagues, feeling inadequate in a new setting, and generally feeling fearful and threatened by the introduction of new practices. 6% of respondents specifically mention being afraid of change. Comments

include-

> Teachers' have lack of confidence in their abilities, skills and gifts as teachers. There is a culture of working alone, beyond observation and comment.
>
> There is a fear of being judged and letting go of the familiar- opening the door and letting in the other is seen as a threat.
>
> Collaboration hasn't been the norm so some might be unwilling to start.
>
> Teachers are nervous about sharing failure.
>
> Teachers have their own routine and don't want to be disturbed.

One respondent referred to the 'individual mentality' teachers have, rather than the 'group mentality'. She mentioned two sides to this individual mentality.

> On the one hand there are teachers who feel they can't possibly contribute, thus feeling inferior and on the other there are those who feel superior – they know it all, they don't need to discuss anything as their plan cannot possibly be improved upon.

This culture of teaching needs restructuring so that schools develop a shared culture that nurtures, motivates, challenges and inspires all members of the school community (Hargreaves 1994; Deal & Peterson, 1999; McEwan, 2007).

During the interviews in the four visited schools, teachers and principals were asked to describe the culture of their schools. The following excerpts from the interviews in the four schools provide an insight into the culture of these schools. It is helpful to recall Hargreaves (1994) four forms of teacher culture when reading the narratives- individualism, collaboration, contrived collaboration and balkanisation. It is hoped that having a picture of the culture of each school assists the reader in understanding the subsequent section in which the interviewees explain how in-class support came to be used in their schools.

Table 4I: Culture of the schools

Interviewees	How would you describe the culture of your school ?
Lavender School Principal:	**Patricia**:The culture in this school is one of mutual respect and a willingness on the part of all members of the school to learn
LS teacher	**Phil**: It's lovely here. We've a very pleasant atmosphere all the time. There was only one or two times when there were little hiccups and luckily it was all healed very quickly .We've lovely parents, we've many disadvantaged parents but they're the salt of the earth and great parents. We've no behaviour difficulties in this school. There is a huge caring atmosphere. The children matter to us. All the teachers here love this school. It's not just a job, we like the school
Ivy Lane School Principal	**Rose:** There is a definite warmth here. There is a lot of collegiality. I think there is a lot of fun in the building actually. The children are very happy, I'm always saying that. That's what gives me the great satisfaction . There is a great respect actually. It's helping us a lot. There is a loyalty there as well and there's definitely a culture of sharing and pooling of ideas. There is a sense of 'we're in this together'. There's that kind of a feeling. It's our school motto actually…. 'Together we can do great things!' I came here in 1982 and always found people very helpful. I always found you could ask the older teachers anything, so it's not something new really. It's always been here, which is nice.
LS teacher	**Bernie:** There's a lovely, a lovely atmosphere here. Everyone helps and there's no competition among teachers. As a teacher it's important that you share what gifts you have. Teachers here are fine to ask for advice. The children I know are happy from talking to them. I know some kids who could perhaps, stay at home on days but they will arrive in late just because they want to come into school. I think that says an awful lot.
Oak Tree School Principal:	**Liz** I would say it is welcoming and encouraging. There is a culture of respect and dignity for every child. I would have to say for me I'm extremely lucky to work in a school like this. I think the culture is excellent. Everybody seems to get on very well. Someone said to me the other day 'This school is as good as it gets'! And this man has been in and out of so many schools. He said that the staff cooperate and work so well and they're so welcoming. Everyone who comes into this school says there's a lovely atmosphere. I couldn't count for you the amount of people that come in and say that to me. I take a great sense of pride in that. In terms of staff relations and the way we work together, there's a great ethos of co-operation. The teachers do a wonderful job because they are a very, very caring team of teachers.
LS teacher:	**Estelle:** I think the teachers here are very aware of the children's needs. There's a great understanding of children. I think we all, most of us in the staff are very caring of the children. We're always very concerned about their emotions and their learning. We're watching to see what progress they're making. As a staff I think we're very united and caring toward the children and I think as a staff we work together as a team, most of us. We're there for the children and it's very friendly. There's a friendly atmosphere and it's a nice caring school to be in. And there's progression because our principal is always open to anything, to any change at all. She's very, very willing to be onboard in anything, and as a result we have fantastic books and fantastic resources. You need a wide variety of resources and we have that here. Yes, we are very well resourced and I think we have what other schools would love.

Interviewees	How would you describe the culture of your school?
Hollybush School Principal:	**Bríd**: I think it's very busy here. There's a lot going on. Once we got beyond having just one LS teacher, we found that the LS teachers can engage in LS dialogue with each other. This has enriched all that area and that has fed back into the classrooms. There is a sharing of ideas now, a sharing of resources and new strategies being tried and tested. I'm quite happy now, particularly this year with the way things have gone. Things are a lot more open and we have all classes on board really. There is a commitment to the children in the school and there's an openness to change and I couldn't have said that was there 5 yrs ago.
LS teacher:	**Karen**: The culture in this school has improved, I suppose. Teachers here want to get their curriculum done and there are a lot of outside schemes pulling on their time. They just want to get their curriculum covered and they don't want a new initiative but definitely in-class support shows how you can do programmes in class and reach the children earlier. The principal and the resource teachers now have learned an awful lot of methods and practices and procedures, so they're trying to apply them in the classrooms. As a result the classroom teachers are seeing different strategies and definitely there is more learning going on, by the resource teachers and by the classroom teachers. Definitely the whole culture is that we'll aim more for best practice. It has improved but I would say it wouldn't be as committed as it could be. If you're committed to it, you'll put the work in. I have worked here with teachers who only gave lip-service to something new but didn't really do it.

The interviewees in three of the schools- Lavender, Ivy Lane and Oak Tree- describe many similar characteristics. They state that their schools are warm, happy, caring places where teachers respect students and colleagues and support each other through teamwork. There is a sense of the collaborative culture suggested by Hargreaves (1994), particularly in the comfortable sense where teachers share ideas and materials.

Hollybush School appears to have a different culture. Neither of the interviewees here mentioned any of the qualities that the other interviewees raised. There are no references to warmth, respect, happiness, fun, care or teamwork. Why have they not mentioned any other aspects of school culture? Is there perhaps a lack of collegiality, respect and warmth? Hollybush school was chosen as an interview site because collaborative work has become part of some teachers' practice. Karen talks about striving towards best practice and names the principal and vice-principal as leaders in the change process. However, she maintains that some of the staff only paid lip-service to the new programmes she was committed to. Bríd talks about all classes being on board, in relation to the new ways of working. Is the culture more akin to that of

'contrived collaboration' with 'individualism' still reigning? Or is the collaborative practice that Karen engages in with just a few teachers, resulting in a 'balkanised' culture?

Additionally, there is no mention of care in Karen's account or in that of Bríd's. Students thrive in a school where they feel cared about by the adults and they will work harder for teachers who care for them (Elbot & Fulton, 2008).

> Caring, as part of a passion for teaching, is far from being a sentimental ideal. It is essential….Caring relationships between teachers and students, then, are fundamental to successful teaching and learning. They are the glue that binds the two together and are the abiding expression of the teacher's commitment to the student as a person (Day, 2004, p.29).

Hollybush School may not necessarily be lacking in care but the characteristics of care, respect and conviviality do not spring to the minds of Karen and Bríd when talking about the culture of their school. To ensure that these positive emotional elements are part of a school culture, there needs to be personal investment and commitment from the teachers. Teachers' emotions play a key role in the construction of identity and the emotional climate of the school affects practices of teaching and learning (Day, Sammons, Stobart & Kington, 2006).

Will the collaborative work that is going on in Hollybush School be enough to foster a team spirit and shape a more positive culture or is it necessary to have a very healthy culture in place before the collaboration begins? Can a contrived collaborative culture ever lead to a more mutually collaborative one? Hollybush School appears to be an example of a school where there is some teacher co-operation but this co-operation has not resulted in creating a positive school climate. The other three schools appear to have a positive school climate where teamwork is an accepted norm. The TALIS international Report 2009, states that it is not possible to establish whether a positive school climate depends on good teacher co-operation or whether good teacher co-operation depends on a positive school climate (p.22). However, the situation in the four schools described here suggests that a more natural form of teacher co-operation develops in a school where there is a positive school climate.

4.6.3 Emotions and conflict

Hargreaves (1982) speaks about teachers experiencing fundamental competence anxiety which is the anxiety that teachers experience about appearing incompetent to their colleagues and themselves. Almost thirty years have passed since Hargreaves' study and teachers are still talking about feeling inadequate in front of colleagues. Obviously emotions play an important role in teachers' capacity for change. Teachers need to reflect on their emotions and understand how these emotions can expand or limit possibilities in their teaching and enable them to think and act differently. Such reflection represents a considerable risk of vulnerability (Zembylas, 2003, p.232). This is another reason why supportive, collaborative staff relationships should be fostered in schools, eliminating negative qualities such as inadequacy, jealousy and rivalry, qualities which are often linked with a culture of individualism.

Considering that 11% of survey respondents mentioned that conflict resulting from poor teacher relationships impacts negatively on the development of a collaborative culture in schools, the development of supportive, professional networks for teachers is essential. Schools that have actively hostile relations among staff tend to have a 'toxic culture' (Deal & Peterson, 1999), where values and beliefs are negative and those who are listened to dampen energy and enthusiasm with the belief that the school cannot be anything but the negative, failing mess that their stories represent (p.121). When teaching contexts are constrained and isolated there is a lack of engagement between teachers and this type of environment acts as a 'demotivator' for teachers. (Rath, 2009).

In the interviews, support teachers were asked about any attempts at working together that had not been successful and asked why they thought this had happened or might happen for others? They raised similar issues to the survey respondents but factors that were neglected by the survey respondents were addressed in detail by the learning-support teachers. During the interviews, the interviewees had time to reflect on what they perceived as the greatest challenges to working collaboratively. Already in their descriptions of their in-class support, they referred to the time issue and the difficulties involved in trying to find time to plan and organise. Here, they focus more on the resistance to change and on the conflict that can arise in the classroom when two teachers begin to work together.

> **Phil:** You actually have to be very compatible with the teacher in whose room you're going to work. It's very difficult for them if you speak too loudly and I have to be very careful when I go into a room that I don't speak too loudly. I'm only dealing with three or four whereas she has thirty so she must be the lead in the classroom and I must not take over or have my voice or my children speaking too loudly. I have to know my place in the classroom (*laugh*) The support teacher I suppose has to be aware of her position and make sure there's no undermining of what's going on in the classroom. There's been a few situations here where it's been a little bit difficult. I do think it is the support teacher who has to be very, very careful. It's not so much the class teacher, it's the support teacher that has to agree with what needs to be done with the children because the bottom line is that the teacher is responsible for those children. Where it falls down I think, it is the support teacher who is at fault. Some of the teachers who were unwilling to have the support teacher in the classroom have now got used to it, I think. When it was tried successfully and when the support teacher went in, in a second rate situation, or a quiet situation, then the class teacher did come onboard. But it is a change and it does require change.
> Giving time to planning is probably not happening as much as it should and if it did, things would not go wrong, I think. That's the bottom line.

Because Phil supports the pupils in the classroom in an 'unstructured' way, she feels that she must fit in with what the class teacher wants as the class is the responsibility of the class teacher. Despite the fact that both Phil and Patricia described the culture of their school as one that is collaborative, Phil's narrative tends to give a different picture. Does the school have a more contrived collaborative culture where staff members feel collaboration is imposed on them or is it a situation where the beliefs and understandings of some teachers –as the class teacher here- have not changed and developed and they are still stuck in the culture of individualism?

Phil is conscious of her speaking voice and states that she must 'know her place'. It appears here that the class teacher is superior to Phil in terms of importance. This stems from the traditional autonomous identity of the school teacher which has been in existence for over two-hundred years. Teachers belong to a long established social field and have learned fundamental, deep-founded, unconscious beliefs, and values, that inform their actions and thoughts. Ways of acting and behaving as a teacher have become socially regulated practices. Teachers learn to want what conditions make possible for them, and not to aspire to what is not available to them, thus resisting change. Collectively, they are a form of 'social capital' wielding a crucial source of power. When this power is used against those who hold less, as the support teacher in this case, it can be described as an exercise of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990). The historical footprint of the support teacher is relatively much younger with a mere forty years in existence and this unequal historical background means that the support

teacher often enters the classroom of the class teacher in a subservient role. Should she choose to challenge the symbolic violence, rivalry and power struggles may ensue.

Phil describes her in-class support as a 'second rate' situation or a 'quiet situation'. Similarly, when the recorder was switched off, Bernie said she felt the most difficult aspect for a resource teacher going into a class is when she is treated like an assistant by the class teacher. She felt this has a negative effect on the resource teacher, encouraging her to operate a withdrawal system of support only. It appears that the type of in-class described by Phil is therefore difficult to negotiate and can only work when teachers, who respect and value colleagues' opinions and work practices, plan the lesson together.

In the following section, Karen recounts a difficult incident that happened in her school. Her story supports what Phil said about the importance of planning. She admits that the incident resulted from a lack of planning and a lack of consultation and dialogue with the class teacher.

> **Karen:** I suppose finding time for planning and time for consulting with colleagues is the hardest part.
> One problem that arose and surprised me was going into one class and you do take a role because you are leading it and one of the teachers got very annoyed at me coming in. She felt that I was taking over. I was making the decisions but I was only trying to take the workload off her in that I was deciding what books to use. I didn't expect it to happen. Next time I would tread more softly. I did go to the teacher personally and I said 'you know I will be coming in and doing these literacy groups'. I did speak to her about it but once they started, I think she felt I had more power than her. But I actually thought that the class were demanding and I was just trying to take the load off her so I was using my own classroom experience of saying 'Oh no, more work' and I was just trying to lessen that for her. But I'd say she felt I was challenging her power mainly. In fact I wasn't trying to take over. All I wanted to do was get the chairs ready into groups and that, setting up the writing station or the comprehension activity or whatever. I didn't think there would be a problem and I was very surprised that there was. I suppose I learned patience (*smiling*) and that I should actually have planned more and shown her where I would be going with them through the year as well and what different strategies I'd be using. I know now that I should suggest bringing her in on it and planning it together. That's important. Because I do think one of the problems probably was that I was too gung-ho and I was too 'I want to do this', but I hadn't consulted her enough. It was lack of consultation which is very important but I've learned from my mistake now *(laugh*).
> I definitely think as a resource teacher, inter-staff relations are vital, your relationship with other colleagues is very important. I'm less sensitive now, I can look back and say, '.if they have a problem with me or the programme, yeah, let's change it'. Sometimes classroom teachers are under time constraints. They've so many other subjects and taking kids in and out, you have to be respectful, you have to change and you have to be very flexible.

Karen's narrative is significant because we witness the recreation of her identity as she narrates. We witness how narrative has formative powers where identity is concerned. As she speaks, her identity shifts from one of the autonomous teacher, independent in thought and practice:

> **I** should actually have planned more and shown her where **I** would be going with them through the year as well and what different strategies **I'd** be using.

to a more shared view of her practice where she acknowledges the need for dialogue and equal status planning:

> I know now that I should suggest bringing her in on it and planning it together….. I hadn't consulted her enough

Due to her prior involvement with in-class support in her second school, the likelihood is that Karen already knew about the need for dialogue and planning. However, it was impartial knowledge without real meaning for her until now. Karen's development highlights the need for teachers to engage in powerful conversations in the supportive context of a community of learners.

Karen's story depicts an unpleasant classroom situation, where the class teacher felt undermined and no longer in control of her own class. It resonates with Bourdieu's symbolic violence, where the class teacher holds the power in the classroom. Karen has challenged that power and a power struggle ensued. Ideally, a collaborative programme is only 'truly collaborative' when all parties are respected and treated equally by colleagues.

Karen states that she has had a lot of in-service, attended many courses and also learned from her second school. It is possible that Karen has developed professionally ahead of many of her teaching colleagues in her base school and they may feel inadequate or threatened by her level of expertise or competence. As earlier accounts have shown, the culture of Hollybush School is not yet fully collaborative. There may be elements of a contrived culture here, where members of staff feel they are being forced by other members to make changes.

It is possible that Karen has approached her tutoring of colleagues in a similar way to what happened in the classroom, -too 'gung-ho' and therefore negative rather than positive relations may have developed between her and the other members of staff. In order to develop positive relationships in the school community there must be relational trust (McEwan, 2009; Bryk et al, 2010). Relational trust means that teachers must have respect and personal regard for one another, be open and inclusive, feel competent in their work as teachers and act with integrity at all times. Relational trust is a prerequisite for developing a collaborative school and it is the only antidote to hostility, anger and distrust (McEwan, 2009, p.94). In her reflections on the difficulties encountered, Karen sees the need for consultation as Phil also did in her account. Consulting with one another before planning any programme of in-class support, allows teachers to build that necessary relational trust.

Bernie believes that some teachers may not like the idea of in-class support. A great number of teachers "do not welcome the eyes, minds and mouths of outsiders, even outsiders who teach across the hall" (Perkins, 1992, p.222). Bernie recalls feeling that way herself:

> **Bernie**: I suppose I used be afraid of someone coming in and seeing what I was doing whereas now being on the other side of it I think it makes sense but I suppose it depends on the teacher in question. A lot of teachers still don't like the resource teacher coming in. I didn't like people coming in but as a resource teacher now, I definitely say if I was back in the class again, I would love to have the resource teacher coming in. It does depend on how well you get on with the resource teacher.
> I suppose I found it easy enough because the teacher I was working with knew me and she would have seen me in action as a teacher anyway. When you're on the same wavelength and have a similar form of teaching it's easier.

Bernie talks about the importance of 'getting on' with the teacher and how being on the same wavelength makes it easier for teachers to work together. Hargreaves proposes that collaborative work can become stilted and boring when the people who work together don't already have a relationship (2005, p.280). Karen's earlier story revealed how the absence of a good relationship can result in conflict. Hargreaves (1994), proposes that conflict is an inevitable part of the change process and if continually discussed and resolved, rather than repressed, conflicts can have healthy results. Similarly, Achinstein (2002) found that the development of professional learning communities was rife with conflict and she suggests that ignoring or dismissing the conflict, can blind rather than bind the ties of a learning community.

How teachers feel in the presence of other teachers, matters. Their opinions matter and should be voiced rather than silenced. Teaching involves significant emotional labour as teachers are moved to act by their emotions, which are at the heart of their teaching. Therefore, any reform initiative must acknowledge this fundamental aspect of teaching (Hargreaves, 2005). Constructive teacher dialogue has the capacity to resolve conflict and lead to changes that break through the strong-hold of individualism that 'traditional teaching' is built upon.

4.6.4 Challenging tradition

In the following narrative, Estelle proposes that it can be very difficult for many teachers to break with tradition, especially those who lack continuous professional development. She describes *how* teachers should work together and how mutual respect and a focus on student learning is essential.

> **Estelle:** Both teachers must be prepared to work together on the programme. It's a lot of work. There has to be commitment on both sides. The important thing is that you respect everybody. We're all here to do our best for the children in the school and our priority is the children. We respect each other's opinions and we might share them and we'll say 'What do you think?' or 'Is it working?' You're definitely more open. You have to be open. Discussion is important and review to see how it's going.
> Well I think someone who never had in-class support would find it very hard to change. You know the way you are, just used to being on your own in the classroom every day without trying something new. I think every teacher would find it hard. I probably would have found it hard myself. It's like that unless you see something working and when you see something working like this, you say 'Yeah, let's have a go' but it's hard for a class teacher I think to take this onboard without knowing anything about it.
> It was easier for me coming from Learning Support. If I was back in the classroom I don't think I'd have seen those changes happening in myself. And I think by doing courses and being exposed to other programmes you learn. When you're in a class you don't see it but if you don't do something else that's different you will stay the same. So it is hard to take that first step as a class teacher. It's very difficult.

Estelle raises the issue of professional development and its impact on practice. Though acknowledging that making changes in a teacher's practice can be very difficult initially, she believes that 'staleness' and reluctance to change results from a lack of professional development. Her account supports earlier findings proving that teachers who engage in extended professional development are instrumental in the change process in schools.

The reluctance to break with traditional methods and embrace change emerged again when all four principals were asked about the challenges that face schools in attempting

to implement in-class support. All of the principals raised similar issues in relation to introducing changes in their schools.

> **Patricia**: A change of mindset is needed. You still have a slight reluctance there on the part of some teachers. They would be more of the traditional type. Certain teachers would still have that 'independent republic' idea but at the same time they recognise that other teachers are working together and that they need to be part of that. It takes time because I think teachers by nature are inclined to be a bit conservative and slow to change. Some people can be very collaborative and be open to change and new ideas. Others may be a little bit less so. You must work at establishing a culture or mindset within the school that eventually you hope would include everyone.

And Rose went on to support what Patricia says:

> **Rose:** I suppose some teachers might have found it quite difficult to do, particularly teachers who would be more traditional or teachers who have been in the system a while. They would probably have found the notion of in-class work more difficult. But I'm amazed that they have adapted so well, because they were for years and years alone in the classroom themselves. But I do think that if they're in a culture of shared responsibility, it's easier.

Both Patricia and Rose refer to the existing culture of teaching and how teachers have become socialised into particular ways of working over time, making change very difficult. Patricia refers to the classrooms of some teachers as 'independent republics'. It must be remembered that most veteran teachers have become used to working independently in complete isolation -

> From the start of her career a teacher is alone. Often denied any opportunity to see another teacher in action, even on teaching practice, left from the start to make her tactical decisions single-handed, socialised into an understanding of teaching as an individualistic pursuit, dependent on her own preferences, personality and decision- making, she has little incentive to develop a collegial sense of the 'state of the art'. Teacher education, experience and conventional wisdom continually underline the uniqueness of the individual, the specificity of context and the primacy of the person.
>
> (Nias, 1984, p.267)

Teaching away from the eyes of colleagues, though isolating, can give teachers a sense of power in the classroom. They become masters of their own domain and work independently of colleagues. This control may be difficult to relinquish. However, the evidence from both Patricia and Rose shows that these teachers can change if there is an inclusive culture or a culture of shared responsibility where these teachers become exposed to alternative ways of working.

Hollybush school principal, Bríd, mentions organisational and time issues and also the need for an 'openness' to new practices.

> **Bríd**: A problem would arise when people don't adhere to the timetable, particularly with teachers who are very much organised in following their timetable. It absolutely puts the cat among the pigeons if the resource teacher arrives late into the classroom. You haven't a leg to stand on then if that comes up as an obstacle to implementing in-class support, so strict timetabling must be adhered to.
> You also have to be very careful in who you match with whom in our resource and LS . Yes, there would still be the concept or the view that 'it's my room and I'm in charge of everyone'. I think teachers have to be very open to new practices. They have to be confident in themselves and be open and there should be no going around being critical of anyone else. Everything that goes on in the school is for the good of the child and that should be the primary aim of any teacher.

Bríd raises the point about personalities and compatibility, broached earlier by teachers, Phil and Bernie. Believing that members of a team who get along and respect one another will achieve more (McEwan, 2009, p.78), she is careful when matching teachers with others. It is an effective strategy that exposes teachers to the practice of colleagues and moves them away from the 'independent republic' of the lone teacher.

Liz also mentions the hegemonic practices in schools. She refers to the way that teachers learn to live and love the dominant system of beliefs and practices, convinced that these practices are natural and preordained states. They embrace these ways of working and in doing so become willing prisoners who lock their own cell doors behind them, resisting change (Brookfield, 1995, p.15).

> **Liz:** It's a challenge to motivate some teachers who don't want to change their ways, particularly teachers who have been teaching for a very long time and find it very difficult to move.
> I think it's hard for LS teachers sometimes to keep track of all the changes. I do expect a lot of the SEN team, I know that. Yet they're involved in all these new programmes that are coming on all the time. They all seem to be landed on top of the SEN team because they're supposed to implement them but this is over and above all the things they were ever trained for themselves. It's assumed that these people will have the wherewithal to go and read books and look up the internet, and thankfully they do, but I would find it very challenging if I had a very staid SET that wouldn't embrace the challenge of change.

Liz mentions the pressure that new policies put on teachers to change, particularly the SEN team, and is astonished at how they are expected to change and adapt without adequate professional development. She expects engagement and commitment from her SEN team and believes that change would be much more difficult if they were dull and unadventurous. This is further evidence to support the view that engagement in extended professional development affects a teacher's sense of agency.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings of this chapter in relation to the dynamics of teacher collaboration in DEIS schools, are many and varied.

In summary the survey findings reveal that:

- Principals and teachers support collaboration in theory.
- Class teachers are less familiar with policy on learning-support and have less knowledge and input into school LS policy than LS teachers and principals. There is a need for a whole school approach to LS organisation.
- Teachers in DEIS schools engage in more in-class support than teachers in non-DEIS schools with 98% of LS teachers collaboratively planning and 58% collaboratively teaching. Teachers are slower to move out of the comfort zone and share their practice.
- Teachers do not rely on one particular time to plan their in-class schedule. They use a variety of methods seizing whatever chance they can. Only 25% of learning-support teachers manage to schedule planning time.
- The majority of teachers (92%) were of the opinion that a collaborative approach is more effective than teachers working alone, believing that working together is in the best interests of the child.
- Half of those who use withdrawal do so because they are governed by the unexamined cultural assumption that withdrawal is best practice.
- Those who teach collaboratively view the process as a more inclusive approach to meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, allowing them to target a greater number of pupils.
- The 'group work' model tends to be the most popular model of in-class support.

Evidence from the short case studies reveals that:

- The 'Teach Assist' model of in-class support appears to be one of the most difficult to implement effectively.
- Planning the programme is vital for teachers who work together.
- Pre-designed programmes take the 'messiness' out of thinking through issues that are very complex and contested. New programmes such as Literacy Lift-Off seem to provide a context for change, giving teachers permission and opportunities to collaborate, be exploratory and be learners

- Identity is a key influencing factor in a teacher's sense of agency because it affects how teachers understand and interact when changing from working in isolation to working collaboratively.
- Learning from observation is a valuable form of professional development for teachers.
- Off-site professional development positively affects a teacher's sense of agency, encouraging them to become change agents in their schools.
- The availability of resources is essential in making change possible.
- The lack of time for planning appears to be the greatest barrier to the development of collaborative practices in schools but it masks the important underlying issues that teachers fail to acknowledge and reflect upon.
- School culture, teacher emotions, teacher relationships, facing conflict and breaking with tradition are all issues that must be addressed in the change process.

Overall, the findings reveal an emerging picture of the dynamics of collaboration in DEIS urban primary schools. It appears that teacher collaboration is happening more and more in DEIS schools. The evidence shows that changing from working in isolation to working collaboratively can be a slow and difficult process. It highlights that a change in methodologies and resources must be tied in with a change in teachers' beliefs and understandings. The next chapter examines the development of teachers' understandings in more detail focusing on evidence from the interviewees to establish if there is a significant development in teacher learning through collaboration with others. It questions how teachers learn through their collaboration with colleagues.

Chapter 5 - Teacher collaboration and teacher learning

> *For many of us, the concept of learning immediately conjures up images of classrooms, training sessions, teachers, textbooks, homework and exercises. Yet in our experience, learning is an integral part of our everyday lives. It is part of our participation in our communities and organisations. The problem is not that we don't know this, but rather that we do not have systematic ways of talking about this familiar experience.*
>
> (Wenger, 1998, p.8)

The findings presented in this chapter respond to the second research question, revealing the relationship between teacher collaboration and teacher learning. In the above quotation Wenger refers to learning in general. For the purpose of this chapter I wish to interpret his concept of learning specifically in relation to teacher learning. When teachers work together there is an opportunity to participate in a community of practice. As a result the shroud of silence in which teachers' practice is wrapped becomes unravelled (Brookfield, 1995). Teachers become more vocal in the professional communities in which they work and their knowledge becomes shared and explicit rather than tacit as they come to acknowledge their learning through collaboration. Seeing how others work can provide learning opportunities either through acquiring knowledge on alternative effective methodologies or through constructive critical reflection on one's own practice or that of another. The findings presented and analysed here provide answers to the following questions concerning teacher learning:

- When do teachers get the opportunities to share practice and are these opportunities beneficial for teacher learning?
- Do these opportunities affect their identity and agency?
- Is reflective practice used by teachers?
- Are teachers engaging in off-site professional development?
- Is teacher collaboration suited to everyone?
- Does teacher collaboration incorporate an element of accountability?
- Are schools developing as professional learning communities?

The survey data provided limited evidence in relation to some of the questions. For example, the survey asked if teachers felt they could learn through discussions with colleagues about their work. However, the respondents were not asked what type of

discussions or what specifically the discussions were about. Therefore the survey data established that teacher talk was prevalent but revealed nothing about the nature of teacher talk. The interview data was more revealing in this respect.

5.1 Collaboration catalysts

The way schools are organised and the way teachers' time is allocated exclusively to contact time with students means that there is little opportunity in the school day for teachers to reflect and share practice with colleagues (Hargreaves, 1994; Day,1999). But as noted in chapter two there is a limit to how much teachers can learn if they keep to themselves (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). The following sections identify the various opportunities teachers have to collaborate with colleagues. Teacher collaboration is not a specific aim of these identified opportunities. However, the very nature of the opportunities described incorporates an element of teacher collaboration that may enhance teacher learning. Teacher collaboration is almost a by-product of these interventions and programmes. Therefore these programmes act as catalysts for collaboration, which in turn fosters teacher learning.

5.1.1 Working in special education teams

As a result of the re-organisation of learning-support provision in schools, many schools now have special education teams, where all support teachers work together to ensure that there is a whole school approach to SEN. 81% of principals and 76% of learning-support teachers stated that their school has a special education team (SET). Almost half (46%) of principals stated that they met with the SET more than once a term to discuss learning-support provision and assess its effectiveness. The majority (86 %) of principals felt that the learning-support teachers worked as a team. The findings here are significant in that the setting up of these special education teams in schools appears to have increased the opportunities for teachers to collaborate.

5.1.2 DEIS intervention programmes

Some of the intervention programmes in DEIS schools unwittingly foster teacher collaboration. 'Early Start' is one example as in a full unit of 'Early Start' two class teachers work closely with two child care workers. Another example is 'Bridging the Gap' (2001-2006), not a DES initiative but a project coordinated by University College Cork, aimed at enhancing the educational experience of school communities in disadvantaged areas. The building of partnerships was a key focus of the project

(Connolly, 2004) and networks were established where teachers were provided with opportunities to liaise with others involved in the project.

A further development in DEIS schools which prompts teacher collaboration is the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSLC). Developing partnerships is one of the core elements of the HSCL scheme as partnerships empower groups and communities to facilitate change (Conaty, 2002, p.109). In the survey, principals were asked if they had seen evidence of the Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator working in collaboration with the learning-support teachers. Not all of the principals surveyed (n= 125) had the HSCL scheme up and running in their schools but of those that had the scheme in operation (n=114), 72% stated that they had seen evidence of collaboration between the HSCL co-ordinator and learning-support/resource staff. This study found that 64% of class teachers and 69% of learning-support teachers were involved in numeracy or literacy programmes with the HSCL co-ordinator. This form of teacher collaboration requires that the class teacher and the HSCL co-ordinator involve parents in numeracy and literacy programmes. The learning-support teacher may also be involved. Over two thirds of teachers are involved in programmes with the HSCL co-ordinator and this is an important finding. These programmes can provide a non-threatening way to introduce teacher collaboration as the focus is on the pupils and parents, yet the programme is planned and implemented by two or more teachers. An alternative working area is often used e.g. the school hall or parents' room and teachers may find this less threatening than sharing their classrooms. It can provide an opportunity for teachers to talk to others about their practice. It can be a positive introductory step to teacher collaboration and can develop teachers professionally.
Another example of the DES' attempts to facilitate teachers' professional development in schools is the organisation of in-service days for teachers.

5.1.3 In-service days

In providing in-service for teachers to become familiar with the Revised Primary Curriculum (1999), the DES offered two strands of support. The initial strand was seminar based to inform teachers of the content and methodology of the curriculum. The second strand was more context specific, where facilitators, known as cuiditheoirí, visited the schools to support teachers in their own school environment, facilitating a social context for teachers which promotes a sharing of practice.

Teachers in the survey were asked if they had found the first strand of DES in-service days in relation to curriculum development beneficial. 78% stated that their professional knowledge had increased as a result of these informative in-service days:

> Facilitation has generally been very good and informative

This finding suggests that teachers used their new knowledge to inform their practice. Data from Sugrue's report (2002) on Irish teachers' experiences of professional learning suggest that these in service courses "were successful in communicating information regarding revised curricula, aims and objectives" (p.325). However, Sugrue in his analysis draws attention to the fact there is almost no evidence available that indicated the nature of teacher learning, what it looks like over time and how it impacts on students' learning. The findings of that particular study, as in the survey of this study, rely on teachers' self-reports.

The remaining 22% of teachers found that these days were of no benefit whatsoever to their practice, blaming the lack of opportunity for reflection:

> These days are more about new ideas rather than having any chance to self-evaluate.

The second strand, where cuiditheirí supported schools in their own environment involved sanctioned planning days for schools. Ideally, a school based professional development initiative "gives control back to teachers, fosters professional learning, stimulates innovation, energises and enthuses teachers, distributes and grows leadership, and balances central accountability with peer responsibility" (Stoll & Louis, 2007, p.60). This study found that 97% of respondents felt these planning days did provide opportunities for teachers to talk about their practice and about the teaching of certain subject areas:

> These days give us a great opportunity to talk about aspects of our work, opportunities we normally don't get in the regular school day.

However, 43% of teachers stated that such opportunities only arose occasionally throughout the day as these planning days were consumed with other organisational issues in relation to completion of subject plans. Some teachers felt that sharing of practice was very limited:

> Nobody shares anything at these days. It's just a matter of getting the paperwork done.

This finding shows how arbitrary use of planning days can be problematic, and supports the study of Johnston, Murchan, Loxley, Fitzgerald and Quinn (2007), who found that the majority of time during these days was spent on preparing school plans and not on professional development. Their study found that cuiditheoirí felt pressurised by principals to focus on curriculum content and planning in as short a time as possible. In addition, they reported that a lack of preparation by school staff meant that learning needs were not identified in advance which had an adverse impact on the ability of the facilitator to focus on the professional development of teachers. There appears to be insufficient discussion among staff in the lead up to these days and a lack of opportunities for teachers to talk about their problems, doubts, beliefs and insights.

5.1.4 Talk about pedagogy

Teachers work in isolation and seldom have the opportunity to share practice. Principals, concerned with raising pupil achievement, may consider teacher talk to be unproductive and time-wasting and prefer to see teachers interacting with the students rather than with colleagues during the school day. Almost all of the principals (98%) questioned, hear teachers in their schools talking about their work with each other. A few of these principals wrote that there is too much talk going on between teachers. Do some principals consider these exchanges "small talk," which implies that they are pleasant but insignificant exchanges? Clarke (2001) proposes that such a view is a cynical one because it assumes that when teachers have the freedom to talk together, they waste that time on superficial, petty, trivial matters. Clarke's research into the quality of teachers' conversations revealed how teacher conversations can become authentic learning experiences. One of the teachers in the focus group interview in this study highlights the importance of these often informal conversational moments:

> And then after we have the groups, so much is sorted by chatting to the teachers. It's no good just coming in doing your groups and leaving. We do so much more collaboration than we realise- informally. Even when we come in, in the morning, asking about how groups went or sharing about something great you saw. There's just a sharing of ideas all of the time.

Therefore the importance of teacher talk should not be underestimated, (Cortazzi, 1991), and opportunities for teacher talk should be more plentiful. In addition, talking together strengthens teachers' relationships.

> In communities that support teacher research these smaller conversations have an important function: they create and sustain the interpersonal relationships necessary for the larger project of the joint construction of knowledge. When teachers describe encounters with individual students or the responses of their classes to particular texts or activities, for example, they provide rich information about their day-to-day work and the ways they construct their worlds inside and outside their classrooms.
>
> (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, p. 310)

Brookfield (1995) proposes that peer conversations help to break down the isolation that many teachers feel. Teacher talk is also important for developing understanding as Gee (1992) suggests that talk is the medium in which meaning is most readily negotiated. Teachers themselves appear to rate talk with colleagues as a valuable professional development opportunity. Of the teachers surveyed, 93% talk to their colleagues about their work, 96% felt it is important to talk about one's teaching and 99% of teachers believe that talking about one's teaching enhances teacher learning. This finding is consistent with the TALIS report (2009) on teachers' professional development. The report found that "the type of professional development most often mentioned was 'informal dialogue to improve teaching', with 93% of teachers on average reporting this activity during the survey period. It was the development activity most frequently reported, with a participation rate of more than 90% in most countries" (TALIS, 2009, p. 57). Teacher talk is often in the form of personal narrative where the act of telling one's stories and hearing the stories of others makes meaning of experience and brings new understandings. "Language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge" (Halliday, 1993, p.94). Therefore teacher talk is a potent practice for learning (Clarke, 2001) that resonates with the socio-cultural theory of learning described in chapter two.

Most principals (94%) felt that it was a usual occurrence for teachers to ask for advice from each other on work practices. Teachers need to feel supported by their colleagues as strong collegial support has a positive impact on teachers' commitment, enthusiasm and morale (Hargreaves, 1994). However, the opportunities for teachers to talk about their practice are very limited and conversations take place informally. Talk about pedagogy tends to be the exception rather than the rule. The TALIS (2009) report found that a majority of teachers report exchanging and co-ordinating information and ideas on teaching and administrative issues more often than they engage jointly in

professional learning activities and projects across subjects and age groups. The TALIS Report (2009) shows that practices promoting professional collaboration are still relatively rare compared with practices that focus on co-ordination and exchange of information and material. Therefore conversation groups and inquiry groups where teachers get the opportunity to make sense of experiences and express doubts, beliefs and new insights among thoughtful peers are important for teacher development. Considering that teacher talk is a powerful medium for learning which teachers appear to value and enjoy, conversational reflection groups should be regarded as an essential element of on-site professional development programmes in schools, as one principal commented:

> Honest feedback helps us to modify our methods. Teachers need to know that we all have the same problems and solutions do appear and clarity does arrive through honest and sincere discussion which can only take place in an atmosphere of safety. This takes a lot of time and patience to build.

Of the teachers surveyed 91% stated that they had changed their teaching methodology as a result of discussion with a colleague but again it is important to point out that this finding relies solely on teachers' self reports. However, the fact that teachers believe their practice was influenced by discussion with colleagues shows how influential reflective dialogue can be in the area of teacher learning. Teachers are learning more about teaching and learning every day while they work. However much of what they learn remains tacit unless teachers have a colleague or colleagues with whom to discuss their learning. As Wells (1999) proposes, there is real insight in the saying "How do I know what I think until I hear what I say" (p.107). Engaging in conversations with each other about their practice extends teachers' understandings and builds knowledge.

5.1.5 Teacher observation

A further opportunity that arises for teachers to share practice and give and receive feedback is when practice is observed. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Day 1999; Guskey, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teacher learning can occur through observation of practice and subsequent dialogue but according to Wenger (1998) observation is useful only as a prelude to actual engagement. Learning occurs when there is engagement in a specific practice. Therefore teachers who participate in collaborative teaching programmes are participant observers. They learn from colleagues while they are engaged in a shared teaching and learning activity.

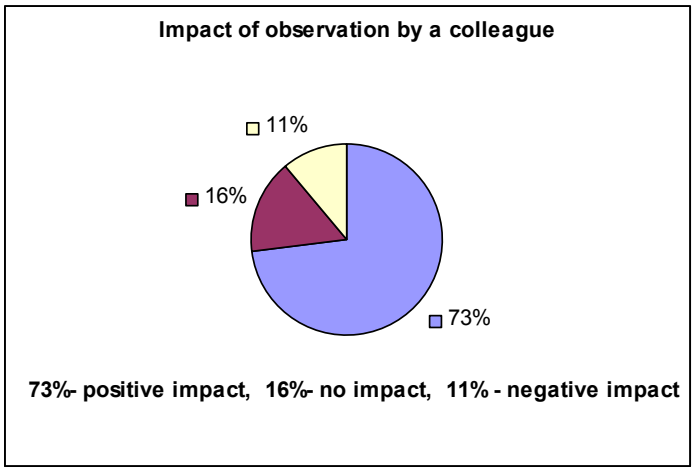
The learning-support teachers and class teachers in this study were asked if they had ever been observed by a colleague, formally or informally. Two thirds (65%) indicated that they had been observed by a colleague. This finding is consistent with the TALIS report (2009) which reveals that almost three quarters (74%) of teachers in Ireland have had appraisal or feedback from either internal or external sources. The teachers in this study felt that they benefited from the feedback of colleagues, with those engaged in in-class support work stating that they had learned new skills and ideas from these informal observational settings. As teachers are provided with little or no opportunity to observe the practice of colleagues, most observation occurs through shared teaching activities.

A written reflection on the literacy project from one teacher in the case study reveals how she has learned through the informal observations of two colleagues' practice during in-class support programmes:

> I have been lucky enough to have worked with two teachers and observed their practice. What have I learned? The list is endless. For example, I have learned how to structure a phonics lesson, how to monitor and record children's progress, how to organise group-work, how to structure writing mornings, literacy mornings, how to develop an appreciation of books and reading. There are many more things I have gained knowledge of this year. There is no doubt I have benefited enormously from being part of this team.

This affirmation of learning through participant observation highlights the impact it can have on teacher learning. Teachers in the survey were asked to rate the impact of being observed by a colleague. Chart 5a shows the results:

Chart 5a :The impact of observation



The 73% of respondents who indicated that being observed had a positive impact on their practice, became very conscious of their methodologies when observed by another:

> I focused on how I was doing things and didn't focus on the content, which is what I think I do when I am alone.
>
> I planned better and made more of an effort.
>
> I became more conscious of my teaching style.

Paying attention to one's practice appears to be more neglected when a teacher works in isolation. Teachers commented that they were also better prepared and more organised for the lesson. All of this points to the possibility for professional development that peer observation offers. The findings here are interesting as they indicate that there was a general 'openness' among teachers to participatory observation.

One in ten teachers (11%) reported that being observed was a difficult experience, admitting to feeling self-conscious, nervous or tense. Such an experience can occur when a teacher feels he/she is being critically evaluated rather than constructively supported. It can be a daunting prospect for teachers to open their doors to others after many years of working behind closed doors. But it is only a minority who feel this way and this finding may be linked to the possibility of a negative culture in their schools.

Interestingly, 16% reported that the situation had no impact whatsoever on their practice. Such a finding may imply that reflection is never practiced by these teachers or perhaps they belong to that group of teachers referred to by one respondent as those who "know it all; they don't need to discuss anything as their plan cannot possibly be improved upon"! These teachers see themselves as professionally self-sufficient, coping well with the everyday challenges classroom life poses. However they are missing out on a very tangible chance to improve their teaching because they fail to reflect on and inquire into their practice, thus failing to reach deeper understandings and develop greater expertise (Hatch, 2005).

Overall the findings here on participatory observation are significant as they suggest that teachers are open to working with colleagues. Most teachers saw observation as a

positive experience and this 'openness' is an important revelation as it clearly challenges the notion of the 'legendary autonomy' of the Irish teacher (OECD, 1991).

5.1.6 Observation threshold for principals

An interesting finding from the interviews is that in-class support programmes provide opportunities for principals to observe their teachers in action in a non-threatening way.

> As a principal it's easier for me to go in and see this sort of work going on and even give constructive feedback as opposed to going into a class teacher who works on her own. I find it much, much easier and more enjoyable…..I feel that I'm welcome in there and I'm wanted in there and I actually love going in there to those classes.

Observation of teachers by principals is not common practice in this country. The principal in Oak Tree School pointed out why this has been the case:

> **Liz:** It's nearly impossible to do in this day and age particularly with teachers who are fully trained because your role is not one of inspection. Your role is one of guidance and leadership.

Therefore observation of teachers by principals tends to be viewed in evaluative terms rather than constructive terms, which brings tension into the role of the principal, a role which includes monitoring the implementation of the school plan on learning support on an ongoing basis (Learning Support Guidelines 2000, p.39). In addition the evaluative role of the principal in the probation of newly qualified teachers has been increased since September 2010 (DES, Circular 55/10).

Considering the difficulties that may arise in providing principals with the responsibility of evaluating new teachers, an important finding is that all four principals in the second phase of this study stated that when two or more teachers are working together in a classroom it is less invasive to informally observe what is going on, than it is to observe a teacher who is working alone in a classroom. These observations are beneficial to the principal in that she sees first hand the teaching methodologies used in the classroom and beneficial to the teachers in that the principal's knowledge and understanding of the workings of the in-class programmes increases. Liz, who said it was almost impossible to observe solitary teachers' work found there was "no problem" in entering and observing the in-class support programmes and it also gave her a chance to participate:

> **Liz:** I can participate. It's nice to participate, I do enjoy that. There's a buzz in those rooms where there isn't a buzz in the other rooms really.

Bríd too found it easier to observe and participate in the in-class support programmes:

> **Bríd:** I think it's an awful lot easier when you have one or two more people inside in the classroom. There's no problem with another person coming in. You can always call in informally and say 'how are they getting on there with their reading' and you can go over to a group and end up being half an hour in the classroom before anyone knows it.

Rose believed that it was easier to visit classrooms where these in-class programmes were going on because:

> **Rose:** You're going in to see something in particular. The focus is on the event, not on the teacher and that's what makes the difference.

Perhaps Rose has pinpointed why it is so much easier for principals to enter classrooms where collaborative work practices are in place. The work that the pupils are engaged in is the main focus of the principal's observation. The principal also sees her teachers in action and gains insights into each teacher's pedagogy but rather than evaluating any one teacher's work she is collecting gems of good practice to praise and pass on among her community of learners. In-class support offers a threshold for observation and learning for principals as well as for teachers as both Bríd and Liz mentioned the development of their own learning when they became involved in the teaching themselves. Considering that there has been a greater evaluative role assigned to principals as outlined in Circular 55/10, the findings here are significant as they suggest possible ways for principals to enact and fulfill their evaluative role in a non-threatening way.

5.1.7 Appraisal and feedback

This study has found that informal teacher observation where teachers share the same work-space makes one's teaching public. To obtain maximum benefit from peer observation, teachers need to develop ways of giving and receiving feedback in a constructive way; "examining problems, raising questions, evaluating alternatives, making judgements and sharing their conclusions" (Hatch, 2005, p.11). Teachers in this study were asked if feedback from their principal or inspector on the nature of their work impacted on their practice. This type of observation differs to the informal observations that occur during shared teaching activities. It is a more formal observation. Inspectors usually observe teachers' practice from an evaluative stance which can be viewed negatively by many teachers. However, 81% of the teachers who had been observed in this instance felt affirmed as a result of positive feedback and

reported feeling valued, encouraged, supported and motivated. Many felt that positive feedback increased confidence and self-esteem, was good for morale and resulted in improvement in practice:

> His comments guided me.
>
> I really felt her advice assisted my practice
>
> I found it so encouraging
>
> It had a very positive effect because I felt this person really knew what they were talking about
>
> It was very motivating and the new suggestions made were very helpful
>
> It's always nice to hear that you're doing well
>
> It's so nice to be appreciated and acknowledged

This finding is important as it is consistent with the findings of the TALIS report (2009):

> On average across TALIS countries, teachers who received appraisal and feedback had a positive view of the process and its connection to their work and their careers. Overall, teachers considered the appraisal and feedback they received to be a fair assessment of their work and to have a positive impact upon their job satisfaction … This is an important finding given the negative connotations that may be associated with the introduction of a teacher appraisal system (p.158).

Considering that much of teachers' work is carried out away from the eyes and ears of peers and superiors, the chances for affirmation are rare but it is evident from the findings here that affirmation is very necessary and productive. The findings are consistent with the idea that "mechanisms and forums for exchanging and reviewing teachers; work across groups, organizations, and contexts have to be developed (Hatch, 2005).

Teachers reported that constructive criticism was more difficult to deal with:

> I felt resentful and defensive afterwards.
>
> The negative comments left me feeling very challenged and hurt.
>
> I took offence at first but later I used it- it proved to be very valuable advice.

Perhaps the difference here between these comments and the earlier ones is that the teachers here heard nothing positive about their practice in the feedback. Such criticism is more difficult to take on board as the teacher can feel their best efforts are

undervalued. Beginning with positive feedback is more productive even when criticism of certain aspects of a teachers' practice is the issue. Constructive criticism needs to become part of teachers' professional practice replacing the current situation in which teachers feel isolated and under attack by constructive criticism. Not all teachers in this study would welcome suggestions from colleagues on how to improve their practice, with almost half (46%) indicating that it would depend on the circumstances. These findings are a reminder of how teachers' relationships and teachers' emotions are very closely linked to teacher performance, something not adequately considered by teachers themselves when they are faced with making changes in their practice, nor by the educational administrators and reformers who mandate policy change.

Findings of this study in relation to teacher learning indicate that DES interventions, teacher talk, observation and feedback provide powerful opportunities for teacher learning through collaboration with colleagues, principals and inspectors. These opportunities act as collaboration catalysts. Some of the opportunities such as teacher talk, observation and feedback have the potential to yield high dividends in teacher learning through collaboration. Other opportunities such as in-service days have a lower dividend yield in teacher learning as opportunities for collaboration throughout these days are not always plentiful. One important opportunity where teacher talk, observation and feedback constitute the elements of a shared learning environment is through the provision of in-class support. Principals have already reported that in-class support programmes provide a threshold for observation that is lacking when traditional teaching methods are used exclusively in a school. The following section reveals how in-class support is a dynamic collaboration catalyst, providing an active threshold for teachers to work together and learn from each other. It can have a high dividend yield in relation to teacher learning.

5.2 In-class support: A dynamic collaborative learning opportunity

The recent National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading (Eivers, Close, Shiel, Millar, Clerkin, Gilleece & Kiniry, 2010) recommends that learning support provision in schools should be restructured to increase in-class provision, and to support collaboration between class teachers and SEN personnel. This recommendation reiterated that of the Learning Support Guidelines (2000) and that of the 2003 and 2005 Special Education circulars.

As noted in chapter four, over half (58%) of learning-support teachers have taken this recommendation on board in that they now participate in in-class programmes as part of their learning support work. In the postal survey, respondents who used in-class support were asked in an open question why they did so. All respondents spoke about the benefits for the students but only two mentioned teacher learning:

> In-class support keeps me in touch with class standards. I don't want to be seen as learning-support teacher, only.
>
> In-class allows learning-support to be seen in the class context. It's a good opportunity for teacher interaction and learning.

The teachers interviewed in phase two of this study were asked how their work practices had changed and what they had learned about themselves as a result of using in-class support and working with colleagues. Their accounts reveal that collaborative practices provide valuable opportunities teacher learning. They felt that teachers involved in collaborative projects with colleagues were more accountable but regarded the challenge to plan, teach and assess in-class support programmes as a form of motivation for teachers. All of them were concerned with the need for well planned programmes:

> **Phil:** Working together we actually feed off each other, especially if we have enough time to have the little planning meetings. That is when a person who has more expertise or more experience can actually help a younger or newer trained teacher by sharing or whatever.

Phil perceives in-class support as an opportunity for teacher learning, where the more experienced teacher can help the newly trained teacher through sharing and mentoring. Mentoring new teachers is an important part of teacher induction and in-class support can provide such an opportunity within schools.

Bernie recalls the way she worked before she became involved in in-class support and is now very conscious of the teacher being a continual learner:

> **Bernie**: You must be prepared to learn from her and she from you.
> Working alone means you miss those opportunities. I was really traditional in my approach, focusing on the 3 Rs. Whereas now I've picked up ways I wouldn't even have thought of from some of the teachers I've gone into. I was a real old style teacher before. Now I'm open to change. I'll take part in anything whereas I wouldn't have before. I suppose that I lacked confidence before. Now it's more fun this way. All along, I thought I was enjoying teaching whereas now I'm really enjoying it. I see that we need to learn as well. When you work alone, you're going along and you've nothing to be comparing yourself to and you don't get the chance to say 'Oh yeah, I should try that myself'. So I think it's dreadful for us to have no contact with teachers. Working together strengthens your character as a teacher. Also the kids can see that you're working with another teacher

> and you're picking things up from her so it's ok that teachers don't know everything and that they learn from each other.

This account from Bernie is a powerful testament to her learning through collaboration with others. She can now reflect on her earlier practice and realise that she was 'traditional' in her approach and was afraid to take on something she wasn't familiar with. Bernie sees herself as a better teacher now as her involvement in in-class support has strengthened her character. Engagement in dialogue about practice increases teachers' knowledge base. In-class support provides an opportunity to compare work with that of colleagues leading to enhanced teaching practice and increased self–confidence in one's abilities.

Karen also talks about an increase in confidence as a result of in-class support and believes that teaching in isolation offers little opportunity for teacher development. She goes so far as to suggest that continually working in isolation erodes teachers' confidence:

> **Karen:** I worked for sixteen years as a mainstream teacher but I've learned ten times, a hundred times more in resource. I think I'm a more skilled teacher now and definitely in the whole area of English and Maths I would have my skills refined. There's a better atmosphere too with in-class support, so I think even your own self-esteem as a teacher is raised.
> I got an awful lot of inservice and learned an awful lot from visiting my second school. I learned an awful lot from all the courses I've done as resource teacher.
> I don't have best practice yet but I hope that I'm achieving better practice now.
> This work has given me confidence in that before I would never have taught in front of my peers. Never! And the thought of teaching in front of my peers would have scared me to death but now I would model in First Steps and I teach the phonics in-class. I definitely think the isolation works to your detriment. …. You see now I can look back and realise the isolation is very bad for you and even I found that when an SNA came in, I was probably a bit more relaxed but I was still never myself, whereas now I don't know why but when I'm in resource and teaching, I think I am myself.

Karen attributes her own learning to the professional development she has participated in, in recent years and also to what she has seen and been involved in, in her second school. Her pace of learning has increased in comparison to when she worked in isolation, a finding which supports teacher learning through collaboration. Karen acknowledges that her practice has improved but is concerned with achieving 'best practice'. The danger here lies in the belief that it is essential for teachers to achieve 'best practice'. Best practice is the practice espoused in policies and research that puts pressures on teachers to constantly strive for greater achievement in their teaching. Teachers' practices are constantly changing, adapting and improving and what may be

considered ‘best practice’ one year may be superseded the next. Therefore teachers should regard their teaching as a craft that continues to flourish, nurturing the imaginative endeavours that are necessary for future improvements rather than replicating past achievements (Sugrue, 2008).

Estelle’s experience of in-class support highlights the enjoyable aspect of teamwork:

> **Estelle:** I enjoy the success rate that’s involved and working with the children. Seeing the enjoyment they get out of achieving the levels they get to is great. I suppose there is also enjoyment in working with colleagues. …and we all work together as a team.
> It’s a nice way for teachers to work together. It’s not isolated. It’s shared and it’s teamwork. It’s for the benefit of the children.
> It brings a more social aspect into teaching as well and there’s a togetherness, a working togetherness which is very enjoyable.
> It also adds a bit of motivation for people because you’re constantly being challenged. It makes you plan your work and you’re looking ahead all the time. The class teacher is always observing the children and it helps the class teacher observe and makes them more accountable to themselves especially in discussing the children as the programme goes on. The class teacher might say to you ‘ he’s coming on great’ or ‘he’s fantastic’ or ‘he’s still struggling’ and you know you have more feedback.
> Hopefully it should help teachers to develop professionally. And if they see the success of any programme then it should spill over into other areas.

The enjoyment inherent in the in-class support programme comes from involvement in a more social dimension of teaching, an aspect that is lacking when a teacher works in isolation. Estelle uses the terms ‘sharing’, ‘teamwork’ and ‘togetherness’ to describe the social aspect of the in-class work. This social dimension appears to develop teachers’ learning in that it inspires teachers to become more motivated, challenged and accountable to themselves as a result of their involvement. Estelle proposes that being involved in and seeing the success of an in-class literacy programme, develops teachers professionally in relation to their knowledge of literacy but it also has the capacity to extend the professional development to other curricular areas.

All of the interviewed learning-support teachers had previously worked as class teachers and as learning-support/resource teachers using withdrawal only and compared working in isolation with their present work. All of them found that working collaboratively had developed them on a professional level, something that is more difficult to achieve through working in continual isolation. Overall, the impact of in-class support on teacher learning appears to be positive. It offers an opportunity for teacher professional development through teacher talk and observation, it is challenging

and motivating, and it demands greater accountability as well as providing a more social milieu for teachers to enact their craft. But the most fundamental impact appears to be the identity shift that teachers experience through their involvement in collaborative practices. It appears as Lave and Wenger (1991) propose, that learning and an acknowledged sense of identity are inseparable.

5.3 New roles affecting identity: from situated to substantive identity

A lack of opportunities to collaborate ties teachers to the idea of a fixed identity which makes change very difficult but as explored in chapter two there is a perpetual incompleteness about identity (Bakhtin, 1981), as it is in constant social negotiation and can never be permanently settled or fixed (Britzman, 1991). Ball (1972) proposes that a person's situated identity is a malleable one which changes according to situation and is not necessarily representative of the 'real' self. Substantive identity is a more stable, core presentation of the self that is fundamental to how a person views himself (Day et al, 2006). However as noted in chapter two, identity is in constant flux and is negotiated as a result of the experiences teachers encounter in both their personal and professional lives.

In the previous section both Bernie's and Karen's accounts reveal how teachers often hide their substantive identity behind a situated identity. Working collaboratively appears to empower them to reveal the substantive self. Bernie's experience with in-class support has resulted in an acknowledged identity shift - "Now I've changed". She now views herself as learner in the classroom and is no longer the only source of knowledge available to the pupils. Karen's account reveals that she is now more relaxed when working with others and is not afraid of being on show, which is how she felt previously. She has acknowledged the revelation of the personal part of her professional identity.

In thinking about the way she works now, Karen declares "I am myself". What does she mean by this revelation? Formerly she adopted strategies to defend her sense of 'real self' and presented a situated identity which reflected her perception of herself in relation to the school culture in which she participated. Now her practice is more revelatory of her 'real self' or substantive identity, which comprises a person's most salient and most valued views of and attitudes to 'self' (Ball, 1972 ; Nias, 1984).

Sometimes teachers try to develop a professional identity that is outside of their personal experience and thus keep their substantive identity hidden. But "it is stronger and more fruitful to practise humility in the classroom, to have the courage to admit what you don't know, to invite others to teach you, and to stay close to your own experience." (Ayers, 2001, p.126). The findings in this study show that working collaboratively allows teachers to reveal the substantive self. Through collaboration teachers come to perceive where things are not right, they come to envisage and enact other possibilities and position themselves in relation to alternative possibilities (Coldron & Smith 1999).

The focus group interview in Oak Tree school raised many issues in relation to teachers' ways of working and changing identity. The participants reconstructed the social reality of their work practices and contrasted them with their former ways of working which stemmed from the accepted norms underpinning teachers' work. The participants were asked about the way they worked when they first began their teaching careers. What practices did they see themselves engaging in? What were their initial thoughts on what their days' work would entail?

> **Annie:** Honestly, I'd say 14 or 15 yrs ago I thought I'd be standing at the top of the room. This is from what I'd learned myself. And they'd all be on the one book. And very well behaved. And I'd say "turn to page 11" and we'd all turn to page 11….. I'm not saying that that way was right either but that was the view of teaching that we had.
>
> **Cara**: Yes. - my vision would have been whole class. Even when I came out first, I thought it would be just me in the room, I was so enthusiastic, I've got loads of ideas, let's get them done. But then you realise that they're not all necessarily going to follow with me….there's three or four down there who don't know what's going on. So not everything will work out. But you do still have this image of yourself as a teacher, at the top of the classroom.
>
> **Theresa**: Yes, when I first qualified, you had this idealistic view of how your class was going to be and how teaching would be for you. So for me it was just like you said…I'd be at the top of the classroom, I thought they would all be with me…. In hindsight now from my experience of just being in different schools I see the different levels of ability in a big class….you cannot be alone…you have to have more than one , you need the support for them.

The three teachers here reveal the tacit knowledge of teaching they have brought with them from their own school experiences. The pre-conceived ideas they held about teachers' work and teacher identity appeared to be influential at the beginning of their

careers but experience has led them to believe that there are alternative, better ways of enacting their practice.

Annie believes that the way in which teachers are stereotypically perceived influences teachers' practices:

> **Annie:** But I think it's something to do with our personalities as well….aren't we kind of 'play it safe' people anyway. We'd never do anything mad like say "Everyone stand up, push all the furniture back against the wall and we'll all sit on the floor for an hour"! We're just not inclined to do something different. It's our personalities.

Britzman (1991) referring to Lortie's work proposes that teachers become trapped within the stereotypical images of 'the teacher' and the individual's ability to become something other than what is expected is diminished. Annie's belief is evidence of this mechanistic form of social control. In an attempt to clarify Annie's understanding of this belief, I as researcher questioned further:

> **Researcher**: And where does that come from….you're saying personality……but …
>
> **Susan**: Conditioning. I think it's conditioning
>
> **Eilís**: And a sense of order…
>
> **Annie**: I think it comes from when you went to school yourself …
>
> **Theresa**: And from teaching practice. Yeah, in TP it was having them quiet and sitting like angels…..but then when you do your Dip ….like I had 32 children and it is so far from reality.
>
> **Cara**: Yeah it is so completely unrealistic.
>
> **Theresa**: But you just have this idea inside you ……and it stems from that.
>
> **Susan**: But it was realistic one time….I mean years ago we all sat there and took out our books.

The teachers in Oak Tree School regard the traditional role of the teacher as an unrealistic one. Susan points out that such a role may have been acceptable in the past but has little meaning in today's world. Teachers in today's schools are expected to teach using research-based methods, models, strategies and approaches that enable all students to learn. They must be well trained, highly motivated and masters of content. They are expected to constantly look for more effective ways of teaching struggling students through collaboration with colleagues and observation of peers (McEwan, 2009). Teachers therefore are required to assume many new roles and as Susan suggests teachers very often need to be involved in the new process for a time before they reach new understandings and fully appreciate its value:

> The more I use work-stations the more I value them. Because you know when you start off something you don't see its full value. It's only when you do it for a while that you see how beneficial it is.

The teachers agree that their new ways of working as part of a team have had positive effects on them as teachers and their identities as teachers have changed as a result of their involvement in collaborative programmes. Annie in particular reveals how her professional identity is very much part of her personal identity:

> **Annie**: I'm more fulfilled professionally. I feel I'm getting somewhere now. I'm making some bit of a difference. I'm certainly a lot happier than when I started teaching. Here, you're part of a team, you're not so isolated. And reflecting on it now today , work is a huge part of your life ; it can make you happy, it can make you sad. I'm very happy working here and I enjoy working with everyone. I get enjoyment and fulfilment out of it. It's something I've never really admitted until today. It's actually very fulfilling. …. I enjoy work and that's very important even for your own mental health. I had dark days back along when I started out teaching ……oh my God, no one to talk to, no one to turn to and work is such an important part of your life.
>
> **Theresa**: The curriculum is just so broad that as a mainstream class teacher I know I wouldn't be able to do it on my own. I feel it's great to be on that team, you're not alone, and everyone is working together. I've a long teaching career ahead of me and I definitely want in-class support and collaborative teaching and planning to be at the centre of my job.
>
> **Susan**: I feel teacher collaboration will continue in the school because I can never see myself working without in-class support and group-work and collaboration with another class teacher. It makes me so much happier in that your day goes faster. The kids are all looked after and it is all about the kids and their learning but it's about your sanity as well. At the end of the day I know from having this meeting with a group of our staff, I see that they value collaboration and it will be continued no matter what class I am in.

The teachers in Oak Tree School report on the ways they themselves have changed and how their beliefs have also developed and changed. Sharing their practice and working as part of a team has developed them as reflective practitioners. The clear message from the findings of this study seems to be that teachers learn from observing colleagues and subsequently having reflective conversations about their work. If reflective practice is an essential characteristic for teacher learning then it is important to establish if reflective practice is commonplace in schools.

5.4 Reflective practice in schools

When asked if teachers reflect on their practice, 99% of respondents said that they did reflect and the majority reflected regularly and frequently. This finding is supported by Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003) who propose that all teachers reflect-"Teachers reflect all day, every day, while in the act of teaching and long after the school day is over, *on* the act of teaching" (p.7). However as the findings from the survey show, most reflection occurs at unplanned moments in the heads of teachers and is not visibly

recorded:

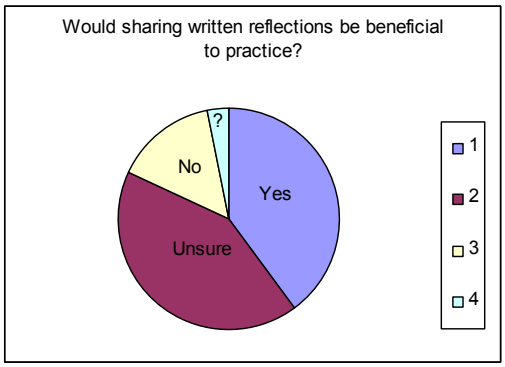
> I do it all in my head.
>
> I always take my work home in my head.
>
> I ask myself how things went and make conscious changes for next time.
>
> I have a very good memory-don't need to write it down.

Most principals (90%) stated that they encourage teachers to reflect on their work. The majority of principals encouraged reflection at staff meetings and planning days through discussion.

Teachers were asked if they use a reflective journal or learning log to record the important events or interactions that occur in their working day and 29% said that they did so. Of those that used a reflective journal, 60% held a postgraduate qualification. Some (22%) of those who stated that they used a reflective journal said that they did not use it to address problems or make changes in their practice. This cohort also stated that they had not engaged in any professional development over the course of their teaching career which perhaps indicates a difference in meaning or interpretation, of the term- 'reflective journal/learning log'. This reminded me of the ambiguity around the area of reflection in the pilot stage of the survey. Though the questions had been made clearer there still appeared to be misinterpretations made. Some teachers felt that in writing lesson plans and monthly reports they had sufficient opportunities for reflection. It would appear that there is a general lack of understanding about reflective practice among Irish teachers especially in relation to the possibilities for professional development that written reflections have to offer.

A further question in the area of reflective practice asked teachers if they thought that sharing written reflections with colleagues could help to improve their practice. Chart 5b shows the results:

Chart 5b :The benefit of shared written reflections



Of the teachers surveyed, 39% agreed that written reflections would improve practice, 42% were unsure and 14 % thought it would not help to improve practice. 5% did not respond with a few of these respondents stating that they did not understand what sharing written reflections involved. Overall, evidence points to the fact that Irish teachers are very unsure of what reflective practice entails and many of those who were familiar with it felt that they did not have enough time to adequately reflect on their work. This is a very significant finding as without adequate reflection, there is a limit to what teachers can learn. It has implications for the design of future teacher professional development programmes.

Younger teachers are the only cohort to have engaged in reflective practice at pre-service level and the question arises as to how many of them value the practice enough to continue with it throughout their teaching careers? Has its importance become embedded in their own theoretical assumptions about teaching? Teachers need to develop ways to articulate and share their reflections more explicitly so that their reflections are more feasible and thorough, resulting in continuous sustained improvement in their practice (Goodson, 2003, p.129). Engaging in off site professional development can be of benefit here as teachers through action research inspired by these off-site programmes inquire into their practice and using research-based knowledge they come to understand their practice and improve it. Are many teachers engaging in voluntary off-site professional development programmes?

5.5 Off-site professional development

Theory generation is at the heart of policy making that provides new directions for the teaching profession. Teachers are still seen as expert practitioners, not

> as expert knowers, which is a concern, because teachers need to have a say in what counts as policy. To do so they need to have confidence in themselves as creators of new theory, so that other people also develop confidence in their capacity…… Action research is valuable because it is a practical systematic form of enquiry with the emphasis on what is happening in everyday work
>
> (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p.3)

Both learning-support teachers and class teachers were asked about their experience of professional development, outside of mandatory curriculum days. 82% of teachers had participated in professional development courses, with participation from a higher percentage of learning-support teachers (92%) than class teachers (70%). The teachers were then asked to describe what type of professional development courses they had participated in. Table 5A shows the findings:

Table 5A : Teachers' professional development

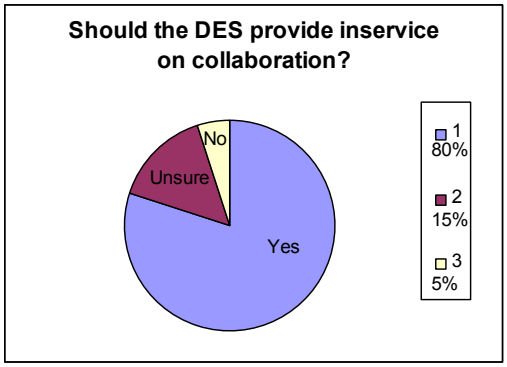
Category of teacher	Teachers who have engaged in voluntary professional development no. (%)	Teachers who hold a post graduate degree no. (%)	Teachers who hold a Special Education qualification no. (%)
LS Teachers no.=120	110 (92%)	20 (17%)	41 (34%)
Class Teachers no.= 95	66 (70%)	10 (11%)	5 (6%)

Voluntary engagement in professional development is very high. Most professional development was attributed to INTO Summer courses for teachers and also evening courses run by local education centres. Attendance at Summer courses has always been high as attendance secures three days personal leave throughout the school year for teachers. Learning-support teachers have engaged in more professional development than class teachers with 34% holding a Special Education qualification. This finding may be explained firstly by the fact that the cohort of learning-support teachers tends to have more years experience and secondly by the fact that the teaching of children with special educational needs requires teachers to use skills and methodologies that were not widely explored in their pre-service education courses. Despite the fact that post-graduate degrees demand a high level of commitment and effort by practising teachers, participation in these courses seems to appeal to many teachers with 17% of LS teachers and 11% of class teachers participating. Are teachers beginning to see the

importance of life-long learning and realise that their pre-service education is not enough to sustain them throughout their teaching careers?

Teachers who participated in professional development courses were asked if these courses encouraged them to examine their practice or encouraged them to work with colleagues. 90% of respondents stated that they were encouraged to examine their practice while 80% were encouraged to work with colleagues. However as the findings in relation to reflective practice reveal, many teachers do not examine their ways of working, despite what they hear at these professional development courses. The majority of respondents were of the opinion that the DES should provide professional development for schools in relation to working in collaborative school cultures, as Chart 5c shows:

Chart 5c : In-service on collaboration



Teachers quite obviously require information and knowledge on how to work collaboratively. However, as reflective practice is not widely used by teachers, they are slow to realise that they themselves possess the agency to make changes in their school and instead they rely on and await instruction from the DES. Chart 5c reveals how 5% of teachers do not wish for any in-service from the DES on how to work collaboratively. Many of this cohort are teachers who prefer to continue working as they have always worked. They prefer to work alone.

5.6 Solo Teaching: Individualism and individuality

As already discussed in chapter two, the rights of the individual teacher should not suffer due to group pressure. Not everyone will work better in a collaborative situation and contrived or forced collaboration will undermine the productivity it set out to achieve. In developing professional learning communities within schools, teachers

come to learn and respect the rights of individuals and a fragile balance between building cultures where collaboration and colleagueship are promoted and where individual integrity and artistry are allowed to flourish must be maintained (Lieberman & Miller, 1991, p. 108).

In this study, 6% of learning-support teachers stated that they would never wish to work in class with a colleague. All of these teachers except one were teachers who had worked alone for over twenty-five years. All of these teachers firmly believed that withdrawal was the most effective method for pupils needing support. Some mentioned that it was more comfortable for the pupils. None mentioned that they themselves might feel uncomfortable, sharing the same workspace as colleagues. Two of the respondents wrote lengthy comments in favour of working in isolation. Both had considerable experience, forty-two and thirty-one years respectively, both were male and both were learning-support teachers. Their comments are worth exploring in greater detail as they provide some insight into the reasons why these teachers and perhaps many more, prefer to work alone. In addition, one class teacher contributed some valuable comments on working in isolation. For the purpose of differentiating between the respondents, the pseudonyms Jim and Denis (learning-support teachers) and Tom (class teacher) are used in reporting and analysing their answers and comments.

Jim always withdraws his pupils for learning-support and cites 'best practice' as the reason why. For the question – 'Would you welcome the chance to work in-class with a colleague?' he ticked the 'Never' option. However for all of the other questions in relation to collaboration, he gave positive answers. He believes that collaborative planning is essential, he would use more planning time to plan with others, he has found that curriculum in-service days and school planning days have been beneficial to his practice and he stated that being observed by a colleague, principal and inspector assisted him in improving his practice. From these answers Jim does not appear to have any difficulty with being observed by others. When asked what he believes are the greatest barriers to working collaboratively, he states:

> Too unwieldy, too complicated, poor class/pupil control and time restrictions.

He is adamant that he will never share the same work space with a colleague. He firmly believes that his way of working is best practice. He considers in-class support to be

too unwieldy and complicated. Considering that this respondent has forty-two years experience, it is understandable that embracing a new way of working would be extremely difficult at this stage of his working life. His professional identity appears to be deeply rooted in the dominant culture of teaching, where the teacher works alone and is the sole provider of knowledge. He is willing to plan collaboratively but unwilling to take that next step and move out of the comfort zone which is his solitary practice.

The veteran class teacher, Tom, with thirty-two years experience, shows an awareness of belonging to this culture of teaching when he says:

> Old guys like myself are traditional and conservative and fear such things.

Tom is a class teacher who also favours withdrawal of learning-support pupils. His reasons are evidence based:

> Withdrawal has proved to be very successful for the majority of the children concerned as only a very small number of our pupils need to continue beyond 4th class.

The withdrawal of SEN pupils has worked well for him and he sees no reason to change.

Denis provides an example of 'individualism' at its strongest. Similar to Jim, he would never welcome the chance to work in-class with a colleague. His reasons for this include:

> There is no clear research available to teachers to show how in-class teaching works.

He doesn't agree with the need to plan collaboratively or that collaborative plans are a better way to raise pupil outcomes. When advised by an inspector to consider in-class support, his reaction was to dismiss the suggestion immediately:

> I was more adamant and convinced than ever that my own out of class methods were better.

However, he provides no evidence to substantiate his claim. He appears to have an avid aversion to collaboration:

> The DES loves the idea of planning programmes with class teachers and integrating learning-support work with classroom work, I have no faith in professional experts who push this idea without back-up research and data. Children love all sorts of topics which are not connected or integrated. So long as they are interested in the work at hand they are learning and progressing. I have found no evidence that working collaboratively would raise standards. I think that most teachers prefer to be masters of their own domain and that collaborative teaching would be a stress they don't need. A great deal of time and effort is wasted on over-planning in learning-support and teaching in general. The barest sketches should be sufficient for success. The greatest tools a teacher has is their own personality and 'thinking on their feet'. To me, real planning happens when one is inspired or gets a

> good idea – strike while the iron is hot! – I find planning days useless and messy and depressing. Imagine telling a poet that he has to write a poem next Tuesday at 9.00 a.m.!

There are elements of individualism and individuality (Lukes, 1973) apparent in this statement. Denis has very strong beliefs and assumptions in relation to collaboration. He states that he has found no evidence to back up the case for collaboration, despite the abundance of research that has been done to prove the effectiveness of collaboration. This may point to the inaccessibility of educational research to practitioners. As Huberman points out, understanding some of this discourse can involve a real challenge for practitioners and though research work is often stimulating, it often appears to actually describe another planet (2002, p.261)! Most educational research is perceived by teachers as irrelevant to their daily work lives and this assumption spills into and contaminates their willingness to believe that research has any relevance to them as teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, p.304).

Denis' negativity in relation to collaborating in any way with others has limited his professional development as remaining isolated means he gets little adult feedback on his value, worth and competence as a teacher (Hargreaves, 1994, p.167). He is denied the benefits of being involved in the socio-cultural context of teaching. This type of individualism, is elective in that the respondent prefers to work alone on pedagogical and personal grounds. Sharing for this teacher would mean closing up instead of opening up his options. A collaborative sharing of ideas would not in his view, increase creativity.

Denis' perception of 'the teacher' is an interesting one. He considers himself 'master of his own domain' and finds inspiration and creativity occur at unplanned moments. He equates the work of the teacher to that of a poet, seeing his work as a creation. He views himself in similar terms to an artist. His professionalism and career rewards are as Huberman described, "fundamentally grounded in independent artisanship and at odds with the collaborative school cultures that bureaucracies might try to create in the interests of increasing system effectiveness and centralized accountability" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2002, p.326). Perhaps his negativity could be described as a healthy resistance to top-down reform.

Interestingly, Denis' professional development has been limited to DES in-service days on the implementation of the Revised Primary Curriculum in addition to a few week-long Summer courses. His experience of professional development has been limited to the traditional in-service format provided for teachers where teachers' experience is neither valued nor built upon and where there is no space for teacher voice, inquiry or reflection.

Denis requires solitude to stimulate his creativity and imagination. In addition, he considers planning to be a waste of time. He views planning as being too prescriptive in that his creativity is stifled. As Goleman suggests, he feels 'barred from the flow' (1995). He values 'moments' where pedagogy cannot be derived technically from methods or theories but rather the pedagogy is context sensitive, manifesting itself in the practical moment of a concrete situation (van Manen, 1991, p.47). He understands teaching as a process of acting and thinking wisely and making split-second decisions in the immediacy of classroom life. It requires artistry in that new knowledge and strategies must be invented in the face of unexpected situations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 266). For this respondent, teaching is a solo performance in which his creativity and pedagogical tact are protected; two very positive elements of his work that he feels are threatened by collaboration. His comments remind us of the significance of the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning that cannot be ignored by educational reform efforts. All of his comments lead us to ask the question about what kind of collaboration he has experienced and why he perceives it as a 'waste of time'? Unless teachers are engaged in meaningful dialogue that leads to pupil achievement, much of what masquerades as collaborative work may be as Denis describes, 'a waste of time'!

Another interesting point of note in these findings is that these three veteran teachers are all male teachers. Is it possible that gender makes a difference in the development of collaborative cultures in schools? A strong sense of collaboration and caring for one another is often a feature associated with women's culture (Acker 1999, p.103), and research done by Lyons (1983), Belenky et al (1986) and Noddings (1992) shows that a preference for connectedness is more characteristic of women than it is of men. Whether this is the way that women really are as in the essentialist view of women or whether women have been conditioned to 'connect' is arguable. John-Steiner (2000)

argues that variations in men's and women's collaborative engagement are the outcome of social rather than biological forces. Women have been more widely engaged than men in practices that require relational skills such as teaching, nursing and secretarial work. Consequently, it may be the case that they become more interested and more comfortable with collaboration than their male counterparts. However it is important here to refer to the particularity of case study research and how findings might be interpreted. The findings in this case reveal a lesser inclination towards teacher collaboration among older males but it must be acknowledged that there may be alternative interpretations.

The contributions of Jim, Tom and Denis provide an illustration of how some teachers think and behave in relation to recommendations for collaboration. They provide a glimpse into the conflict experienced by many veteran teachers when faced with policy that mandates changes in the way they have always worked (Lasky, 2005).They remind us of what may be lost in the over reliance on delivering prescribed pre-planned collaborative lessons. Their thoughts evoke the positive elements of individuality that shouldn't be lost when eliminating any negativity: "Vibrant teacher cultures should be able to avoid the professional limitations of teacher individualism while embracing the creative potentials of teacher individuality" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 183).

However it is important to return to the concept of reflective practice and how neglect in this area by teachers can be a root cause in their inability to make changes in their practice. Teachers tend to be governed by hegemonic assumptions. A reflective journal entry provides further evidence:

> Today, Susan was sick and Betty was the sub teacher for the day. I asked her if she was willing to continue with our work plan which involved in-class literacy groups first and later on, in-class Maths work-stations. She said 'No problem' and I gave her the lesson plans and all seemed to work well. But interestingly, when all of the in-class work was over, she turned to Anna, the SNA and asked: 'Are we finished with all that stuff now? Can I get on with some **real** work?'
>
> (Reflective Journal Entry – 06/02/08)

Betty sees the traditional work of the teacher as 'real' work. Any different form of teaching is not valued as much as is standing in front of the pupils engaging in whole class teaching. Denis, Jim and Tom's practice is guided by this hegemonic assumption and it appears to be one of the most difficult teacher assumptions to shift.

When teachers engage in what they regard as 'real work' work they are as Denis says: 'masters of their own domain'. Accountability may be at a low level especially in Denis' case where he has little regard for planning. If a teacher's work cannot be seen or sufficient planning and assessment is not available how can a principal be sure that content and methodologies used are appropriate? This is an interesting issue as the following section looks specifically at the whole idea of accountability and how there appears to be a link between teacher collaboration and accountability.

5.7 Accountability or collective mindfulness?

In recent years teachers have found themselves under pressure to increase the quality of education and improve outcomes for pupils in order to create a more skilled and educated workforce. Results from international studies of pupil performance have led national governments to seek greater accountability from their education systems in the race for economic competitiveness and have led a drive to reform and change (Osborn, 2006).

Osborne's international study draws upon a programme of funded comparative research aimed at examining the impact of national policy change on teachers' work and professional identity in England, France and Denmark. She found that teachers, especially in England, have become subject to a growing 'performance model of practice, seeking to govern not only the inputs and processes but also the outputs of education. Teachers were struggling to hold on to their commitment to the affective and pastoral, while at the same time being set ever increasing targets for the achievement of individual pupils in national testing (Osborn, 2006).

In Ireland teachers have been more fortunate than their English counterparts, who have had a strong sense of priorities imposed on them from outside since the 1990s. This external accountability has led to some loss of personal fulfilment and autonomy (Osborn, 2006, p. 246). Irish teachers have not been similarly restricted and they still manage to hold on to some of their professional autonomy. However, recent policy documents promote greater accountability for teachers through the recommendation for the use of formative assessment:

> Principals and teachers should ensure that assessment *for* learning is a feature of every classroom, with good practice shared at school-level. Both cross-curricular and subject-specific strategies should be used – e.g., using miscue analysis (reading), observing pupil response methods, ability to connect modes of representation, and use of problem-solving strategies (mathematics).
>
> (DES, National Assessment of Literacy & Numeracy, 2009, p.90)

The DES suggest that the information derived from assessments should contribute usefully to teacher planning as well as having a stronger role in identifying pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and informing greater differentiation in classroom instruction. Thus teachers become more accountable for their work and its outcomes.

In the interviews at the four schools, the principals were asked how in-class support programmes had influenced the work practices in their schools. Their comments were interesting and opened up the whole area of accountability in teaching. The accountability mentioned by the principals here appears to stem from the teachers themselves through their collaboration with colleagues, rather than from outside pressures. It is one of 'creative mediation', where teachers take active control of changes and gain a new professional discourse (Woods & Jeffrey, 1997), including new professional practices in the process (Osborn, 2006):

> **Patricia**: Planning is much better now. Teachers are a lot clearer about their objectives and their targets. They are a lot more conscious of the targets and reviewing the targets and also looking at new methodologies.

Here Patricia suggests that in-class work has meant that teachers plan better and are more aware of the need to fulfil learning objectives. It is important that the objectives and targets are set down by the teachers themselves with their own pupils in mind. Prescribed targets set down by a centralised education system run counter to the essential nature of teaching (Coldron & Smith, 1999) and perpetuate a technical approach to teaching. However, collaboratively setting targets that focus on individual learning needs and collaboratively designing a teaching plan to reach those targets is a comprehensive way of ensuring effective outcomes of teaching practice. It incorporates a level of teacher accountability which is perhaps better described as 'collective mindfulness' (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 1999). According to Langer (1989), mindfulness is having new energy in new contexts, the ability to reframe a situation, the ability to take risks and welcome change, as well as feeling less fearful, less

helpless and less restricted. Langer's narrative concerning a nursing home conceptualises 'mindfulness' in a nutshell:

> One day at a nursing home in Connecticut, elderly residents were each given a choice of houseplants to care for and were asked to make a number of small decisions about their daily routines. A year and a half later, not only were these people more cheerful, active and alert than a similar group in the same institution who were not given those choices and responsibilities, but many more of them were still alive. In fact, less than half as many of the decision- making, plant- minding residents had died as had those in the other group. This experiment, with its startling results, began over ten years of research into the powerful effects of what my colleagues and I came to call mindfulness…
>
> (Langer, 1989, p.1).

The in-built accountability of in-class support programmes is more a sense of teacher mindfulness where teachers are conscious of finding the best way to teach their pupils in order to increase literacy and numeracy levels. It is not a negative one which is often associated with outside pressures to improve performance, described by Ball as 'the terrors of performativity' (Ball 2001). Principal of Ivy Lane School, Rose points out that it is a positive sense of accountability linked with work satisfaction:

> **Rose**: It really keeps people on their toes, keeps them motivated, they learn from each other. Somehow isolation is a very crippling thing because you can be lazy, you can get into bad habits and you might not question your teaching and see that people are moving on. So I think when you have this collaborative thing going, it's very alive and I think there's loads of people working harder. I think straight away what you're doing is avoiding the staleness and the accountability within it is big. People feel 'our whole act is sharper now' but that's the way the world is. We are more accountable, we have to be sharper and we have to be professional, but I don't hear resentment. It strikes me that people are pleased to be challenged.

Rose's account implies that working in isolation can lead to laziness, routine teaching, staleness, and lack of motivation. Teaching practice can become so routine that teachers become mindless experts (Langer, 1989). Collaborative work, on the other hand, keeps teachers sharper, on their toes and 'alive'. Though teachers are working harder, there is no resentment but a sense of motivation through learning from one another. There is a 'mindfulness' about their work and its focus which is student learning.

Liz agrees that in-class support programmes incorporate an element of accountability for teachers. She is very adamant about the need for accountability in teachers' work, something that has been absent in the past:

> **Liz:** With in-class programmes there's a much more targeted approach to the children's education and it's more accountable because it's planned. If the work is not written or recorded anywhere then there is no accountability. Teachers are more accountable nowadays and rightly so. We have to produce some sort of results. We cannot allow children to go through a DEIS school and come out the other side almost illiterate. There has to be some change.

Liz believes that a demand for accountability is a necessary change. Working in a DEIS school for twenty-five years she has witnessed low pupil achievement levels over and over again:

> **Liz:** We're aware that we teach in a disadvantaged area but you can't sit down and blame that for everything….. The teachers have to change the way they teach.

Teachers working together learn from each other and as a result they change and improve their methodologies. They become accountable to one another rather than to their principal, inspector, or education department. They have high expectations of their pupils and collaboratively develop enjoyable ways to tackle underachievement which is a necessary requirement if attainment levels are to be raised in disadvantaged schools (Parker-Jenkins, Hewitt, Brownhill & Sanders, 2007). In section 5.2 the four learning-support teachers spoke about their in-class work, revealing how they are now more motivated and challenged. According to Phil, teachers working together, "feed off each other". Working collaboratively is an example of a positive experience that fortifies motivation and resilience (Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary & Clarke, 2010). It is almost as if participation in effective collaborative programmes increases the 'flow' for teachers and students alike, in that they become fully immersed in a feeling of energised focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998).

On a similar note to Liz, Bríd deems this accountability as reasonable, because it requires all teachers to perform to a certain standard, avoiding the inequalities that she claims exist in the teaching profession:

> **Bríd:** Everyone is paid the same amount of pay but some people are doing much more work for it than others. The day just doesn't finish at 2.30. After 2.30 is for planning, evaluating and getting things ready. But for some it's "2.30 and I'm out the door". Now I know that work is done at home but for a lot of people there isn't anything going on at home and I don't know how anyone physically can come in and do their job without some effort to plan their work.

It can be difficult for principals to monitor teachers' work. But if teachers are involved in structured in-class support programmes, a high level of collaborative planning and

organisation is required. This means teachers are more accountable to themselves and to each other and have to put maximum effort into their working day. There is a collective mindfulness about pupils' progress which supports collective responsibility, assumes professional thoughtfulness at all times and checks inertia and complacency about practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p.7). The comments from the principals suggest that they have encountered teachers who are complacent about their work and lack energy and enthusiasm. The finding here linking teacher collaboration and accountability is therefore a significant one as involvement in in-class support with colleagues, offers a solution to inertia and complacency developing in teachers' practice. The accountability or collective mindfulness stems from the desire of a particular group of teachers to maximize student learning. This focus on student learning is integral to the development of PLCs (Vescio, et al, 2009).

5.8 Schools developing as PLCs

From the findings revealed in this chapter, it is evident that many DEIS schools are evolving as professional learning communities. They have embraced collaborative ways of working. In the 'additional comments' box at the end of the survey, some principals and teachers wrote about the collaborative work that is ongoing in their schools and the positive aspects of such teamwork. Many spoke about the benefits and enthusiasm generated through working as part of a team:

> Working in-class with mainstream teachers has been the single, greatest addition to the Learning-support/Resource system in our school. There is now a desire to work together rather than resentment as was the case heretofore.
>
> We have an excellent team working in Special Educational Needs and we are constantly trying to improve the service our children get.
>
> It falls on the principal to instigate and foster collaboration- it's tough work but it's worth it!
>
> We have been working collaboratively here for six or seven years- it is effective and it is possible, though the planning time required does impact on teaching time.
>
> Collaborative work practices in this school have led to greater professional respect among colleagues.

These schools and the four schools visited in phase two of the study provide examples of how schools have responded to DES policy firstly in establishing that the recommendation for collaboration made by the DES is relevant to their own setting and secondly, and more importantly, by devising ways of working collaboratively, which are specific to the needs of their own particular school. The schools have restructured

themselves from the inside out and this requires "shaping a school culture that touches everyone: students, teachers, staff, administrators, parents and community" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p.135). Such schools have taken the first steps to developing as efficient professional learning communities.

But how can a school be recognised as a professional learning community? According to Vescio et al. (2008) who cite the work of Newman (1996) and Dufour (2004), professional learning communities have five major characteristics:

- Shared values and norms.
- A clear and consistent focus on student learning.
- Reflective dialogue that leads to extensive and continuing conversations among teachers about curriculum, instruction, and student development.
- De-privatising practice to make teaching public.
- A focus on collaboration.

The findings of this study reveal that schools where teachers participate in in-class support programmes, tend to have developed a collaborative school culture where values and norms are shared and where teachers feel supported in making their practice public. The pupils' learning is the main focus of the programme. Thus many of the criteria cited by Vescio et al are met in these schools. However, reflective practice is not yet of paramount importance in these schools and there appears to be insufficient time for reflective dialogue and therefore no platform available to teachers for effective collaborative reflection. As a result schools cannot develop fully into professional learning communities. Chapter two concluded by stating that the potential exists within schools to 'grow' PLCs and the findings here provide evidence of that. But until such time as the whole area of reflective practice is addressed as an essential form of professional development for teachers, schools will remain mere seedlings of PLCs.

5.9 Conclusion

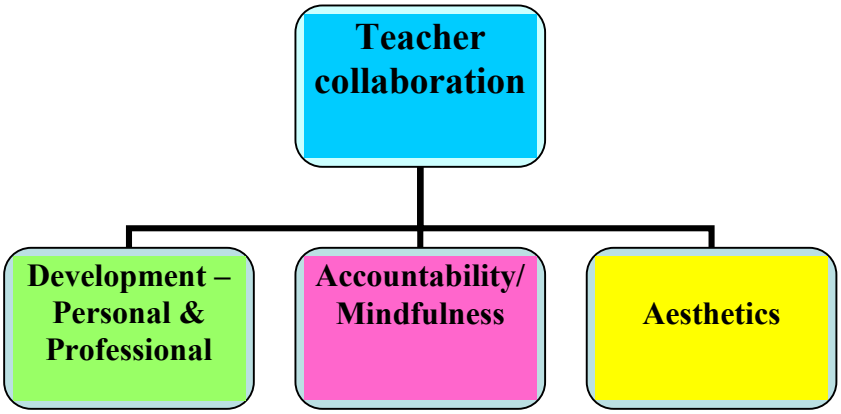
This chapter sought to reveal the relationship between teacher collaboration and teacher learning. Its findings were mainly positive in relation to teacher learning revealing that:

- The many opportunities that teachers avail of to share their practice unravel the shroud of silence in which teaching practice is wrapped. Many of these opportunities are stepping stones to working in full collaboration with colleagues and they can provide a non-threatening way to introduce teacher collaboration, thus acting as collaboration catalysts.

- Some collaboration catalysts have a high yield dividend for teacher collaboration and teacher learning, others have a lower yield dividend. In-class support programmes have a high potential for teacher learning.
- Teachers and principals report that there is an inherent element of accountability or collective mindfulness attached to in-class support programmes.
- Principals find that these programmes provide a threshold for observation which can be evaluative in a non-threatening way. Despite the rare opportunities available for appraisal and feedback teachers are motivated and empowered by constructive appraisal.
- In general there appears to be an openness to observation and collaboration which challenges the idea of the 'legendary autonomy' (OECD, 1991) of the Irish teacher.
- Evidence from the interviews revealed that engagement in in-class support affects teacher identity and agency because there is an identity shift when new understandings occur. Teachers play out new roles which challenge long-held assumptions and beliefs. They become less fearful and less restricted and work toward their core values, revealing their substantive self.
- The survey revealed that a minority of teachers will always prefer to work alone especially veteran teachers who haven't engaged in voluntary off-site professional development and have spent a life-time working in one particular way.
- Evidence from the on-going collaborative programmes suggests that external professional development is necessary for teachers to make changes in their practice.
- Evidence from the survey points to the fact that Irish teachers are very unsure of what reflective practice entails and many of those who were familiar with it felt that they did not have enough time to adequately reflect on their work.

Overall, the findings on teacher learning through collaboration with colleagues appear to illuminate three positive elements as diagram 5a shows:

Diagram 5a: Three important elements of teacher learning through collaboration



If teacher collaboration incorporates elements of professional and personal development, a sense of accountability or mindfulness and an aesthetic element, is this the way forward for teacher scholarship and professionalism?

The findings of this chapter reveal that effective collaborative programmes positively impact on teacher learning. These programmes, though having very positive benefits for teachers are designed specifically with student learning as the focus. The following chapter looks specifically at the relationship between teacher collaboration and student learning.

Chapter 6 - Teacher collaboration and student learning

> *Our results suggest that schools with greater levels of teacher collaboration did indeed have significantly higher levels of student achievement. Thus, not only is collaboration good for teachers…by fostering teacher learning - but it is also positively related to student achievement.*
>
> (Goddard & Goddard, 2007 p.893)

This chapter addresses the third research question of this study establishing how teacher collaboration influences students' opportunities for learning. In Goddard et al's study which was cited in chapter two, it is proposed that the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement is likely to be indirect as the most important outcome of teacher collaboration may be that teachers learn how to improve their instructional practice. The evidence presented in chapter five of this study clearly revealed this to be the case. However, before considering the outcomes of teacher collaboration it is important to restate the main aim of the teacher collaboration researched for this study as outlined in chapter two.

Mainstream staff and support staff must work collaboratively and share expertise if a successful inclusive programme is to be implemented (Westwood, 2003). Student learning and achievement is at the core of a collaborative programme of work designed by a class teacher and a support teacher. It is the major focus; the driving force of the programme; the reason for teacher collaboration. It could be argued that enhancement of student learning is at the core of every collaborative effort even one that is aimed at school improvement as is the case in Goddard et al's study. Their evidence which was drawn from a survey of 47 elementary schools with 452 teachers and 2,536 fourth-grade students showed that students have higher achievement in mathematics and reading when they attend schools characterised by higher levels of teacher collaboration for school improvement. The findings presented and analysed in this chapter seek to establish if the aim of improved student learning is reached through collaborative programmes of work, either directly or indirectly. The following questions frame the findings in this chapter:

- Does in-class support positively affect student learning opportunities?

- In what ways does it affect student learning?
- What evidence is there to suggest that in-class support results in increased achievement levels?
- What other learning opportunities are influenced by teacher collaboration?
- What type of learning arises from teacher collaboration?

The survey data provided some positive comments in relation to student learning as a result of teacher collaboration. The interview data provided richer descriptions from the teachers of how the students benefited. Most of this data is based on teachers' perceptions of pupil achievement. However, findings from the case study show that teachers were able to assess the outcomes of their collaborative programme in terms of data that indicate changed teaching practices and improved student learning. Such formative assessment of pupil learning has recently emerged as being necessary for school improvement but it is something that is not yet established as common practice in schools (Vescio et al, 2008).

6.1 Improving student learning opportunities through teacher collaboration

The findings of this study have already established that teachers working collaboratively enhance their practice through observation, dialogue and participation in shared activities. At this point the research findings are analysed to establish if students' learning opportunities are increased and enhanced when teachers work collaboratively in the classroom.

In the postal survey, respondents were asked why they engaged in in-class support. Almost all respondents (92%) were concerned with the benefits for the pupils that in-class support offers:

> Children can learn with their class and at the same time receive one to one tuition
>
> With two teachers children have more opportunity for collaborative learning and active learning than in a single teacher classroom.
>
> It gives pupils an opportunity to work in mixed groupings, gives support to class teaching and I can observe learning-support pupils in a class context.
>
> I can support a greater number of pupils and it makes differentiation more possible when there are two of us.

The respondents have raised a number of issues here which suggest that the collaborative practice of teachers benefits pupils. Working in class with the class

teacher allows learning-support teachers to observe their students in the classroom context, providing evidence of how students perform amongst their peers. Two teachers working together in the classroom increase the possibility of supported group work where active learning can take place in small groups providing students with a greater chance for social interaction with their peers while at the same time ensuring that they receive the support they need to scaffold their learning. In-class support programmes appear to avoid fragmentation, broaden the scope of SEN support, enable differentiation and promote variety and enjoyment of learning. These issues are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

6.1.1 Avoiding a fragmented programme

One of the principals in the survey commented that in-class support provides the pupil with continuity in their learning programme more so than withdrawal because it demands that there is a very close link between what is taught by the class teacher and the learning-support teacher. Other comments from principals supported this finding:

> In-class is better for pupils. Teachers must liaise re programme of work.

> There is a greater understanding of the child's capabilities on both sides when in-class is used.

Similarly in the interviews the teachers agreed that in-class support meant that the programme of work was continuous rather than fragmented which can be the case when the withdrawal system of support is used:

> **Bernie:** A lot of withdrawal isn't great unless you're really in touch with the teacher the whole time. You could be working away and doing the wrong type of thing. I think the class teacher definitely has to work with you. It's fine to have kids withdrawn but you must know what's going on in the class and you must know what they're going back into so you're preparing them for it. When I was the class teacher the resource teacher would have taken them away and they could have been doing anything.

Bernie finds fault with the withdrawal system of learning support as work programmes can be fragmented unless teachers are constantly in touch with one another. Despite each teacher working intensively with a pupil, the fact that they are in separate locations, often without commonly agreed-upon objectives, can mean that the fruits of their labour are quickly lost as there is no reporting of progress between teachers and therefore the gains are not generalised (Jordan, 1994, p.13). Such fragmentation is avoided when in-class support is used, ensuring continuity in pupil's learning.

In the following account Karen also raises the issue of fragmentation in pupil's learning when withdrawal is used:

> **Karen:** There's great contact too with in-class support. It leads to better contact with the class teacher because you're in there and they discuss things with you whereas if you're withdrawing kids all the time, that doesn't happen. The teachers don't often know what you're doing anyway in withdrawal. You give them the IEP but sometimes they don't read it and they say' What are you doing' ? But with in-class the teachers are inclined to approach you more. You get more satisfaction because as a resource teacher, sometimes you only interact with a couple of pupils if you're withdrawing them so it's very good to interact with a class.

Just as Bernie described, Karen too feels that a pupil's learning is more fragmented when a system of withdrawal is used. She states that the IEP, though recommended to be jointly written, may not be used as a working document. In in-class support, the fact that the support teacher is working in the classroom regularly means that there is more contact time between teachers. Additionally, the support teacher gets the opportunity to interact with a class as opposed to only three or four pupils as in a withdrawal setting, thus broadening the scope of the SEN teacher.

6.1.2 Broadening the scope of SEN support in schools

The findings show that another advantage of in-class support for the pupil is that the learning support teacher gets a chance to support other children especially those who may be on the borderline of receiving learning support. Due to the learning-support teacher's caseload these students would have to cope without extra support in a school where withdrawal only was used:

> **Phil:** There are huge benefits in staying in a classroom and supporting within a classroom because you can actually support three or four other children besides the target children. This is the whole idea and that is wonderful. You're actually spreading the learning among others.
> I have taught mainstream before and it's very difficult in a large class situation when you do know a child is struggling and yet you're not free to give them the extra time that is badly needed. You're frustrated. It can be very difficult for a class teacher who is skilled and as good as any of the teachers who are withdrawing the children and yet they're frustrated by the lack of time. You're stuck for time and feeling very guilty about it and sad for the child because you know quite well that with a little bit of extra time you could make something of their difficulties you could improve them somewhat. So in-class gives them the boost they need.

For Phil, the ability to address the needs of all of the pupils is a positive outcome of in-class support. In chapter four in her account of how she operates a system of in-class, Phil describes working quietly at the back of the room with the 'weaker' pupils. However, it is possible that the process is more flexible than she initially describes as

she talks here about helping other children when she is in the room. This is evidence of the gap between what she actually does and what she says she does. It resonates with Schon's (1983) idea of 'knowing more than we can say' and Polanyi's (1958) notion of 'tacit knowledge'. In Phil's earlier description of her work she neglected to include the important fact that she was able to support more learners through in-class support. Her daily work has possibly become automatic and no longer available to consciousness (Huberman, 1993), which strengthens the argument for the necessity of all teachers to become critically reflective practitioners.

Supporting more pupils is a benefit of in-class support as the additional manpower of the support teacher avoids a situation that Phil has experienced, where the class teacher becomes frustrated at her inability to support all learners and feels guilty as a result. Such guilt can become de-motivating and disabling in one's work and one's life (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 142). In-class in this instance, 'kills two birds with one stone'. The teacher is supported in her overwhelming workload. Meanwhile the pupils who need support are getting the help they need. The learning-support teacher is in touch with all of the pupils and supports those who need help at different times. She gains a wider perspective of all pupils' needs in the school, thus broadening the scope of SEN support. This is an important finding which supports the use of in-class support as put by one principal in the survey:

> In-class support means that more children can be targeted, especially those who are not under the 10th percentile.

6.1.3 Differentiation: Challenging every child

Many respondents in the survey mentioned the term 'differentiation' when stating their reasons for using in-class support. As outlined in chapter two, differentiation refers to personalising instruction based on individual pupils' strengths, abilities, interests, prior knowledge and preferred learning modes (Tomlinson, 1999). It means ensuring there is an emotionally safe learning environment, appropriate levels of challenge and individual interpretation of skills and ideas (Tomlinson and Layne-Kalbfleisch, 1998).
The NCCA (2007) guidelines for teachers of students with mild general learning disabilities recommends differentiating work by level, pace, interest, access and response, structure, sequence, teaching style and teaching time. Structures such as individual work, pair work, and varied group work are suggested. Differentiation, though logical in theory can prove quite difficult in practice. Much of the difficulty

associated with differentiating practice appears to be that it is almost impossible for the teacher to do alone (Brookfield, 1995; John-Steiner, 2000; Tomlinson, 2003; Westwood, 2003). Therefore collaborative practices where two or more teachers work together may make it more possible to address the needs of all pupils. This is one of the key arguments of this research study and it lends support to teacher collaboration as a way of countering criticisms often associated with teaching in disadvantage settings, namely that the curriculum is often diluted and not challenging for every student, often repetitive and rarely involves higher order thinking (Conway, 2002). When the class teacher and the support teacher plan, implement and assess a collaborative programme of work the danger of curriculum dilution can be avoided.

In the following account Estelle highlights how difficult it can be for the lone class teacher to address all pupils' needs. She maintains that the weaker pupils are only surviving in whole class teaching:

> **Estelle:** Mainstream teaching is such that you're at the top of the class. You're one body and you've a class varying from 20 to 30. You're standing there teaching, the good children are benefiting and the weak children are only surviving the best way that they can. It's so hard to include everybody. So it can be of benefit, bringing support into the classrooms. It also benefits those children who get one to one by further reinforcement plus it includes other children in the class. With the in-class support programme, the priority is to target every child, weak children, middle of the road children and the good children, so that every child is challenged. It's a very good way of getting children to read at the different levels that they are able to read at and nobody is left out, everybody is included.

In Karen's school, I spoke briefly with a Senior Infant pupil who was working in a group as part of the Literacy Lift-Off programme and asked him if he liked doing this type of work. Karen informed me later that he was a child who had a mild general learning difficulty. He stated that he preferred when the class teacher worked alone in the room!

> I like it better when it's just my own teacher because when the other teachers come in the work gets very hard and you have to keep doing it. I can't just sit down, like I do when my own teacher is here.

The pupil's comments support what Estelle said about every child being challenged through in-class support. Here is an example of a child who is challenged through in-class support but not so through whole class teaching. His comments reveal that in-class support programmes, using group-work, can mean that weaker children are challenged and engaged more than in whole class teaching. Each child's performance

can be assisted in the ZPD. The conditions are such that the teacher can be aware of the child's actual in-flight performance (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988). As stated in chapter two, using small groups instead of whole class teaching will not be enough in itself to improve pedagogy. However, there will be greater chance for student talk and engagement especially when the teacher is aware of the importance of student talk for student learning (Alexander, 2005). Teachers working with a smaller group of children can scaffold and wait for pupil response rather than passing over the weaker child. Each child is involved in the lesson and has less chance to switch off because the level of work is not too difficult for him as happens in whole class teaching. He reads at his own level. As Estelle points out it is possible to cater for individual needs through the 'Literacy Lift-Off' programme and in an inclusive setting it is essential to do so as Williams and Bauer suggest:

> The diversity of students in to day's classrooms contributes to an interesting kaleidoscope of individual needs, including reading abilities and interests. Good teachers become accountable to the students and adjust the curriculum accordingly. They are wise enough to recognize that not all students read at grade level and that some advanced readers could be left behind if they are not challenged with interesting materials on their reading level. Knowing that ongoing assessment informs instruction, teachers must match reading materials to the student (2006, p.20).

In her evaluation of the collaborative work on literacy in her school Estelle echoes what Williams and Bauer say:

> **Estelle:** Children who are failing to read will never improve their literacy skills if they are presented every day with a graded class reader. I believe it makes them negative towards reading. They must read a wide variety of books at their own level. Teamwork between class teacher and support teacher is very necessary in a disadvantaged area because no one teacher can possibly cater for all the literacy needs of all the pupils in his/her class.

The findings here are significant in that they reveal that in-class support, specifically literacy groupings, as Literacy Lift-Off in this case, can make effective differentiation a possibility in schools. As well as selecting appropriate levels of reading for the different abilities within the classroom it is also important to vary instruction and bring enjoyment into the programme.

When the pupil is exposed to different learning opportunities throughout the day, the school day becomes more varied and more enjoyable. The classroom becomes an enjoyable place even for the SEN child who may feel lost in a whole class situation. Using group work with two or more teachers makes it easier to use concrete materials

especially in the junior classes as the class teacher doesn't have to organise all of the materials. The organisation is shared, distribution is easier and use of materials is better supported. The class teacher can get the opportunity to assess the needs of all pupils as Karen reports on the Literacy Lift Off programme:

> **Karen:** I would say the literacy programme in Senior Infants, the Literacy Lift-off, is the most successful because the children are in small groups and we have three teachers with the three groups. So their class teacher is very happy because he spots the problems there and then. The teachers don't always stay at the same station so he is able to see blending and reading and he is seeing writing and some magnetic letters or another writing aspect so he isn't just being exposed to how the children are writing or how the children are reading. There's great variety and then the kids enjoy the in-class support.

Karen mentions the use of the magnetic boards and letters for word-blending. This brings a kinaesthetic element to the programme, and the children are constantly actively engaged. Estelle supports this view:

> **Estelle:** There is a multi-sensory aspect to it. By participating in the word building with the magnetic letters, the children are actually involved in it as well. They see it, they change it, they physically break up the words, they repeat it again and again. All children are looking on, they get involved. It's their own work as well, it's not just the teacher saying -'This is the word cat'. The children are actually making the word 'cat' and checking it and it's reinforcing their learning on a daily basis.

Providing the children with enjoyable learning experiences is essential if learning is to be effective. In Oak Tree School Liz raises the enjoyment aspect:

> We all want scores, scores, scores but we forget about the enjoyment sometimes, and how important it is.

Liz points out that teachers are very often too focused on 'scores' and the whole enjoyment factor is forgotten. In our current educational system there is tremendous emphasis placed on standardised tests and we wonder why pupils seem unimaginative and uninspired (Robinson, 2009, p. 16). In DEIS schools where literacy levels are generally low, literacy instruction needs to be systematic, intensive, direct and comprehensive (Birsh, J. 2005, p. 1). But for intensive instruction to be successful, it must include motivation for children and therefore the 'fun' and 'enjoyment' in learning to read and write must not be forgotten. Students in disadvantaged areas need to be engaged in learning programmes that include "motivation, enjoyment, accomplishment and self-worth (Williams & Bauer, 2006, p.21).

In this section the documented findings are important as they have revealed why learning opportunities for students are increased through the collaborative practices of teachers; avoiding fragmentation, broadening the scope of SEN support, enabling differentiation and promoting variety and enjoyment of learning. The next section analyses the findings in relation to how these increased learning opportunities impact positively on student learning.

6.2 The impact of collaborative practices on student learning

The findings of this study highlight two areas that are positively affected by the use of in- class support: student self-esteem and increased achievement levels. These two areas appear to be interdependent. For a student to reach his potential he needs to have confidence and belief in his capabilities. Having a positive sense of self-esteem increases the chances of learning something new and the ability to learn something new enhances one's self-esteem. When we fail to learn something as quickly and easily as we would like, we risk experiencing public embarrassment and private humiliation as well as fear, anxiety and pain (Brookfield, 1995). For many students in the classroom failure to learn what the teacher is teaching can be terrifying and intimidating. In a study by Glazzard (2010) on the impact of dyslexia on student's self-esteem, a feeling of isolation was a consistent theme across the interview data. Students indicated that they felt isolated and left out because they were finding the work more difficult than other people in the class. Escaping to the resource room may be a more attractive alternative. However, experiencing a system where support is available in the classroom can alleviate the fears of many students and enable them to experience success rather than failure.

6.2.1 Improvement of self-esteem and confidence

All of the support teachers in this study who use in-class support also use the withdrawal system of support. They balance the type of support the student receives. Withdrawal of the pupils who need support is deemed necessary. It has been the tried and trusted method used in Irish schools since the introduction of learning support in 1963 and support teachers have found that "withdrawal teaching enables focused work on individualized targets to take place in an atmosphere of calm and concentration" (Gross, 1996, p. 89). According to Anderson, if " tuition is sensitively timetabled and fully individualised via a suitably engaging multi-sensory structured programme, then withdrawal support, preferably on a one-to-one basis, is the best way to accelerate

progress in basic literacy skills and thereby promote inclusion… It is vital that tuition is delivered by skilful experienced practitioners who are well trained and who ensure that the pace and progression of learning is appropriate" (Anderson, 2009).

However, despite the widely accepted view that 'weak' students need withdrawal support, the study of literacy support teaching in Ireland done by Shiel, Morgan and Larney in 1998 showed only modest progress after intervention using withdrawal for the 124 pupils studied (Nugent, 2010). The question that arises here is if withdrawal is as necessary as teachers assume? Is it the best method? Are teachers using withdrawal out of habit and also because organising a system of complete in-class support is too arduous and time consuming? Such a question cannot be answered here as to date there is no evidence to show that in-class support all the way through a pupil's schooling is an effective alternative to withdrawal. As yet research has not established which method is most effective and researchers will be unable to do so until such time as in-class is used systematically over a long period of time.

One principal in this study promotes the use of all in-class support rather than a balance in his school because he believes "it is the perfect way to gently scaffold the child's areas of weakness". Recalling Vygotsky's view of the education of special needs children which was outlined in chapter two, he deemed the social isolation of children with special needs as "unlawful segregation" and proposed a model of special education called "integration based on positive differentiation" (Vygotsky, 1995, pp.114,167). Vygotsky advised that "only a truly differentiated learning environment can fully develop the higher psychological functions and overall personality of a child with a disability" (Gindis, 2003, p. 212).

Despite how we may 'dress up' the withdrawal system of learning support and make it a very pleasant, enjoyable and successful learning experience for students, the daily visit to the resource room is a constant reminder of a student's failure. Bowers (1997) suggests that older primary-aged pupils do not like being picked out for extra support as it shows publicly that they are different. One principal in the survey who was in favour of in-class support believed that the withdrawal system implicitly states 'Out you go, you're too weak to stay!' Students who are constantly withdrawn can therefore have a negative view of their learning ability. To be 'chosen' to attend withdrawal

groups for extra literacy tuition labels pupils as 'needy' or 'failing' by staff, and this has the inevitable result of limiting the options from which pupils can position themselves as learners (Benjamin, 2002; Anderson, 2009).

Teachers in the survey of this study suggested that the use of in-class support can have a positive impact on student self-esteem and confidence:

> It helps weaker students not to feel different all the time
>
> It's less isolating for the SEN students
>
> It certainly impacts positively on the self-esteem of the child
>
> It gets rid of the stigma that is attached to withdrawal
>
> All students see SEN teacher as teacher not just for SEN children.

All of these comments suggest that withdrawal can damage a child's self esteem not only because they are perceived as unable to remain with their peers but also because they need the support of the SEN teacher. However, in-class support is not always the better alternative. In-class support must be carefully structured to avoid a situation that puts the weaker pupils in the spotlight. In chapter four, Phil described the in-class support she was involved in, taking the weaker pupils to the back of the room and working quietly with them on an easier exercise. This is an example of how in-class support can be exclusive rather than inclusive. Teachers need to be aware of the importance of supporting not only the child's academic needs but also the child's need to be accepted as an equal by their peers. "Effective, caring teachers know already that what these pupils need is to be included in the learning process and not marginalised" (de Pear, 1997, p. 21).

In the following account from Bernie, it is evident that her way of working with Anna, the class teacher, means she is seen as another 'normal' teacher and not specifically the SEN teacher. In chapter 4, Table 4F along with the observation reported in Appendix 10, described Bernie's and Anna's way of working which was quite unique. Bernie operated a balanced system of withdrawal and in-class support, not always withdrawing the weaker children but withdrawing a heterogeneous group:

> **Bernie**: The fact that the two of us were working together, the kids could see the cooperation. Sometimes I would take the main class and sometimes Anna would take the main class. Sometimes I was seen as the resource teacher, other times I wasn't so it got rid of the stigma for children that needed to go to resource. I think also the fact that the kids

> who got either an A or 100% in the weekly maths test also came out to me meant that no-one knew who needed help then. I think we've got rid of this learning difficulty stigma. The kids aren't even aware of it as such. Years ago you would have been because the weak child was being taken out of the class the whole time whereas they're totally involved in the class now and all children get the chance to come out.

The main advantage of in-class support for the pupils Bernie is dealing with is getting rid of the stigma of 'learning difficulties' as a result of the blurring of roles between the support teacher and the class teacher. Bernie takes the role of class teacher while Anna supports and vice versa. All pupils are supported in their learning. Pupils therefore are less aware of Bernie's role in supporting the weaker pupils, and pupils' confidence levels increase. During my time in 'Ivy Lane School', I spoke briefly with one of the 6th class pupils and asked her opinion on having two teachers in the room. She stated that two teachers in the room was "great, especially in group work for the shy girls because you never hear them talking in front of the whole class". The findings here are important as they show how effective in-class support, along with the withdrawal of heterogeneous groups appear to have a positive impact on pupil self-esteem. If a student has been withdrawn for learning support for as long as he can remember, he will begin to expect that he will not to be able to achieve in the classroom context; he expects failure. However, if his learning in the classroom has been scaffolded and adequately supported, and the fear and prospect of failure is removed he will expect success and be motivated to achieve. But does this increased self-esteem lead to an improvement in student performance and achievement?

6.2.2 The possibility of increased achievement levels

The principals in this study claim that the in-class support programmes had a positive impact on the achievement levels of the children. It is important to note here that these claims are made through teacher report only and lack of longitudinal assessment data means that these claims cannot be substantiated. However what is important here is that the principals and teachers attributed increased achievement levels to the changes used by teachers in their approach to supporting pupils' learning. They believe their new ways of working are making a difference.

Liz claimed that their in-class programmes directly affected the literacy levels:

> **Liz:** Well we've made huge strides in the last number of years, between the Literacy morning, the Literacy Lift-off initiative, the Junior Infant in-class intervention, and the Senior Infant letters and sounds in-class intervention. Now these children are going into 2nd class and we've done and are doing great things. I'd love the results to get even better but they were excellent this year compared to other years when none of this was going on.

Principals, Bríd and Patricia also witnessed the effects of the in-class programmes at junior level:

> **Bríd:**The results of the standardised tests of those gone into 1st and 2nd have improved and we attribute that to the in-class phonics programme. The children's spellings improved an awful lot too.
> **Patricia:** The test results, all the assessment tests that we did….we have seen a raising of the standards.

The positive effects of in-class support at a more senior level were highlighted in Ivy Lane school by Bernie and Anna who have seen the positive effects of their joint work:

> Our in-class Maths programme is successful. It has even shown in the entrance exams that the two of us working together definitely has made a big difference

Rose, their principal, reinforces what they say. Numeracy was targeted in their updated school mathematics policy and pupils attained much higher entrance exam results than previous years:

> **Rose:** In the results from the Community school this year, in the entrance exam results, the lowest result from the kids was 69%. Now that's a big change for us, a big change.

Liz, an administrative principal, was personally involved in the Literacy Lift-Off programme in Oak Tree School on a few occasions. She considered the programme a success for more reasons than raising reading standards:

> **Liz:** I was only asked once or twice to fill in and when I was asked I thought 'Oh I hope I'll be able for this'*(laugh),* but it was lovely. I couldn't believe the writing that the children could do, unaided really. I was very impressed by the reading and their concentration. and actually even the routine of it. I was extremely impressed at how they just moved from station to station without any talking or messing. Teachers who don't want to engage in these in-class programmes put up those arguments-'It will be too noisy, too talkative, children shouldn't be moving' but the children just moved like clockwork. It was incredible and I feel those children have become more independent as readers from it and will develop a love for reading which is very important .

With first-hand experience of the in-class literacy programme, Liz challenges the opposing arguments put forward by those who do not wish to participate. Her experience taught her that many of the arguments are unfounded and she describes the experience as 'lovely' and 'incredible'. Her comments are further testimony to the learning for principals that can occur through being involved in the literacy programmes. Being involved keeps her in touch with the innovative methodologies used by the teachers. From her involvement in the project she was able to observe what she saw as an improvement in the students' reading abilities. Karen's comments support this finding that participation in-class support programmes provides visual evidence of student achievement:

> **Karen:** Definitely one of the best parts is that the evidence is visual for the classroom teacher. They do see the huge improvement and they can actually diagnose the problems quicker. They are a lot happier with in-class support.

Karen talks specifically about the benefits of the Literacy Lift-Off programme. She states that the evidence is visual for the class teacher and they can see huge improvements spotting the problems that arise as they move from station to station, doing different work daily, rather than staying at one station for the duration of the programme. In-class support incorporates movement for teachers from group to group affording them and their principals an alternative perspective on their students' learning. Here Karen raises the issue of assessment through teacher observation. It is an interesting finding in that she appears to have confidence in assessing the students through observation. The next section examines the assessment methods used by the interviewed teachers and asks should we incorporate new assessment measures into our teaching practice if we want to be certain that teachers' collaborative practices impact positively on student learning?

6.2.3 Importance of assessment

Improving standardised test results can put the emphasis on testing rather than assessment and tends to marginalize children and force teachers to assume the role of clerks (Giroux, 1992). Teachers teach the content required, delivering the curriculum as scripted instruction rather than teaching for understanding (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In terms of achievement, standardised test results can reduce each student to a mere statistic. However, ongoing assessment of student learning tends to be more effective for the individual learning of each student and more meaningful for the teacher who cares deeply about her work and her students. According to Phil, in Lavender school, an increase in a pupil's confidence and self-esteem is a true assessment of something that is working:

> **Phil:** One of the main ways I evaluate success is by the child's own self-esteem really. How much more comfortable they are with themselves in the classroom. They're beginning to feel, not as different. They become much more comfortable in the group situation and they become more brave to speak and not afraid of their inabilities.
> Teacher observation is the real assessment tool. Good teacher observation is much more meaningful for us. The standardised tests give us a kind of comparison with how they're getting on with their peers but the real study of a child and how they're getting on is done by the observation of teachers.

Teacher observation is the assessment tool used here and Phil mentions pupils feeling more comfortable, feeling less different and being brave enough to speak in front of

peers. Though standardised tests are a feature of assessment in Lavender School, and are beneficial for comparative reasons, good teacher observation where a pupil's whole demeanour is observed on a continual basis, appears to hold more meaning for teachers. It resonates with the whole 'care' element of teaching and how teachers' work in the classroom is interlocked in a network of human relationships. It is the quality of these relationships which determines much of the outcomes of education. A strong care orientation is closely linked with positive school climates which foster pupil achievement, when accompanied by high expectations, challenging work and a clear focus on teaching and learning (Nias, 1989; Osborn, 1996). Teacher observation or teachers' knowledge of how a pupil is progressing on every level is part of the 'pathic' knowledge of teaching. This form of knowledge is conditional for excellence in teacher professional performance, though it is not necessarily measurable in terms of the familiar domains of cognitions, affects and skills (Van Manen, 1999, p. 83).

Similar to Phil's account Karen talks about the importance of teacher observation in the following comment stating that she relies a lot on her powers of observation:

> **Karen:** I was thinking about how I evaluate success the other day and there's two things. Firstly, it's if their self-esteem has improved and secondly if they improve academically. They're dependent on each other really. When a child actually realises ' I am reading better' then they do get more self-confident. I use my own observation a lot. We use the graded system of the literacy books so if they're able to move up the levels, it's success. Now at the end of the year we compare Micra- T results and Sigma- T and Drumcondra . We can see if have they improved or not but I wouldn't rely solely on standardised tests.

Karen believes that an increase in a pupil's self-esteem is closely linked to improved academic achievements. Though standardised tests and reading levels are important to assess success, they are not enough. Both Karen and Phil rate teacher observation as an important assessment tool for teachers but it is unclear whether these observations are recorded in any systematic way. The question arises here whether written records of teacher observation should feature as a regular part of teachers' work? The NCCA (2007) recommend that written records of observations allow the teacher to describe a child's learning in context and hence make the planning of further work more focused and systematic. Though helpful in this respect such records may overburden teachers with mandatory paperwork. When teachers become reflective practitioners, written reflections of their practice will incorporate pupil's holistic performance and achievement or indeed difficulties. Such reflections on practice may avoid the necessity of completing numerous record sheets to fulfil a requirement. Assessment in the form

of a reflective learning log or journal involves a useful and informative reflection on how pupils respond to a teacher's practice. This reiterates the need for all teachers to develop as reflective practitioners. But, to date, teacher assessment methods have rarely prioritised teacher reflection and meaning-making. It is essential then that the process of 'reflection' is taught and scaffolded in a very conscious way in teacher education courses (Rath, 2009).

In Oak Tree School, Estelle constantly monitors the children's progress and suggests that children's work samples are valuable evaluation tools:

> **Estelle:** Well I evaluate success because I have to monitor the children daily. And in the Literacy morning on a Friday, you monitor and record what they're able to write, what they're able to read and what they're able to do. It's how they can work independently. Samples of the children's work are a good evaluation tool and for the reading, listening to them read is very important and listening to how they read, what they look for in the printed text.

In addition to the children's work samples, listening to how the children read is also a valuable form of assessment. Learning-support teachers withdrawing a small group of students for literacy support have the space and time to assess student learning in this way on a daily basis. When a child reads orally, the teacher learns a great deal about whether the child is making sense of what is being read by looking closely at the types of errors the child makes. Support teachers can use running records and miscue analysis as ways of analysing the errors a child makes during oral reading. According to Lingard (2000), helping children to solve the specific problems they encounter when reading at their own level is the key to success for low attainers and they need to practise every day. Class teachers faced with teaching a large number of students and covering a wide curriculum cannot find the time to do any such intensive work. However using in-class support can make this possible for the class teacher as one principal put it succinctly:

> In-class support ensures that every child is heard reading on a regular basis

The findings in this section show how teachers evaluate student achievement in various ways. The importance given to teacher observation should not be underestimated and efficient ways of recording observations should be considered by teachers. Despite the negative connotations attached to standardised tests, schools also use standardised testing as an indicator of effective teaching practice. By focusing on continuous results and areas of weakness within the tests, schools can work on areas that need improving

and raise results from year to year. The standardised tests become important for more than the mere results.

6.3 Evidence of student learning in Oak Tree School

In the studies reported in chapter two, Cunningham (2006), Kennedy (2008), and the NSEF Report (2009) all highlight the importance of a framework for literacy in disadvantaged schools that places planning and assessment high on the priority list. In 2006, Oak Tree School began to use the results of standardised testing as a yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of newly designed literacy programmes. This assessment coincided with the formation of the mandatory DEIS three year plan in 2007:

> Section 5 of the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan for educational inclusion places an increased emphasis on planning at school and school cluster level, target-setting and measurement of progress and outcomes to ensure that the increased investment under the DEIS initiative is matched by an improvement in educational outcomes for the children and young people concerned. It provides that a tailored planning template will be developed for implementation, through the School Development Planning Support (SDPS) service, in primary schools participating in the School Support Programme (SSP) under the DEIS initiative.
> (PPDS, 2008, DEIS Three Year Plan Background, from Social Inclusion Unit, DES)

Since 2007, schools are therefore required to compile their three year plans showing how improvement in educational outcomes will be achieved. In Oak Tree School, the Literacy project outlined in chapter three was included as part of the three year plan (Appendix 13).

With the Literacy project in place, teachers in Oak Tree School found for the first time that all pupils were grasping letters, phonics and basic reading skills. To 'catch pupils before they fall', McPhilips and Shevlin (2009) suggest that literacy teaching for pupils must include all of the skills or abilities that are essential to reading development. They recommend that pupils with low literacy skills experience early intervention literacy programmes where a balance of instruction in reading and writing skills is used. As outlined in chapter three, the early intervention literacy project in Oak Tree School incorporated all of the following essential reading skills with writing featuring in all areas:

- Phonemic awareness instruction
- Explicit systematic phonics instruction
- Repeated oral reading practice with feedback and guidance
- Direct and indirect vocabulary instruction
- Comprehension strategies instructions

(National Reading Panel, US, 2000).

Throughout the programme, assessment results were examined. The Middle Infants Screening Test (MIST) is administered annually in the third term of Senior Infants. This test has five sub-tests:

- Listening Skills,
- Letter/sounds identification
- Written vocabulary
- Three phoneme words
- Dictation.

A comparison of results of the MIST prior to the project and after the project reveals improvements especially in the areas of prior weakness- written vocabulary, three phoneme words and sentence dictation. It is important here to point out that it is not possible to draw decisive conclusions from this comparison as this study is not an experimental one. However, the results are noteworthy. Table 6A shows the scores for the years 2003, 2004, 2009 and 2010 in the five sub-tests:

Table 6A : MIST scores 2003 & 2004 in comparison to 2009 & 2010

Sub-test	Maximum possible score	Mean score 2003 (n=22)	Mean score 2004 (n=18)	Mean score 2009(n= 18)	Mean score 2010 (n=22)	Is there a noticeable difference?
Listening skills	**15**	12.16	9.55	13.31	12.09	Little difference
Letter sounds	**26**	14.16	16.17	26.00	22.73	Big difference
Written vocabulary	**no max.**	3.11	2.88	33.25	26.55	Major difference
Three phoneme words	**30**	5.74	10.2	29.10	23.64	Major difference
Sentence dictation	**36**	0.21	3.9	33.10	26.60	Major difference

From the above results it is clear that the students of 2003 and 2004 were unable to write little if any dictated sentences. Their written vocabulary and three-phoneme word scores were extremely low in comparison to the scores of the 2009 and 2010 students.

To test if the difference is statistically significant, differences in scores between the groups were investigated using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. Scores on the MIST subtests were described using the median and the inter-quartile range (IQR). All statistical analyses were performed using PASW 18. All tests were two-sided and a p-value <0.05 was considered to be statistically significant. Table 6B presents the results of the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 6B: Comparison of MIST subtest scores between the groups

	2003 + 2004 group (n=38)	2009 + 2010 group (n=38)	
	median(IQR)		p-value*
Listening skills (max score=15)	11.50 (9.75 to 13.00)	13.00 (10.75 to 15.00)	0.013
Letter sounds (max score = 26)	16.00 (9.00 to 20.25)	26.00 (25.00 to 26.00)	<0.001
Written vocabulary (no max)	2.50 (1.00 to 4.00)	32.00 (29.50 to 35.00)	<0.001
Three phoneme words (max score = 30)	4.50 (0.00 to 14.50)	29.00 (26.75 to 29.00)	<0.001
Sentence dictation (max score = 36)	0.00 (0.00 to 1.00)	33.00 (27.75 to 35.00)	<0.001

* From Mann-Whitney U test

The table shows that there is a statistically significant difference in all the MIST subtest scores between the groups with the 2009 and 2010 groups performing better on all subtests. Prior to the literacy project the results of the latter three subtests of the MIST

were consistently low. From 2006 there has been a steady improvement. The original scripts of the two highest scoring students from 2003 and 2010 were scanned and their written vocabulary sub-tests are presented on the following two pages providing very visual evidence of improvement. The first page shows the written vocabulary of the two highest scoring students in 2003 and the second shows those from 2010.

▲ Stephen CROWN

bike
Today
in it

▲

y o

yo - yo my

red so

Adam Walsh

nan 6 carfan canbad box got not ham

WRITTEN VOCABULARY

I	van	him	She
a	go	no	here
at	going	on	come
am	Look	up	This
is	Looking	mum	Alex
my	can	dad	bag
The	he	in	Like
Cat	for	rat	red
fox	not		

this That red

WRITTEN VOCABULARY

I	going	not	have
a	Look Hakim	get	can
at	Looking	is	come
am	my	up	had
no	cat	an	cup
the	fox	van	
go	me		

Cat pig day

There is a marked improvement. It is clear from the examples that the students' ability to write vocabulary has increased significantly in recent years. As noted in chapter three, there is an issue here in relation to the internal validity of these results. The improved results could possibly be attributed to a better intake of students in the latter years. However the teachers involved in the project believe that the improved achievement levels of the pupils is a direct result of their new ways of working. As this study is not an experimental study it is impossible to draw decisive conclusions but the raw scores and the teachers' reports seem to suggest that the new collaborative teaching methods used in Oak Tree School are positively influencing student learning opportunities. The teachers' practice has intensified; the teaching is more explicit and multi-sensory. The teachers are working smarter through their collaborations and the increase in their own learning opportunities has resulted in better and more focused teaching where students benefit. A recent reflective journal entry sums up the achievements of Oak Tree School.

> Today as Liz left my room she paused outside to look at the writing display by Senior Infants. She called me to look with her and also pointed out the procedural writing done by Junior Infants displayed further down the corridor. She commented on how wonderful it is to see such an improvement in our pupils' learning. She recalled frustrating times a few years back when our infants could barely write a few words. I agreed with her and told her how demoralised I had felt as a Junior Infant teacher for many years trying to do it all alone. It was such hard work with little dividend in terms of pupil learning! Liz affirmed my practice over the years acknowledging all the hard work but she smiled as she said- "We just hadn't found a better way - but now we have".
>
> Reflective Journal Entry, 15th Feb. 2011.

This conversation with Liz shows a school principal who is able to trace the development of pupil and teacher learning, by recalling how things were, seeing the improvement and acknowledging changes for the better.

6.4 Evaluation of the collaboration in Oak Tree School

The teachers in Oak Tree School have changed their ways of working. They have moved from working in isolation to working collaboratively and they believe that the changes in practice have resulted in increased student learning. The whole culture of the school has been positively affected and each year new ways of working

collaboratively are discovered and honed. All teachers are members of either the 'Literacy Committee' or the 'Numeracy Committee' and therefore involved in planning, implementing and assessing literacy and numeracy programmes with the aim of improving student learning and achievement. According to Bryk et al (2010), "high quality professional development in the context of a supportive professional community where teachers are oriented toward improvement appears powerfully related to gains in academic productivity" (p. 113). In the following sections the focus group interview and written evaluations by the teachers provide evidence that reveals a professional culture where student learning is the main focus.

6.4.1 A professional and integrated culture

Change in the professional culture of Oak Tree School is a significant finding because according to Vescio et al (2008) it demonstrates that establishing a professional learning community contributes to a fundamental shift in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their daily work in the classroom. In Louis and Marks (1998) study of the impact of PLCs, they documented that the presence of a professional community in a school contributes to higher levels of social support for achievement and higher levels of authentic pedagogy.

Evidence from Oak Tree School supports this view. Two of the teachers in Oak Tree School reflected on their collaborative ways of working in 2009 and wrote the following report as part of an article for Learning Teacher Network (LTN) international teachers' magazine. It reveals how the teachers have honed their craft with student learning as the specific focus of their practice:

> The most important aspect of this intervention programme is the inclusion of all children. The individual needs of the child have been met within this classroom setting. We have found that when groups are ability based, each child is challenged to achieve within his capabilities. The steady pace and variety of work-station teaching maintains the young child's interest and makes learning enjoyable for them. The adult/child ratio is reduced in comparison to whole class teaching, ensuring greater attention to each child's learning needs.
>
> From a professional point of view, in-class support enhances collaboration within the teaching community of the school. Teachers become adept at collaboratively monitoring, assessing and targeting the progress of each child. The school becomes a place where on-site professional development is consistently taking place.
>
> Overall, in-class support programmes have been very successful in raising the literacy and numeracy achievements of the children in our classes.
>
> (Susan 7 years teaching, Annie, 13 years teaching)

This written reflection contains all of the four elements cited by Newmann (1996) as being inherent in learning communities: teacher collaboration, a focus on student learning, teacher agency and continuous teacher learning. Teachers in the focus group interview supported the finding that collaborative programmes focusing on student learning, intensify teachers' practice:

> **Susan:** We sit down and we have 10 minutes with each group and you teach more in that 10 minutes because it's so intense.
>
> **Eilís:** I can keep on the pressure in the groups. That few minutes with them is golden. You can give them the specific help they need at that time…that's specific to them.
>
> **Alice:** It is so intense. And you don't expect that. I think it's so hidden ….you think that oh great there's four people in…I've a group of five…… not a bother…but it is so intense.

The comments here show how the small group work as part of the in-class support requires teachers to work harder and smarter than before. But they are supported by colleagues in their work as this is how the whole school works together now as newcomer Teresa points out:

> **Theresa:** It was fantastic to come in to a system of collaborative work in this school
>
> **Jenny:** Do you feel we imposed it on you?
>
> **Theresa:** Oh no, not at all because it's a whole school approach we have here to teaching and learning. I could see from Junior Infants all the way up to 6th class that it's just a common thread. It's in each classroom. And this kind of in-class support is really important and for me to compare it with what I was doing last year and see how it works here. I can see the difference when everyone is involved. It wasn't just one or two teachers involved. I think it's really important that everyone's on the same page. No, I didn't feel it was imposed. It was just a matter of getting everyone onboard for a common outcome.
>
> **Annie:** Yes because everyone's here for the good of the children. We're not standing around observing.
>
> **Eilís:** Well it's better for everybody and it works. The kids like it, they have variety, they all get a break from each other, the good guys get a break, the guys who are struggling and who genuinely want help, love it because it's individual attention, it's all about them and they know it.

The teachers here describe what Kardos, Moore- Johnson, Peske, Kauffman and Liu (2001) refer to as an integrated professional culture in Oak Tree school. All teachers share their knowledge and expertise and veteran teachers understand the importance of mentoring their novice colleagues finding that they, themselves, benefit from the exchange.

> Colleagues within these schools provided sustained support and ongoing exchange across experience levels for all teachers; there were no separate camps of veterans and novices. All teachers, veterans and novices alike, were regularly engaged in deliberations about curriculum, instruction, and their shared responsibility for students. Novice teachers found opportunities to develop their teaching, easy access to others' classes, clear expectations, and organized discussions about the needs of students and the improvement of practice.
>
> (Kardos, Moore- Johnson, Peske, Kauffman & Liu 2001 p.261)

In Oak Tree School the teachers describe how they help each other out. The openness to new things and trying out new possibilities adds to student learning, enjoyment and motivation. And the teachers acknowledge that they too are learners:

> **Eilís:** I think people here are very open and everyone is willing to help each other. So nobody feels intimidated or inadequate. If you ask a question, you'll get an answer and you can say 'Am I doing it right'. We're all there to support each other and 'train' each other.
>
> **Alice:** We're very lucky really with Liz. She really values the work-stations and she's on for promoting them and she's really anxious to get them up and running in the school.
>
> **Eilís:** But you see she had proof of them working. We had the proof. Like that 2nd class I had. They were using dictionaries and everything by the end of the year. The kids that were coming out of 1st class had done the work-stations already. They were only average readers, but they were hungry for more of it.
>
> **Alice:** It is great. It keeps everything open. Everyone's communicating and everyone is on the same mission.
>
> **Cara:** Even from a point of view of trying out things. There are absolutely no boundaries. If you want to try something, everyone is very open to it.
>
> **Alice:** I suppose we all have to open about learning, willing to take on new challenges, to see what works and what doesn't work in different classes. It's all about learning; the students' and our own.

The findings here are significant as they show how the collaborative work practices in Oak Tree School have contributed to the higher levels of social support for achievement and higher levels of authentic pedagogy that Louis and Marks (1998) talk about.

6.4.2 Creating a continuum of collaboration

Continuing to collaborate on both literacy and numeracy programmes has meant that the teachers have opened up their teaching practice to the eyes of colleagues and to the principal in the school. They have learned from their involvement in the programmes

and value the varied methodologies they have observed and become practiced in. They have transferred this new knowledge to other curricular areas:

> **Annie:** Having an open classroom makes us more open people as well.
>
> **Eilís:** There's great support and you can draw from the experiences of the in-class work and the group work. If there's something you saw that's good, you're very open to using that elsewhere and you know you can use it.
>
> **Theresa**: You're more open to other ideas as well. You can see benefits in certain aspects and see where else in the curriculum it might work

Support teachers involved in the Junior Project have extended the project into the senior classes by using group work, station teaching, peer tutoring as part of their in-class support programme. As a result of this in-class support the teachers of the senior classes who were not involved in the Early Intervention Literacy Project have also acquired new skills and have come to accept and expect that collaborative teaching is now part of their practice. Initially, Liz was instrumental in extending the collaboration. At staff meetings she reported on the in-class intervention she had observed and participated in at junior level. She encouraged teachers of senior classes to try out literacy and numeracy work-stations with the support teachers who initially in many cases brought the in-class support into the classrooms. Even though the class teacher is responsible for the class it was important that the class teachers did not feel the pressure of an increased workload due to the organisation of in-class support. After a number of weeks of 'spoon-feeding', the class teachers began to see the academic gains for the pupils and they became more involved in the planning of the programmes and interested in sharing the planning and organisation. Collaborative programmes became part of their practice as the following comment from the focus group interview reveals:

> **Jenny:** Well yes the class teacher is responsible but you must realise that initially in-class involves a lot of extra work. In 4th class it was very interesting for me because when I started first I think Donal (class teacher) didn't really want to do the work stations but Liz put him under pressure a little bit. I used to come in for the first few weeks and even Estelle used to say to me 'You've him spoiled'! I'd come with all the boxes ready. And then he'd say to me after the first week or two "That problem sheet was a bit hard for that group". So I'd say "fine I'll make it easier for next week". But then he saw it working and after about three more weeks he said I'll actually do the problem station myself" and now he does it himself. But I knew that would come because the exact same thing happened in Declan's class last year. The class teachers just needed the support at the beginning because I don't think it's fair to ask them to change and do this and then expect them to do all the work for it as well. Liam is the same now this year. I gave him all the comprehensions at the start and now he does his own. It just happens.

Thus, involvement in the early intervention projects and the spin-off effects has resulted in changes in teachers' practice throughout the whole school, changes that have all the hallmarks of increased teaching performance due to on-site professional development which improves teachers' practice (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Day 1999; Lieberman & Miller, 1991 & 2001; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Elbot & Fulton, 2008).

One of the teachers in a senior class in the school wrote a report on his experience of in-class support which was published in the international Learning Teacher Magazine in 2010 :

> Our Literacy in-class support programme involves the SEN teacher working in the classroom with me for Peer-Tutoring in reading twice weekly, and once weekly for our Literacy Work-stations programme, which involves extra support from two other support teachers.
>
> I have found that the advantages of this type of support are many:
>
> - A well-organised, target-based scheme of work clearly defined in collaboration with SEN teacher.
> - An agreed assessment of the outcomes informing the approach to further support programmes.
> - A sharing of responsibility in class management.
> - An opportunity for instant feedback from a colleague.
> - A strong sense of comradeship develops which supports the otherwise isolated class teacher.
> - A sense of fun and enjoyment prevails as there is opportunity for social interaction amongst teachers and pupils.
> - A less stressful exercise in teaching than whole class teaching due to shared responsibility.
> - An awareness that, in the midst of the general chatter in the room, real work is taking place and progress achieved.
> - Closer contact with pupils in the class through the group dynamics, giving the class teacher new information about individual pupils.
>
> (Liam, 29 yrs teaching)

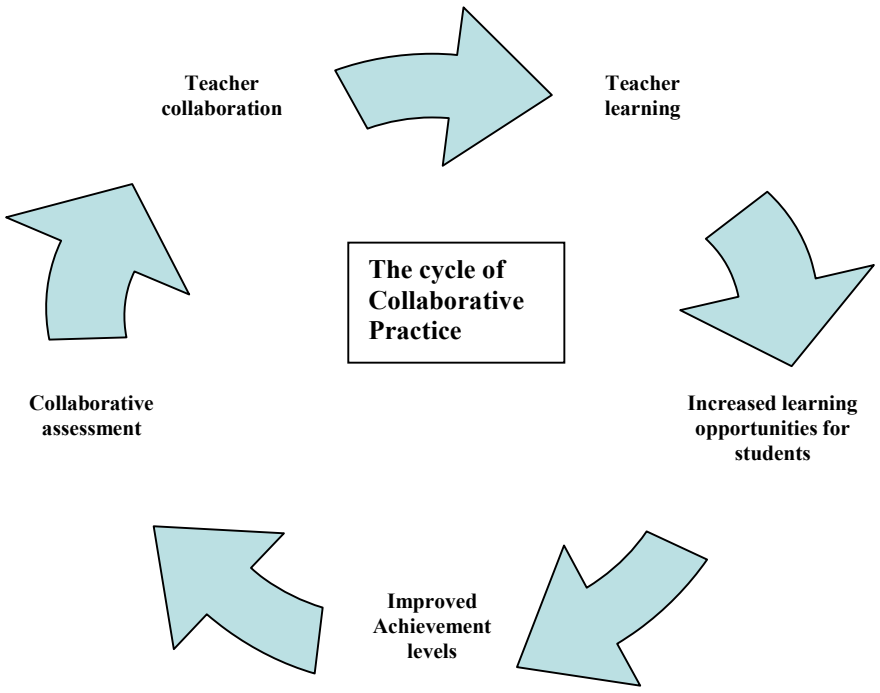
Liam's written reflection on in-class support is testimony to the learning that has occurred over time in Oak Tree School as he was the teacher in chapter four who did not see the need for class teachers and support teachers to plan collaboratively back in 2003! The teachers in Oak Tree School have learned how to improve their practice through collaboration with colleagues and the students are the beneficiaries who reap the rewards of the teachers improved practice. Oak Tree School is an example of a school where teacher collaboration has resulted in learning for all.

6.5 Collaboration: A cyclical process of learning for all

Teachers in this study have found that collaborating on well-designed programmes with colleagues has very positive benefits for students. How teachers teach matters hugely in schools that face the problem of educational disadvantage. As Taylor et al (2003) suggest, these students require expert teaching.

When teachers work collaboratively they are learning from one another on a daily basis, their practice is continually honed. Improvement in teaching practice can only result in better outcomes for students. Therefore the whole process of teacher collaboration is quite cyclical as Diagram 6a shows:

Diagram 6a : The cycle of collaborative practice



Teachers planning and teaching a programme together learn from one another, and therefore improve in all aspects of delivering that programme; this results in the students being provided with better learning opportunities and their achievements are assessed collaboratively by the teachers who fine-tune the programme further as a result of the information gained from the assessments. What type of learning is involved here?

Teachers in Oak Tree School are involved in collaborative programmes of work in an effort to increase student achievement. They assess the outcomes of their collaborative programme in terms of data from assessments. Such formative assessment of pupil learning is a powerful yet underused way of improving instruction. Without data, schools are left with teachers' opinions on student learning and have little reason to change practice. Single-loop learning means we have designed a system that works but continuing to use this system without constant examination and review is not good enough. The settings need to be constantly checked and changed accordingly. It is then that the learning becomes double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Data from assessments allow teachers to question how and where improvements can be made (McEwan, 2009). Teachers ask questions about and reflect on their new ways of working. It is reflection-on-action (Schon, 1983) involving double loop learning where strategies and programmes are open to question and critical scrutiny in an attempt to constantly improve them while aiming for greater student achievement.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter answered why it is that collaborative practices enhance student learning opportunities and also how these collaborative practices can impact positively on student learning. The findings are significant as they show the direct link between instruction and learning. In disadvantaged schools where literacy achievement is generally low, teachers must collectively examine their practice with a view to changing it and improving it. Teaching without learning is akin to selling without buying; it is a monologue in which no change or growth happens, and it cannot be considered teaching (Shim, 2008). Teachers need to be responsible for raising the achievement bar of their students and they cannot place the blame for failure elsewhere, as Liz in Oak Tree school states:

> **Liz:** We're aware that we teach in a disadvantaged area but you can't sit down and blame that for everything. We all saw as a staff that our results weren't increasing. Our results were very poor. We just saw the need on the ground to do something different. The teachers have to change the way they teach.

Teaching collaboratively is one response to the call for change in practice. The findings in this study show how such a response has made a difference in many schools. The findings reveal that collaborative work practices that include in-class support are beneficial for student learning because:

- Learning-support teachers can observe their students in the classroom context, providing evidence of how students perform amongst their peers.
- Active learning can take place in small groups providing social interaction with peers while students receive the support they need to scaffold their learning.
- Continuity in the pupil's learning programme is provided.
- Children on the borderline of receiving learning support can get extra support through in-class support.
- The class teacher is no longer frustrated and guilty at her inability to support all learners.
- Every child can be challenged through in-class support
- The organisation and distribution of materials is easier which leads to more use of concrete materials.
- Effective in-class support raises student self-esteem
- Assessment and recording of achievement levels is used for planning future work programmes which leads to more focused teaching and subsequently increased student achievement levels.

The above findings are particularly true in Oak Tree School and Ivy Lane School. The collaborative partnership between Anna and Bernie in Ivy Lane School is an example of how the blurring of roles of that of the class teacher and the SEN teacher has removed the stigma of learning-support and thus increased student self-esteem. These findings support the PISA report (2003) which promotes the importance of engaging students in meaningful learning as motivation and self-confidence are indispensable to outcomes that will foster lifelong learning. A focus on improved student learning through changes in teaching practice has increased the student learning in Oak Tree School. This finding is supported by Comber and Kamler (2004) who state that the most important variable at school in making a difference for students is the teacher. Overall the findings in this chapter have shown that effective teacher collaboration enhances student learning opportunities significantly.

Chapter 7 -Teacher collaboration: The hidden story

Conclusion & Implications

This research study began with the words of Irish-American novelist, Frank McCourt who compared the often daunting role of the teacher to the fighter in the ring. I believe that this research study tells a story that offers an alternative to the lone 'fighter', one that challenges the idea of the teacher as 'independent entrepreneur' (Little, 1990) and dispels with the myth of the heroic lone teacher. It shows how applying a socio-cultural framework to teacher learning can ensure that teachers no longer feel isolated in their profession. It establishes how working together can be more effective in its outcome, can be more enjoyable for pupils and teachers, can provide learning opportunities for teachers that working in isolation cannot offer and ultimately can contribute to raising literacy and numeracy standards in schools. Thus the research uncovered in this study has many implications for understanding teacher learning, school improvement and educational reform.

Over the past thirty years many studies recommending teacher collaboration have contributed to the body of educational literature. The ten studies highlighted in chapter two are representative of studies that examine the impact of teacher collaboration particularly on student learning. This study corroborates and extends on the findings of those studies in that it reveals how 'teacher collaboration', though widely used in practice, policy and research, is not clearly understood. This study has uncovered the hidden story of teacher collaboration. It has explored a culture of teaching, which espouses the idea of teachers as bearers of a tradition, a tradition where teachers are professionally isolated, autonomous and private. Teachers readily identify with this culture of teaching and can find it difficult to embrace a culture of collaboration. The transformation requires that teachers acknowledge their changing identity and learn to articulate their practice knowledge in the presence of colleagues. It involves coming to know the self through collaborative practices and understanding and developing different perspectives. This transformation is part of 'relational knowing' defined by Gallego et al (2001, p. 242) in their research into reforming educational cultures. Galego et al suggest that knowledge of the self and others in relationships in addition to knowledge of curriculum and instruction and knowledge of critical action form the

elements of relational knowing, an essential pre-cursor for educational reform. Changing from working in isolation to working collaboratively involves a learning journey for teachers, a learning journey that can take much time to unfold.

7.1 The significance of this research as a personal professional learning journey

This research has taken a considerable number of years where there has been critical engagement with the literature as well as involvement with school improvement through action research since 2002. Much of what I uncovered is supported by Fullan's (1993, 2001) and Hargreaves'(1994, 2005) research on educational change, Day's (1999, 2004, 2006), Lieberman's (1991, 2001), Little's (1990, 1993, 2003) and Darling-Hammond's (1999, 2005, 2006) work on teachers' professional development and Vecsio et al's (2008) review of the literature on the impact of professional learning communities.

Therefore, this study has been written placing me, the writer in the role of the professional researcher. But my position in this study has shifted throughout the course of the research. At the beginning I was a teacher identifying a 'felt difficulty' (Dewey, 1933, p. 4) in my practice through reflective journaling during an M.Ed. module. As a result I became interested in working collaboratively with colleagues. Then I became the researcher and as the study progressed I engaged in reflective dialogue concerning the area of teacher collaboration. I disseminated my work through conference presentations in Ireland. I assumed the role of teacher educator through giving talks to learning support teachers and through being a member of the editorial board of an international teacher magazine produced by the Learning Teacher Network (LTN). My involvement in the LTN also provided me with the opportunity to speak to international audiences in Ljubljana, Vienna, Berlin and UK. Later I became a member of the innovation group of the LTN with three others from Germany, Holland and Sweden. This allowed me to experience education in a wider sense, at an international level that brought understandings of how similar educational issues are contested in many countries but also how the Irish education system is set in relation to other European countries. Thus, my own learning journey has been expansive.

This section of the concluding chapter provides glimpses of the varied roles I assumed throughout the research journey. It seeks to crystallise the concept of teacher learning

through teacher collaboration established through the findings of this study from a personal perspective. The personal professional learning journey is an integral part of the PhD process, one that is regrettably overlooked in many of the theses I have read. I support Goodson and Walker's (1991) idea which suggests that "that which is personal is the most meaningful means of access to understand wider domains- both as methodology for research and means for change in pedagogy" (p.25). Faced with many of the challenges discussed in this study I combined a practitioner's approach and a researcher's approach to overcoming them in that I linked my developing knowledge through educational research with my developing knowledge of practice through my own lived experiences.

7.1.1 My journey as an action researcher

In reflecting now on this journey I draw on a collection of journal entries which record the beginnings of collaboration in my own school. It shows the slow process of educational change and reveals how what began as a solo project became a whole school project over time. These journal entries present snapshot moments of my personal learning journey. However they identify many of the challenges that surfaced throughout this research study: conflict, emotions, relationships, fear of the unknown and lack of time.

Journal Entry 7/11/02: I am looking into the whole idea of collaborative teaching as whole class is proving so difficult. I don't know if Helen will be willing. I think the problems will come from the 'not knowing'. If we don't know how to plan it properly the whole idea may come to an abrupt end with nobody sure of the benefits. We need to collect data in my room and assess it before further steps can be taken.

Journal Entry 5/12/02: Had two days of in-service as whole staff. I silently felt disheartened. I cannot see the willingness for change, and words like 'routinised' and 'settled' describe what I saw from our staff. What can I do to break through the shell of tradition. Time seems to have sown the seeds of acceptance for many- how can we empower?

Journal Entry 9/1 03: I spoke to Frank today about my project and my ideas. He was interested and willing to cooperate in my survey. I have three onboard already. I am learning to accept that one small step every day is plenty - it could lead to 100 steps by June

Journal Entry 25/1/03: I've spoken with everyone now. Yesterday I circulated a sheet to staff outlining the project and asking for their involvement. All responses were positive. Speaking to Liz she wasn't surprised that people were open to it but she said it would have to be a slow process of introduction to collaboration and she spoke in terms of years! Gosh-Will I be 6ft under before my dream is realised?

Journal Entry 26/3/03: Collaboration return sheets almost completed. Already looks like majority are in favour of collaboration with time for planning. Hope we will get the show on the road by term 3.
Journal Entry 11/11/03: Beginning with the collaborative planning organisation. It has taken some months to get here. And today there was conflict between E and myself. It was out of the blue for me. I didn't realise she had difficulties with this all along. I tried my best to resolve it but still felt very wrongly portrayed by a colleague I have trusted and respected. I am upset and annoyed.
Journal Entry 25/11/03: Things are still a little strained between E and I. Thank God for Liz. She has been such a pillar of strength for me in this. Yesterday for a time I questioned the whole project and was sorry I had dragged it all on myself. I longed for the simple life. But then today, I felt that what I am doing here matters so much to our school and to the kids we teach. I will keep at it.
Journal Entry 9/1/04: Things are moving. Our first scheduled planning went well- everyone availed of it and seemed keen.
Journal Entry 22/3/05: Middle management meeting went well. We discussed the possibility of one support teacher for 1-2 classes. This will lessen the need for so much planning. Everyone is talking about needing so much time to plan our work.

These journal entries trace the path of setting up a system of collaborative planning in Oak Tree School. It began in November 2002 as an idea in my head and took until March 2005 to materialise as an accepted whole school project. Throughout those two and a half years there were times of despair when I wished to abandon my vision and there were times of conflict when I met with the disapproval of colleagues. Though difficult, these moments were very necessary as they informed future steps of the journey. There were also times when I acknowledged the shift that was occurring and it was fortunate that a positive school culture and good relationships supported the project.

The journal entries show how the initial step of the journey was one of a change in organisational routine. Teachers were scheduled to meet with each other and it was through this interaction that transformation in teaching practice came about. Teachers began to move from working in isolation to working collaboratively. This finding is supported by a very recent longitudinal case study of leadership practice carried out by Sherer and Spillane (2011) over four years. Their study reveals that organisational routines play a role in changing school work practices because "change happens in the interplay between individual agency and the structure of the routine" (p. 646).

7.1.2 Expanding my learning journey

The second narrative which follows shows how my thinking, my identity and subsequently my practice were influenced by my international experiences.

Journal Entry 19/9/06: My first day in Ljubljana. I had some great conversations. I learned a lot about the Swedish, Spanish and Portuguese systems. The Swedish model seems light years ahead of ours. Eva is head of two schools and works with three other head-teachers in a core group to run the schools in one area. She is always so busy but when I asked her about the time issue she told me that in her experience if you really want to do something, you will always find a window!
Day 2 - 20/9/06 : Today I learned about my own 'fear feelings' towards change. We were asked to change our groups and record our talk on flip-charts. It meant working with others I did not know very well. I was uncomfortable and a little resistant to moving out of my comfort zone. I became very conscious of what others may think of me.

This study found that asking teachers to make changes in their practice in order to work with colleagues can be a daunting process for many teachers. Through my involvement in the Ljubljana work-shop I experienced similar fears and understood why some teachers will chose to stay within the comfort zone they are familiar with. There is, as Galego et al, 2001 suggest, "a degree of personal safety in failing to examine one's own experience" (p. 245). Coming to know the self involves acknowledging one's fears and addressing them. In this situation in Ljubljana, not only did I have to confront my fears, a process which can be painful and complex but I also needed to understand the other, to appreciate the cultures I had not previously encountered. This is part of the process of relational knowing that Galego et al (2001) deem essential for reform.

It is also evident from the above account that professional development involving reflective conversations has the potential to influence practice. Since my conversation with Eva, I have never used 'lack of time' as an excuse for non-completion of a project. I have always found a window.

7.1.3 Reflecting on my experience as teacher educator

The following vignette highlights the gap between policy as text and policy as practice. It is an account from my own experience as teacher educator, talking to teachers about incorporating in-class support into their practice. The teacher in this story was aware of the recommendation to use in-class support but was not familiar with the inherent

challenges. This vignette highlights the necessity for teachers to link their practice to educational research and become knowledgeable of what others in the field think.

Giving a talk on in-class support to learning-support teachers participating in the Learning Support diploma in UCC, I began with – 'In-class Support: The hidden story'. Taking a line from Fiona King's book on methods of in-class support – "It takes two teachers to try in-class support and invariably it then becomes infectious" (2006, p.12). I began by telling the teachers that I do not agree with this statement because through my own experience and from my research I have found that the issues of teacher relationships, identity, reflection, conflict, school culture, leadership and time, all needed to be considered when trying to make changes to teachers' practice. These issues are the 'hidden story' of teacher collaboration. One participant spoke to me afterwards and stated that she was trying to launch in-class support in her school but found it very difficult because of 'all that stuff' I had talked about. Up until now she hadn't realised the significance of all of these issues when it comes to reforming teachers' practice. Hearing "In-class support: The hidden story" unpacked 'all that stuff' for her and explained why she had met with the reluctance of colleagues in her efforts to implement change.

This vignette depicts the hidden story of changing practice showing how teachers are very often unaware of the challenges they face as they travel the path from isolation to collaboration. It highlights the unfamiliarity with educational research. This teacher was eager to engage with policy recommendations but lack of engagement with research literature and lack of support from a professional learning community left her bewildered and confused. It shows how an absence of relational knowing (Galego et al 2001) makes change impossible. Teachers need to be supported through participation in the professional learning community of their own schools in their efforts to improve practice, striving to become expert 'knowers' as well as expert practitioners and identify the links between theory and practice.

7.1.4 Attention to practice through reflection and dialogue

It was possible to trace the story of my personal learning journey through the use of my own reflective journal. The use of reflective tools can be a powerful medium for teacher learning. Through my own journal entries I have been able to identify the varied features we met along the path to change in our school, the path from isolation to collaboration. At times it was a difficult path, and at other times it was exciting and energising. Without my reflective journal entries much of the details of the learning journey would be lost. Recorded moments of my practice embody the hidden story of

teacher collaboration, a story that can be uncovered through the research literature. But the journal enables the link between theory and practice to be made. Perhaps the path we travelled is a generic path to change, one where difficulty, interest, scepticism, conflict, energy & focus, collective mindfulness and relational trust all stand in line to be encountered on the road to powerful change.

There is little doubt that this research study has been a powerful learning journey paying rich dividends in personal and professional development. I was fortunate to experience PhD supervision from two perspectives. In the early years of my PhD journey my supervisor's reflective stance taught me to question everything I believed in and through reflective practice I identified many hegemonic assumptions that existed deep within me and of which I was previously unaware. Her guidance helped me to pay attention to practice and gather gems of data in narrative format. The final stages of my PhD journey were supervised by a different supervisor due to the retirement of my first supervisor. Initially, the change was disconcerting as my new supervisor needed time to familiarise himself with my work. However, the change provided me with the opportunity to articulate my own understandings of my research to date. My new supervisor engaged with me in energetic debate about what it was I had uncovered and thus fuelled my enthusiasm to continue with my journey. Our talks helped me to strengthen the arguments of my study. I realised that the result of having two supervisors added a dynamic dimension to my own learning and achievement. Through this research study a new form of epistemology emerged for me. I no longer perceive knowledge as something 'out there' to be collected and amassed but rather I have come to understand that my developing educational knowledge is created through the relationships I form (Nakagawa 2000) with researchers and practitioners, and these relationships create knowledge that has the potential to make meaningful changes in my practice.

7.2 Key ideas emerging from this study

At the outset of this research study it was hoped to establish if schools were incorporating collaborative practice into their learning programmes by devising their own frameworks and strategies at local level. The findings have established that a sizable number of teachers in DEIS schools are working collaboratively with

colleagues; planning, teaching and assessing collaborative programmes that have either been designed or adapted by the teachers themselves.

This study hoped to map the challenges that teachers face as they embrace collaborative ways of working with colleagues. In addition to the practical issues of time, organisation and curriculum, teachers spoke about the challenges of opening up their practice to the eyes of others. The findings here reveal the key issues for educational reform. Firstly changes need to be made in the organisational routines of schools as such changes will pre-empt changes in work practices as indicated by Sherer and Spillane's recent study (2011). Secondly, teachers must come to know the self and others and articulate their practice knowledge in a way that is problematic, yet constructive, leading to improvement. It is essential that this element of 'relational knowing' is addressed (Galego et al, 2001). As teaching is a profession traditionally shrouded in silence teachers found that sharing practice involved unwrapping the shroud of silence (Brookfield, 1995) through unpacking assumptions, examining culture, acknowledging identity shift and breaking with tradition.

The findings revealed that well-designed collaborative planning, teaching and assessment programmes can address the challenges of inclusion and differentiation that primary school teachers face in the 21st century. Many of the instances of teacher collaboration uncovered here have inspired teachers to be participants of developing professional learning communities, where all children's needs are considered and provided for by a team of teachers who share a common purpose and vision. Interestingly, not all teachers are so steeped in the traditional culture of teaching that they are reluctant to open up. My findings show a general openness to observation and to collaboration but the lack of planning time and lack of access to forums for teachers to share and use their reflections to inform future practice impede progress.

For schools to develop as successful PLCs, the teachers working within them must be provided with social contexts to engage in reflective activities (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Otherwise schools will remain mere seedlings of PLCs. The potential for the growth of PLCs is linked to providing opportunities and mechanisms for sharing and reviewing teachers practice through the use of reflective tools such as participant observation practices or video/audio tapes of practice that can

be discussed, reflective journal sharing and reflective dialogue. Unexamined assumptions act as powerful cultural obstacles to change (Osterman & Kottkampf, 1993; Brookfield 1995; Kegan & Lahey, 2001). Unless schools have a positive healthy culture where teachers' professional needs are tended to and nurtured, teachers are left without a context to challenge hegemonic assumptions and their schools are unlikely to thrive as sustainable PLCs.

7.3 The implications of this research in relation to the learning of teachers

The majority of support teachers in DEIS urban primary schools are collaboratively planning education programmes for pupils with learning difficulties and over half are collaboratively teaching. This finding is high considering that an earlier study (DeBúrca, 2005) found that only one fifth of schools nationally used any form in-class support. Thus over half of the support teachers in DEIS urban primary schools have changed their way of working in recent years. Principals stated that their support staff worked as a team and they believe that new initiatives and recent DES policy had made teachers more aware of the necessity to collaborate. DEIS urban primary schools appear to be places where the traditional practice of teachers has changed considerably from one of isolation to one that is more collaborative, confirming the findings referred to in the DES draft plan for improving literacy and numeracy in schools:

> Evidence from Inspectorate evaluations of DEIS schools also shows that some schools are managing to set realistic targets for improvement and to use the resources to deliver the planned improvements. However, schools are not universally successful, despite facing similar challenges and receiving similar supports. This makes it all the more important that best practice in the use of DEIS resources is disseminated and all schools are challenged to deliver the best outcomes for learners.
>
> (DES, 2010, p.34)

But this study, similar to Galego et al's (2001) study uncovers elements that the DES in taking the above approach may fail to address. School reform cannot be reduced to dissemination of best practice and demand for improved results. To do so is simplistic and ignores the nested social, political and cultural contexts of school communities in which teachers and students are situated (Little & McLaughlin, 1993).

This study has shown how teacher collaboration contributes to developing relational knowing in that the element of knowing the self and others can be realised through

effective collaborative programmes. It is a valuable form of teacher professional development.

7.3.1 Collaboration catalysts

This study found that teachers who participated in off-site professional development were usually instrumental in contributing to implementing change in their schools. Off-site professional development propels an interest in finding out what is happening in the educational field and therefore acts as a precursor for teacher collaboration.

Pre-designed programmes such as 'Literacy Lift-Off' appear to act as collaboration catalysts for teachers, encouraging them to work more closely with colleagues. The 'Literacy Lift-Off' programme is not over scripted because schools using the model adapt and change aspects of the programme to suit their own school needs. Therefore these new programmes need not render teachers mere technicians by completely prescribing the work involved. They can have quite the opposite effect on teachers providing them with the opportunity to exercise agency through reflecting, examining, adapting, assessing, and re-adjusting these programmes with the needs of their own pupils as the central focus. Engaging in such work develops them on a professional level in that they become adept at collaboratively planning, teaching and assessing specific work programmes.

One of the most beneficial ways for teachers to learn is to talk about their practice and teachers are generally keen to talk about pedagogy and share insights and difficulties with colleagues. Reflective conversations with colleagues about practice, brings meaning and understanding to teachers' work.

Sharing the teaching of lessons with a colleague brings further learning for teachers. They are provided with the opportunity to see other teachers in action and can pick up some innovative ideas. Teachers pay greater attention to their practice when working collaboratively. When teachers work in isolation their practice and any inherent problems tend to be neglected rather than acknowledged and improved upon. Teachers need appraisal and feedback on their practice and need to learn how to give and accept constructive criticism. This becomes possible through involvement in in-class programmes which appears to yield high dividends in teacher learning. Planning the in-

class programme is vital for teachers who work together. The 'group work model' of in-class support tends to be the most popular model of in-class support while the 'teach assist' model appears to be one of the most difficult to implement effectively. Teachers use a variety of methods to plan their in-class schedule seizing whatever chance they can.

Teacher collaboration involves teacher development, both professional and personal, a positive sense of accountability or mindfulness where the focus is on student learning. And there is also an aesthetic element to teacher collaboration where teachers and students enjoy the 'togetherness', the sense of participating in a learning community. Participation in effective collaborative programmes increases the 'flow' for teachers and students (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). They experience a feeling of energised focus and full involvement, as they witness success in the collaborative programme of work. Collaboration between teachers leads to greater commitment to student learning. Should such a beneficial way of teacher learning be available to all teachers in all schools? Is this the way forward for teacher scholarship: the development of effective collaborative programmes?

Despite the advantages for teacher learning that collaborative practices entail, these practices are slow to become embedded in the minds of many teachers. Half of the support teachers in DEIS schools still rely completely on the withdrawal model and half of this cohort appear to be governed by the unexamined cultural assumption that withdrawal is best practice. Of late, the education debate on literacy in disadvantaged schools, such as that proposed in the DES (2010) draft plan for literacy and numeracy suggests that intensive literacy programmes, focusing on assessment data, run by literacy co-ordinators will be enough to raise the literacy achievement levels in schools. What fails to be addressed in this debate are the challenges that are intrinsic in change implementation.

7.3.2 Reframing core change concepts through new identities

This study found that the lack of time for teacher collaboration is a major issue for teachers in schools, a finding that has long been recognised as an obstacle to school reform (Fullan, 1991). However the findings of this study extend this theory by suggesting that pre-occupation with the lack of time masks other issues that act as

barriers to collaboration; barriers that many teachers are quite possibly unaware of. There is a necessity for teachers to be aware of their identity. Teachers' awareness of identity and the effect of experiences on identity are closely linked to the ability to make changes to practice. Participating in a collaborative programme of work that results in an acknowledged identity shift appears to empower teachers to reveal the substantive self (Ball, 1972), the self that is fundamental to how a person views him or her self. This study found that working with colleagues on academic programmes focusing on student learning enables teachers to know the self and others, to examine curriculum and instruction and to engage in critical action, thus establishing the relational knowing that Galego et al (2001) propose is essential for change.

Reflective dialogue with the interviewees revealed that there can be resistance to change in some schools and conflict can arise in the classroom when two teachers begin to work together. It is essential to build on a foundation of relational knowing (Galego et al. 2001) where teachers have trust, respect and personal regard for one another, are open and inclusive, feel competent in their work as teachers and act with integrity at all times. In a collaborative situation where relational knowing exists, teachers learn from one another and this learning leads to enhanced teaching practice and increased self-confidence in one's abilities.

When school leaders encourage their staff to embrace more collaborative forms of working, they need to understand that teachers are bearers of a tradition and hold certain assumptions about what constitutes the 'real work' of a teacher. Long-held assumptions upon which teachers have based their practice for many years are slow and difficult to shift and teachers need to feel supported and fostered in their attempts at change rather than forced into making changes too quickly. Karen's story of meeting conflict in chapter four provided an example of the contrived collaboration Hargreaves (1994) talks about and showed how such contrived collaboration can create a hostile environment rather than a positive one.

7.3.3 Extending school and teacher leadership

This study's findings indicate that in-class support provides a more accessible opportunity for principals to observe teachers' practice and also updates their own knowledge on innovative teaching methodologies. When a number of teachers are

working together in a classroom involved in group-work or station teaching, principals' observation visits appear less threatening which contrasts with observation visits of the classroom where the teacher works in isolation. This finding would benefit principals in their new role as evaluators of newly qualified teachers providing them with a platform for observation of practice and an opportunity for appraisal and feedback. Considering that Bryk et al's (2010) significant recent longitudinal study of urban school reform proposes that school leadership which is inclusive and facilitative is the driving force of school reform, this study shows how collaborative practices provide an opportunity to extend school leadership so that it becomes inclusive and facilitative. The principal can become involved with the teachers and the wider school community on curricular and instructional issues at a practical level in addition to a theoretical level. The teachers become accustomed to sharing their work-space with their school leader and ensuing discussions on effective instructional practices can be more meaningful. The link between quality leadership and quality learning (Fullan, 2006) can be strengthened. The interaction between staff and principal strengthens the professional learning community within the school and impacts on teachers' responsibilities in that they assume leadership roles in areas such as literacy and numeracy (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Involvement of principals in collaborative programmes enables a style of quality leadership, one that is shared and distributed (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001) and directly connected to the learning within the school.

The findings of this study suggest that class teachers are less familiar than support teachers with the DES' Learning Support Guidelines and Special Education circulars. This is an important finding as both documents draw attention to the significant role of the class teacher in relation to children with learning difficulties. If over one third of class teachers are unaware of these recommendations, principals and school staff need to ensure that the organisation of learning support provision involves whole school input. Providing all teachers with the opportunity for input and sharing of information on the school's learning support provision will ensure that there is a more collaborative and inclusive approach to special education. Making such changes in the organisational management of learning-support in schools will in turn effect changes in practice as Shere and Spillane's (2011) study proposes.

Principals are vital players affecting the development of learning communities that give teachers opportunities to collaborate. Currently, only one quarter of learning-support teachers manage to schedule planning time. The availability of resources is essential in making change possible. As school leaders, principals need to look at formally scheduling planning time for teachers. The new 'Croke Park Hour' has added an extra hour per week to teachers' hours but this is non-contact time and could be used to accommodate teachers with collaborative planning time. As the evidence from Oak Tree School revealed, when teachers have the chance to sit and plan a programme with colleagues they are more likely to take that extra step from the comfort zone of working in isolation to working alongside their colleagues, supporting Sherer and Spillane's (2011) findings.

7.4 The potential of this research in relation to student learning

As reviewed in chapter two of this study, the literature on school improvement is replete with proposals for increased student achievement, all of which highlight the importance of teacher effectiveness and quality. Bryk et al's (2010) recent study focused on five core components that influence student learning: inclusive and facilitative leadership, wider school community links, professional capacity of staff, instructional guidance and student-centred environment. This study delved deeply into one of these components – the professional capacity of staff because "the effectiveness of schooling depends largely on the teachers' capacity to problem solve regarding classroom concerns and to co-ordinate instructional work" (Bryk et al, 2010, p.54). This study proposes 'teacher collaboration' as a means to professionally develop teachers in schools because it requires a collaboratively co-ordinated plan of work that is constantly assessed and improved upon.

This study has outlined how teacher collaboration has the potential to improve teachers' practice and this in turn may significantly increase students' learning opportunities. The evidence in this study supports Bryk et al's (2010) study showing that a supportive professional community where teachers are oriented toward improvement appears powerfully related to gains in academic productivity. As stated in chapter three and chapter six this study's findings on raised achievement levels are not conclusive as this was not an experimental study. However, the fact that the teachers in Oak Tree school were excited and energised with their collaborative ways of working

implies as Bryk et al's (2010) findings show, that their involvement in a supported professional community positively influenced student academic achievements.

When teachers collaborate on a programme of work and particularly when they collaboratively teach the programme, there are greater opportunities for student learning. There tends to be continuity in the SEN pupil's programme of work rather than fragmentation. The LS teachers can observe their students in the classroom context, providing evidence of how students perform amongst their peers. Active learning can take place in groups ensuring that pupils socially interact with their peers whilst they receive the support they need to scaffold their learning. The scope of the LS teacher is broadened in that pupils on the borderline of receiving LS can get the support they need and the class teacher does not feel as frustrated or guilty at her inability to cater for all students' needs. In-class support means that every child can be challenged.

Teacher collaboration that serves to blur the roles of class teacher and support teacher can remove the stigma of needing learning support from the SEN pupils and they view themselves as learners rather than failures in the classroom setting (Anderson, 2009). Allowing them to realise their potential rather than singling them out for their disabilities builds their confidence and self-esteem as learners (Travers et al, 2010). They become more motivated and thus realise their potential to increase their achievements.

This study has provided some evidence of improved student achievement levels. This evidence suggests that early intervention programmes involving collaborative work between teachers, appears to create opportunities for greater gains in achievement levels among students. The task of catering for all students' literacy needs is extremely difficult and often impossible for the isolated teacher in a DEIS school. Working collaboratively to share the workload with a specific focus on student learning appears to be one solution to the problem of low attainment levels in DEIS schools.

However collaborative work programmes must be carefully planned, expertly taught and continually monitored and assessed if they are to be effective. Teachers attempting to implement in-class support simply because it is recommended in recent education policy or imposed by the school leader may end up providing an inadequate form of in-

class support where the work is not sufficiently planned or the pupil is singled out for support at the back of the room, putting an even greater spotlight on the pupil's difficulties than the withdrawal model would.

This study found that collaborative programmes not only had the potential to raise student self-esteem and achievement but also there was deep professional engagement which was both challenging and often enjoyable for all concerned parties. This is an added advantage of using in-class support, one that benefits both teachers and students alike. This evidence challenges the findings of research which show that students prefer the withdrawal system of support (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1989; Crockett & Kauffman, 1998). As this research shows, effective collaborative programmes are quite recent developments in schools and pupils have not yet experienced on-going in-class support throughout their primary schooling. In addition, if in-class programmes are effectively planned and carried out, pupils may often be unaware that their learning is being specifically supported or targeted. It is an inclusive model that students may not identify as learning support. Therefore pupils cannot choose withdrawal above in-class as it is an unfair comparison that does not compare like with like and compares the familiar with the unfamiliar.

7.5 In what ways are the conclusions of this study substantive and original?

The findings of this study have practical importance and value because they show that teachers working collaboratively develop on a personal and professional level and as a result their practice improves. This in turn is valuable for student learning. This study is one of the first studies focusing on *teacher collaboration* in DEIS primary schools showing how and why it affects student learning in a positive way.

The findings are original for a number of reasons. Firstly they show that teachers are perhaps unaware of the 'hidden story' of teacher collaboration. Teachers believe that time is the biggest constraint but this barrier masks the underlying issues of culture, tradition, identity and assumptions. Teachers appear unaware of the value of reflections, shared and written. Reflection is vital in the change process. This research shows how teachers are very unsure of what reflection and shared reflections entail. Unless there is provision made for teachers to reflect and share reflections, schools will remain mere seedlings of PLCs. Without reflection the hegemonic assumption

believing withdrawal to be the best model of learning support provision, remains difficult to shift. Almost half of the support teachers in DEIS schools use this method and they have never experienced an effective collaborative programme. These teachers will never make changes in their practice unless they have the chance to become reflective practitioners supported by a professional learning community.

Secondly, this study reveals that the long-term isolation of teachers in the workplace has had a crippling effect on many teachers and shows how almost 200 years of traditional practice has done little to develop teachers on a professional level. In fact it has done quite the opposite; silenced teachers' voices for too long and barred them from learning from each other on an ongoing system basis.

Thirdly the evidence here uncovers the positive transformative outcomes evolving from teacher collaboration and therefore poses the question of the value of persevering with an individualistic notion of teaching at pre-service level. Such an approach prevents young teachers from understanding the substantial challenges associated with more collaborative approaches to teaching and experiencing the benefits of collaboration.

Fourthly, if pupils' experiences of school are so influential in forming pre-conceived ideas about a teacher's work, then real change can only occur when a cohort of new teachers have experienced collaborative teaching from a pupil's perspective. However, if the majority of teachers come from advantaged rather than disadvantaged backgrounds then experiencing the collaborative practices of teachers in DEIS schools will have little effect on the next generation of teachers as most are from non-DEIS schools where collaboration is lower because low literacy and numeracy levels is not an issue for them. This study's findings imply that all schools should adopt collaborative methods in order to change those pre-conceived ideas of what it means to be a teacher so as to expose all young people to alternative teaching methods from an early age. Additionally, this study has uncovered evidence which supports the view that teachers' learning is enhanced through teacher collaboration. Therefore can non-DEIS schools afford to neglect this area? Should teacher collaboration be a way forward for professional development in all schools?

Finally, the findings of this study suggest that a more natural form of teacher co-operation develops in a school where there is a positive school climate, implying that good teacher co-operation depends on a positive school climate. This finding somewhat answers what the TALIS international Report questioned but was unable to establish in its 2009 study.

7.6 Future research directions

This research study began with questions I have answered throughout the course of the project. However it ends with many more. The questions arising as a result of this study offer possibilities for future research projects.

The first question that arises asks what mechanisms can be used to provide a platform for reflective dialogue in schools in order to develop them into fully functioning PLCs? How can off-site professional development courses that promote teacher reflection be influential in schools? More action research into the development of PLCs in schools is necessary to establish how they develop and are sustained. In Vescio et al's (2008) review of literature on learning communities, they note that different groups with any interest in schools are now calling themselves PLCs. The snapshot case studies of the four schools in this study showed how schools' characteristics vary and therefore PLCs will differ in nature. There is a need for researchers to examine schools with different cultures bearing in mind Hargreaves (1984) four types of school cultures: individualised, balkanised, contrived or collaborative. Researchers could compare and contrast successful teacher learning through involvement in different types of school culture and establish how school cultures influence the way teachers develop personally and professionally? Such studies could also answer more fully whether a positive school climate depends on good teacher co-operation or whether good teacher co-operation depends on a positive school climate (TALIS, 2009).

Another question that arises from this study is how time for teachers to collaborate could be accommodated in the school weekly timetable. Action research that documents and analyses ways of finding time for teachers would add constructive suggestions to the concept of teacher collaboration. Additionally research that collects detailed assessment data from collaborative teacher projects would greatly support the argument for an inclusive approach to learning support provision. Longitudinal studies

of in-class support programmes are necessary which include students' perceptions. Research into how students experience in-class programmes may help to challenge the notion that they prefer withdrawal.

Another possibility for future research arising from this study would be research projects studying the training of student teachers in collaborative teaching methods. Teachers who train as teams are more likely to operate in a collaborative manner in the future, and therefore increase collegial practices in schools (Nokes, Bullough, Egan, Birrell & Merrell-Hansen, 2008). It would be valuable for the future of teacher education to explore this area further. This study revealed that teachers lack opportunities for appraisal and feedback. As a result teacher performance and growth can be stunted as they lack feedback on their practice, feedback that can energise and lead to improved changes. Collaborative practice has an inbuilt opportunity for feedback on practice and further studies into this whole area would be beneficial for continuous teacher professional development programmes as well as for pre-service teacher education.

As I delved deeply into the collaborative programmes of work that are ongoing in schools, an area for future study became apparent. As I collected the data in schools where collaborative programmes were in operation, it became clear that very often Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) had a very important role to play in the delivery of the in-class programme. The scope of this study did not allow me to research this area but it is one of increasing importance particularly in light of the recent economic downturn where schools are losing support teachers. Schools launching new programmes will need the help and expertise of SNAs more and more. The role and professional development of the SNA needs to be examined in future research projects questioning the possibility of SNAs becoming teaching assistants in the classroom.

7.7 A final note

At the beginning of this study, novelists McCourt and McMahon maintained that story-telling has the power to engage and capture the learners' attention. Story-telling is a traditional, popular and powerful form of teacher pedagogy. Story delivers information in a way that is useful while also powerfully portraying the connections between individuals and their contexts (Goodson, 1992). I hope the story of teacher learning told

here has done that. The story within this study has been multi-faceted revealing a personal story, an institutional story and a professional story, all with many hidden facets.

This study has shown how the traditional practices of teachers working in isolation leaves them to struggle with their problems and anxieties privately. However the evidence here also shows how many schools are finding ways to foster teacher collaboration in order to enhance the learning opportunities they can offer their students. School leaders understand the importance of having expert teachers to increase the literacy and numeracy levels of the most disadvantaged students and they are encouraging teamwork and in-class support in their schools. Likewise many teachers in DEIS schools have come to the understanding that working alone is not producing the desired results leaving them frustrated and defeated. Working collaboratively has had the effect of energising them in their work, giving them a feeling of job satisfaction which previously evaded them. They are pleased to be challenged, are mindful of their responsibilities and care deeply about enhancing the learning of their students. I hope they feel as one teacher in this study did, when she changed from working in isolation to working collaboratively:

> I'm more fulfilled professionally. I feel I'm getting somewhere now. I'm making some bit of a difference. Here, you're part of a team, you're not so isolated. I had dark days back along when I started out teaching - no one to talk to, no one to turn to and work is such an important part of your life. I enjoy work now and that's very important for your own mental health.

Engaging in collaborative work with colleagues can mean, to use Huberman's metaphor (1989) that teachers do not need to tend uniquely their own gardens, but rather their well-being is tended to in a communal garden, resulting in an experience that is enriching and rewarding. I hope this study encourages other teachers to step out of the comfort zone and embrace a collaborative way of working, reaping the rewards of teacher collaboration for both themselves and their students, allowing them to experience a renewed sense of well-being through professional and personal development, collective mindfulness towards students and enjoyment of the aesthetic element of teacher collaboration.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Principal – please complete the questions below and return to me in attached SAE by March 12th 2007 . This questionnaire will be used for research purposes only, and will not be shown to a third party. Please feel free to be as open and honest as you wish. Any additional comments you wish to make will be most welcome. Thank you - J. McCarthy.

Questionnaire - Research into Collaborative Partnerships between learning-support/resource teachers and mainstream teachers in DEIS urban primary schools in Ireland.

Demographics

□**Male** □**Female**

1. (a)How long have you been a principal _____
(b) How long have you been principal of this school? _____

2. (a) How many teachers are on your staff? _____
(b) How many pupils in your school? _____
(c) How many classes of 2nd class pupils in your school? _____

3. Please tick the intervention programmes your school is involved in-

Early Start _____
Home School Liaison Scheme _____
Breaking the Cycle _____
Support Teacher Project _____
Giving Children an Even Break _____
School Completion Programme _____
Reading Recovery _____
Other (please name) _____

4. Have these programmes impacted on literacy and numeracy levels in your school?
Yes _____ No _____

How do you know?

5. How many teachers are working as mainstream teachers? _____

6. How many are working as learning-support or resource teachers? (please include resource teachers for Travellers , , support teacher project) _____

7. Approximately, what percentage of your pupils score under the 10th percentile in

Literacy	Numeracy
1% - 10%□	1% - 10%□
10% - 20%□	10% -20% □
20% - 30% □	20% - 30%□
30% - 40%□	30% - 40%□
over 50% □	over 50%□

8. Do your learning-support/resource teachers support

Literacy only ___
Literacy and numeracy _____
Literacy, numeracy and other areas_____

Familiarity with Policy

9. Are you familiar with Special Education Circulars, 24/03 and 02/05 that recommended major changes in policy relating to the allocation and deployment of learning –support resources?

Yes ____ No _____

10. Has your school's organisation of learning support changed in any way since the introduction of these Special Education Circulars?

Yes _____ No _____

Can you briefly explain what changes were made?

_____
_____
_____

Organisation of learning support: Planning & Teaching

11. Do the learning-support teachers compile IEPs or IPLPs for all of their pupils?

Yes _____ No_____

12. Are you involved in the process in any way ?
Yes _____ No _____

13. Are the class teachers directly involved in the process ?
Yes ____ No _____

14. Are parents consulted in relation to the individual programme of work for their child? Yes _____ No _____

15. Do class teachers and learning-support teachers have meetings to discuss the pupil's work? Yes ____ No_____

16. If yes, are these meetings scheduled into the school time-table?
Yes ____ No ____

17. (a) Does your school have a Special Education Team?
Yes ____ No ____
(b) If yes, do you meet with the Special Education Team
collectively ___ individually ____ (tick both if applicable)

(c) Do you meet these teachers
Collectively: Regularly _____ At least once a term ____Sometimes ____ Rarely ___
Individually: Regularly _____ At least once a term ____ Sometimes ____ Rarely___

18. (a)Do you encourage learning-support teachers to provide a balance of in-class support and withdrawal ?
Yes _____ No _____
(b) If yes, why do you encourage this method?

_____
_____

19. (a) Is there any in-class support provided in your school?
Yes _____ No_____
(b)If yes, is in-class support provided by
all ___ most___ half____ one or two ___ learning-support teachers?

20. If in-class support is provided, what method is most widely used –
(a) groupwork ____
(b) individual support during whole class teaching _____
(c) co-presentation of material to whole class ____
(d) other ___ (please explain) _____
_____
_____

21. Are some of the teachers in your school working together on literacy/ numeracy programmes? Yes _____ No _____

22. If yes, are parents involved in any of these programmes ?
Yes _____ No _____

23. Have you seen evidence of collaboration between learning-support teachers and Home School Liaison Co-ordinator in your school ?
Yes _____ No _____

24. In your opinion, do learning-support/ resource staff work
(a) as a team in your school ____
(b) as individuals in your school _____

Teacher Dialogue

25. Do you hear teachers talking about their work?
Yes _____ No ____
26. Is it usual to hear teachers asking for advice from each other , on work practices?
Yes ____ No ____

27. Do you think it is important for teachers to talk about their work?
Yes ____ No _____ Unsure____

28. Do you think teachers can learn from talking about their work with colleagues?
Yes _____ No_____ Unsure_____

Reflective Practice

29. Do you encourage your teachers to reflect on their work?
Yes ____ No _____
If yes, when and how do you do this

_____
_____

30. Do you think a reflective journal / learning log/ videotape/ colleagues' observation would contribute to improvement in teachers' practice?
Yes ____ No _____ Unsure____
31. (a) Do you keep a daily log/diary? Yes ___ No__

32. (a)As a principal do you reflect on your own practice in any way?
Yes ____ No ____

(b) If yes, do you use a reflective journal or any other method to write about significant events or interactions relating to your practice or that of your staff?
Yes _____ No _____
(c) If yes, do you look back over these writings to solve problems or make changes in your school?
Yes _____ No _____

Observation of Practice

33. Do you ever observe your teaching staff at their work?

Formally: Yes ____ No ____
Informally: Yes ____ No ____

34. Do you ever discuss aspects of their work with your staff?

Yes ____ No _____

If yes, what do you think the impact of these discussions have been ?

_____

_____

_____

Professional development

35. (a) As a principal do you feel that you have enough time to become involved in issues relating to teaching and learning?

Yes ___ No ___

36. Do you think teachers have a greater chance of raising pupil outcomes by planning, implementing, and assessing literacy and numeracy programmes as a team as opposed to planning programmes on their own ?

Yes ____ No _____

Please explain your answer_____

_____

37. Do you think that the majority of teachers have the expertise to plan a literacy/ numeracy programme with colleagues ?

Yes _____ No _____

38. Do you think the DES should provide in-service for teachers on 'working in collaborative school cultures' ?

Yes ____ No ____ Unsure

39. Do you think that In-School Planning Days provide an opportunity for teachers to share their practice?

always ____ frequently____ sometimes_____ never____

40. Do you think that new initiatives and changes in policy (e.g. EPSEN Act) have made teachers more aware of the necessity for collaboration?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure_____

Attitude to collaboration

41. Do you think that the recommendation made by the DES for teachers to work collaboratively is a reasonable request?

Yes ____ No _____

Please explain your answer

_____

_____

_____

Barriers to collaboration

42. In your opinion what are the greatest barriers to teachers working collaboratively in primary schools?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire . I appreciate the help you have given me in carrying out my research. Perhaps you would remind the 2nd class teacher and the LS/RES to complete and return their questionnaires. – Many thanks - Jacinta McCarthy, Scoil xxxxxxxxxx Cork.
(Please add any further comments below or on additional sheet).

Comments:

Appendix 2

To be completed by Learning-support/Resource teacher.
Please complete the questions below and return to me in the attached SAE by March 12th '07. This questionnaire will be used for research purposes only, and will not be shown to any third party. Please feel free to be as honest and open as you wish. Any additional comments you wish to make will be most welcome. Thank you. –J. McCarthy

Questionnaire – Research into collaborative partnerships between class teachers and LS/RES teachers in DEIS urban primary schools in Ireland.

Demographics:

□**Male** □**Female**

1. How long are you in your current position? _____

2. How many years teaching experience do you have ? _____

3. Did you work as a class teacher before becoming a LS/Res teacher ?
Yes _____ No_____

4. (a) How many pupils are on your caseload? _____
(b) How many of these are under the 10th percentile in
Literacy _____ Numeracy _____

5. Please list the classes your pupils are in –

_____

_____

Familiarity with policy

6. Are you familiar with the Learning Support Guidelines 2000?
Yes _____ No _____

7. Are you familiar with the DES Circulars, 24/03 and 02/05 that represent major changes in policy relating to the allocation and deployment of resources for pupils with SEN in primary schools?
Yes ____ No ___

8. Has your school's organisation of learning support changed in any way since the introduction of these Special Education Circulars ?

Yes ____ No_____ Don't know ____

Organisation of learning support: Planning & Teaching

9. How many teachers in your school? _____

10. How many teachers are in learning-support/ resource (including resource teachers for travellers and support teacher project) ? _____

11. Do you support pupils in (you may tick more than one)
Literacy ____ Numeracy _____ Other areas _____

12. Do all of your pupils have an IEP or IPLP ?
Yes ____ No____ (if answer is no, proceed to Q 14)

13. Was this individual programme of work planned by
You alone _____
You and class teacher _____
You, class teacher, principal, parents_____
You, class teacher, principal, parents, pupil and relevant others _____
Class teacher alone _____

14. Do you meet with class teacher to discuss work plan and progress of pupil?
Never _____ (move to Q 16)
Once a term (or less) _____
Monthly _____
Fortnightly _____
Weekly (or more) _____

15. Are these meetings
Formally scheduled _____
Informal _____
Both _____

16. (a) Are you aware that the DES promotes a balance of in-class support and withdrawal ? Yes____ No_____

(b) In relation to supporting the learning of your pupils, do you
Always withdraw the children for support _____
Provide in-class support only ____
Withdraw and give in-class support _____

(c) Why do you use this method?

_____
_____
_____

17. (a) Is this method your own preferred method?
Yes ____ No____
If not, which method do you prefer and why?
_____
_____

(b) Would you welcome the chance to work in class with a colleague
Regularly_____ Sometimes_____ Never_____

(If you do not provide any in-class support, please proceed to Q 22)

18.What type of in-class support do you engage in ?
(a) Group work with you and class- teacher _____
(b) Individual support during whole class teaching _____
(c) Co-presentation of material _____
(d) Other (please explain) _____

19. Do you regularly discuss the in-class support programme with class teacher?
Yes ___ (Move to Q 21) No____

20. If no, why not – (you may tick more than one, then move to Q 22)
(a) we never have the time _____
(b) we don't need to discuss as we work the groups independently ____
(c) too many class teachers to meet _____
(d) other reason _____

21. If yes, when do you discuss the in-class programme (you may tick more than one)
(a) break times _____
(b) before or after school _____
(c) in classroom when children are working independently _____
(d) a quick word when you can (e.g. at the door) _____
(e) a scheduled time slot without the children _____
(f) other (please explain) _____

22. Does your school schedule any collaborative planning time for teachers to plan together?
Yes ____ No ____

23. (a)Do you schedule planning time for yourself in the week? Yes ___ No ___

(b) Would you welcome more planning time ? Yes ___ No___

(c) Would you use extra planning time to plan with other teachers?
Yes____ No ____

24. Are you involved in any literacy/ numeracy programmes, organised by you and other teachers?
Yes _____ No _____

25. If yes, are parents involved in any way?
Yes _____ No _____

26. Do you think that the teachers in your school work together?
Regularly
___ Frequently ____ Sometimes ____ Never ____

Teacher Dialogue

27. Do you talk to your colleagues about your practice?
Yes _____ No _____

28. Do you think it is important to talk about your work?
Yes ____ No ____ Unsure____

29. (a)Does your school have a Special Education Team?
Yes ____ No____
(b)Do you have scheduled meetings with other members of the Special Education Team (SET) as a group?
Yes ___ No _____

30. Do you think that teachers can learn from talking about their work with colleagues? Yes ____ No _____ Unsure____

31. Have you ever changed your teaching approach/ methodologies as a result of a discussion with a colleague?
Yes ____ No _____

Reflective Practice

32. Do you keep a daily log/diary of your work?
Yes ___ No____

33. Do you reflect on your own practice ?
Regularly____ Frequently_____ Sometimes_____ Never_____

34. (a)Do you use a *reflective* journal or a learning log to write about the important events or interactions that occur in your working day?

Yes _____ No_____

(b) Do you use this journal or log to solve problems or make changes in your teaching practice?

Yes _____ No _____

35. (a) Do you think that looking back over a journal or a learning log or a videotape of your work would contribute to improvement in your practice?

Yes _____ No_____ Unsure_____

(b) Do you think that sharing your written reflections with colleagues could help you to improve your practice? Yes ____ No ____ Unsure_____

Observation of practice

36. Have you ever had a colleague observe you working?

Yes ____ (formally□ or informally□ or both □)

No ___

37. If yes, how did this impact on your practice?

_____

38. Would you welcome suggestions from a colleague on how to improve certain aspects of your practice?

Yes ____

No _____

It would depend on the circumstances _____

39. Have you ever had feedback about the nature of your work from

Principal - Yes ____ No ____

Inspector - Yes ____ No _____

How did this impact on your practice?

_____

_____

Professional development

40. Have you found in general that the in-service provided by DES in relation to the Revised Curriculum has been beneficial to your practice?

Yes ____ No____

41. Have School Development Planning days been beneficial to your practice?

always____ frequently___ sometimes ____ never _____

42. Do you think that In-School Planning Days provide opportunities for teachers to share aspects of their practice?

always ___ frequently ___ sometimes____ never___

Why?

_____
_____
_____

43. (a)Have you participated in any other personal professional development since you qualified as a teacher?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, can you elaborate on what this professional development was-

_____
_____
_____

(b) Did this professional development

(i) encourage you to examine your practice? Yes ___ No ___
(ii) encourage you to work with colleagues? Yes ___ No ___

Attitude to collaboration

44. Do you think that teachers have a greater chance of raising pupil outcomes by planning, implementing and assessing literacy and numeracy programmes with teaching colleagues, as opposed to planning programmes on their own ?

Yes ____ No _____ Unsure_____

Please give reasons for your answer

45. Do you think that the DES should provide in-service for teachers on 'working in collaborative school cultures' ?

Yes ____ No ____ Unsure____

Barriers to collaboration

46. In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers to working collaboratively in primary schools?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and helping me to carry out this research – Jacinta McCarthy.

Please add any further comments below or on an additional sheet.

Appendix 3

To be completed by 2nd Class Teacher .

Please complete the questions below and return to me in attached SAE by 12th March 2007, if possible. This questionnaire will be used for research purposes only, and will not be shown to a third party. Please feel free to be as honest and open as you wish. Any additional comments you wish to make will be most welcome. Thank- you- J. McCarthy.

Questionnaire: Research into collaborative partnerships between class teachers and LS/RES teachers in DEIS urban primary schools in Ireland.

Demographics

Male **Female**

1.How many years teaching experience do you have? _____

2. (a) How long have you been in your current position? _____
(b) Did you ever work as learning-support/resource teacher? _____

3. How many teachers are on your school staff? _____

4. How many of these are mainstream teachers? _____

Familiarity with Policy

5. Are you familiar with Learning Support Guidelines 2000?
Yes____ No____

6. Are you familiar with the DES Circulars, 24/03 and 02/05, that represent a major change in policy relating to the allocation and deployment of resources for pupils with SEN in primary schools?
Yes _____ No_____

7. Has your school's organisation of learning support changed in any way since the introduction of these Special Education Circulars ?
Yes _____
No _____
Don't know _____

Organisation of Learning-support: Teaching and Planning

8. How many pupils in your class ? _____

9. How many receive learning support or any form of support from another teacher? _____

10. How many of these children are under the 10th percentile in
Literacy _____ Numeracy _____

11. Do all of the pupils who receive support have an individual programme of work appropriate to their needs?
Yes _____ No _____ (if answer is no, proceed to Q 13)

12. Was this programme of work planned…..
By you on your own _____
By learning-support/res teacher and you _____
By learning-support/res teacher,principal and you ____
By learning-support/res teacher, principal, parents, you and/or relevant others __
By learning-support/resource teacher alone _____

13. How many teachers support the learning of children in your class? _____
(please do not count yourself here)

14. Do you meet the learning-support/ resource teacher to discuss the plan of work and the children's progress?
Yes_____ No _____ (If answer is no, proceed to Q 17)

15. Do you meet
Formally ____
Informally _____
Both _____

16. How often do you meet

Formally	**Informally**
Weekly or more often _____	Weekly or more often_____
Fortnightly _____	Fortnightly _____
Monthly _____	Monthly _____
Once or twice a term _____	Once or twice a term _____
Once or twice a year _____	Once or twice a year ____

17. (a)Are you aware that the DES promotes a balance of in-class support and withdrawal for pupils receiving learning-support.
Yes _____ No_____

(b) Would you welcome the chance to work in class with a colleague
Regularly____ Sometimes____ Never____

18. (a) Does the learning support/resource teacher
Always withdraw the children for support_____
Give in-class support only _____
Withdraw and give in-class support _____

(b) Why do you think he/she works in this way

_____
_____
_____
_____

19. Which method do you prefer ? Please tick one-

(a) Withdrawal ____ (b)In-class support_____ (c) Both _____

Can you give reasons for your preferred method.

_____
_____
_____

(If in-class support is not used in your class please proceed to Q 26)

20. What type of in-class support occurs in your classroom? (you may tick more than one)
(a) Groupwork with you and learning-support teacher(s) _____
(b) Learning support/res teacher giving individual support where necessary ____
(c) Co-presentation of material _____
(d) Other ___ (-please explain) _____

_____

21. Do you regularly discuss the in-class work programme with the LS/Res teacher?
Yes _____ (now move to Q 23) No____

22. If no, why not- (you may tick more than one, then move to Q 25)
(a) we never have the time_____
(b) we don't need to discuss as we work with our own group ____
(c) too many LS/Res teachers to meet _____
(c) other reason _____

23. If yes, when do you discuss the in-class work programme- (you may tick more than one)
(a) break times _____
(b) before or after school _____
(c) in classroom when children are working independently _____
(d) a quick word when you can (at the door etc.) _____
(e) scheduled time slot without the children _____
(f) other (explain)_____

24. (a)Does this way of planning work for you?
Always ___ Usually ____ Sometimes____ Rarely____

(b) Do you have enough time to plan the work?
Yes ___ No ___

(c) Would you welcome more planning time?
Yes ___ No____

25. Are you using in-class support because (you may tick more than one)
(a) DES recommends it____
(b) Principal recommends it ___
(c) School staff decision ____
(d) You agree with theory underlying in-class support _____
(e) You enjoy working collaboratively_____
(f) Other reason _____

26. (a) Is your class involved in any literacy/ numeracy programmes organised by you and any other teachers?
Yes _____ No_____

. (b)If yes, are parents involved in any way?
Yes _____ No_____

27. Do you think that the teachers in your school work together?
Regularly___ Frequently_____ Sometimes_____ Never_____

Teacher Dialogue

28. Do you talk to your colleagues about your practice?
Yes _____ No_____

29. Do you think it is important to talk about your work?
Yes _____ No_____ Unsure_____

30. Do you think teachers can learn from talking about their work with colleagues?
Yes _____ No _____ Unsure_____

31. Have you ever changed your teaching approach/methodologies as a result of a discussion with a colleague?
Yes ____ No ____

Reflective Practice

32. Do you keep a daily log/diary of your work?
Yes ___ No____

33. Do you reflect on your own practice ?
Regularly____ Frequently_____ Sometimes_____ Never_____

34. (a)Do you use a *reflective* journal or a learning log to write about the important events or interactions that occur in your working day?
Yes _____ No_____

(b) Do you use this journal or log to solve problems or make changes in your teaching practice?
Yes _____ No _____

35. (a) Do you think that looking back over a journal or a learning log or a videotape of your work would contribute to improvement in your practice?
Yes _____ No_____ Unsure_____

(b) Do you think that sharing your written reflections with colleagues could help you to improve your practice? Yes ____ No ____ Unsure_____

Observation of Practice

36. Have you ever had a colleague observe you working?
Yes _____ (formally □ or informally□ or both □)
No _____

37. If yes how did this impact on your practice?
_____
_____
_____

38. Would you welcome suggestions from a colleague on how to improve certain aspects of your practice?
Yes_____ No_____ It would depend on the situation _____

39. Have you had any feedback on the nature of your work from
Principal : yes ___ no____
Inspector: yes____ no ___

If yes, how did this impact on your practice-

_____

_____

_____

Professional Development

40. Have you found in general that the in-service provided by DES in relation to the Revised Curriculum has been beneficial to your practice?

Yes ____ No____

41. Have School Development Planning days been beneficial to your practice?

always ___ frequently____ sometimes___ never _____

42. Do you think that In-School Planning Days provide opportunities for teachers to share aspects of their practice?

always ___ frequently____sometimes____ never ___

Why?

_____
_____
_____

43. (a)Have you participated in any other personal professional development since you qualified as a teacher?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, can you elaborate on what this professional development was-

_____

_____

(b)If yes, did this professional development

(i)encourage you to examine your practice -- yes____ no___

(ii) encourage you to work with colleagues--- yes____ no ____

Attitude to collaboration

44. Do you think there is a greater chance of raising pupil outcomes when teachers plan, implement and assess literacy and numeracy programmes with teaching colleagues, as opposed to planning programmes on their own?

Yes_____ No_____ Unsure____

Please give reasons for your answer-

45. Do you think that the DES should provide in-service for teachers on 'working in collaborative school cultures'?

Yes _____ No _____ Unsure___

Barriers to Collaboration

46. In your opinion, what are the greatest barriers to collaboration in primary schools?

_____

_____

Thank you, for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and helping me to carry out this research- Jacinta McCarthy.

Please add any further comments below or enclose an additional sheet.

Appendix 4

'St********',
M******* Rd.,
R*******,
Cork.
23rd February '07.

A chara,

I am a primary school teacher undertaking a PhD by research in University College Cork. The area I am researching is teachers working in collaborative partnerships. I am focusing on the collaborative practice of learning-support teachers and mainstream teachers and hope to explore collaborative practice in disadvantaged primary schools in Ireland.

I have taught in a disadvantaged school myself in M***, Cork, for over 20 years and I am aware of the low literacy and numeracy levels of pupils in DEIS schools. National studies of learning-support provision reveal that many schools have shared LS teachers only, and very often the basic needs of LS teachers, such as accommodation, are not met. With these and other problems to contend with, working collaboratively may not be a priority for many teachers. As you are a teacher in a DEIS school, I would very much appreciate your views on the subject.

I realise that your time is very precious but I would be most grateful if you were willing to help me in my research. It would be of enormous assistance to me if you could complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me by Monday 12th March 2007, in the attached SAE.

The results of this study will be published in the form of a thesis but I hope to disseminate the results also in educational journals. Again I thank you for your time and hope you will help me with my study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (086) 828****.

Thanking you, sincerely,

_____

Jacinta McCarthy.

Appendix 5

'Str*****',**
M*** Rd.,**
R*****,**
Cork.
23rd March '07

A chara,

You may recall that I sent three questionnaires to your school on the issue of teachers working collaboratively. If you have already completed and returned the questionnaires, thank you so much for doing so. If not, perhaps you would consider completing the questionnaires as it would be of enormous benefit to my research. I enclose a further SAE for your convenience. If you chose not to complete the questionnaires, perhaps you would tick one of the boxes below, detach and return the slip to me. I thank you again for your time-

Jacinta McCarthy
Scoil *****
Cork.
(PhD student - UCC)

cut----------

We did not complete questionnaires due to

School policy ☐ **Time constraints** ☐

Weary of questionnaires ☐ **Mislaid** ☐

Topic not relevant to us ☐ **Other reason** _____

_____

Appendix 6

Results of Questionnaires – (Sample sheet of manual recording)

Q	Familiar with LS Guidelines	Familiar with SP Ed Circulars	Has LS organisation changed since circulars etc?

Sch No.	P	LS	CT		P	LS	CT		P	LS	CT
1	Y	Y	Y		-	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
2	Y	Y	Y		-	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
3	Y	Y	N		-	Y	N		Y	Y	?
4											
5											
6											
7											
8											
9											
10											
11											
12											
13											
14											
15											
16											

P- Principal LS – Support teacher CT – Class teacher
Y- Yes N- No ? – Don't know

Appendix 7

'St*******'
M****** Rd.,
R*******,
Cork.
29th February 2008.

Dear Principal,

You may remember that this time last year you completed a research questionnaire on collaborative practices of learning-support/resource teachers and class teachers in DEIS urban schools. I thank you for returning the completed questionnaire to me.

I am now at the second stage of my research which requires the collection of more detailed data in relation to the work practices of teachers. I will need to visit some schools and conduct interviews with the principal and one learning-support/resource teacher. I would be very appreciative and grateful to you if you would participate in this next stage of the research. Your school would be one of four schools visited and would not be identified by name in the thesis. In visiting your school, I would need to interview you for approximately one hour and interview one LS/Resource teacher for one hour. If possible, I would like to observe some in-class support work that the LS teacher provides. I would hope to have completed research in your school in one day, between April and June of this year.

I hope you will agree to participate in this research as I believe the findings will be beneficial to teachers in Irish schools, to the DES and to other interested parties. If you decide to participate please contact me by e-mail at ********@eircom.net or by phone or text at 086 828****. If telephoning, please do so after 2.30 p.m. Should I receive confirmation from you through any of the above channels, I will contact you with further details. I do thank you for your time and I stress again, that your agreement to participate would be of enormous benefit to my research and ultimately to the promotion of collaborative practices in DEIS schools. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanking you in anticipation,
Yours faithfully,

_____

Jacinta McCarthy.
(Primary Teacher,
Scoil ******
****, Cork).

Appendix 8

Interview Protocol Used in schools

In the interviews, try to get away from them talking in general terms. The particular contextual surround and understanding it in teacher's terms is important. They may talk generally…but ask about their own schools - practices etc. It's important to build on the talk about collaboration in their school and how their experiences have shaped their thinking about collaboration as opposed to getting a general picture from them as to what they perceive as the greatest barriers to the development of collaboration in schools? Their anecdotal evidence from their own school should reveal the meanings they have for collaboration, shared work etc.

Ask participant for consent to report findings in thesis/ ed/al journals. Assurance of anonymity. Ask if it's ok to record interview.

Interview questions for Principals -

1.Can you describe this school, its setting, teachers and students and – your vision and goals for the school, how do you go about achieving this vision

2. (a)What are the most important teaching and learning practices valued in this school? Why are they valued?

Prompts: What counts as good teaching and learning in this school?

(b) If you as principal were evaluating the practice of a beginning teacher, what criteria would you use?

3.What are the most significant learning problems that this school tries to address with students? Can you give me an example of one of these problems and how the school has gone about addressing it.

How did you become aware of this problem? What were the opportunities and constraints about dealing with this problem?

4.What kind of policies has the school created to address numeracy and literacy and

LS in these areas?

Prompts- What were the influences in formation of these policies?

SEN team?- meetings

5 .Can you describe the work practices of your staff in relation to class teaching and learning-support?

Possible prompts - What way does LS operate in this school?

- How do you see your role in this?

What influences their ongoing work?

-school policy

-DES policy

-in-service/ PD

SDP - DEIS plan

Cuideatheoir

6..Why do they work together? Can you tell me about how this collaboration came about and its evolution.

How do you view this collaboration – what are the benefits/ downside?

7. (a) Can you describe a **successful** in-class programme

Prompts

What led to its success?

What evidence was used to classify it as successful?

What influenced its design?

Parents & Students - any input/ were they considered

Other teachers

(b) Why do you consider it so successful – what were the main factors contributing to its success?

8. How does this school monitor programme success

Prompts

What evidence is used to assess programmes?

Who is involved

Other teachers share work or not

9. How have these programmes influenced the work practices in the school generally?

Prompts:

Other teachers

Staff presentations

In-service/ PD courses

10. Have any in-class programmes /shared worked practices evolved the practice of teachers in this school?

11..Are there other ways that teachers work together?

Prompts:

Modelling of LS programmes.

Staff Meeting presentation

12. Have they inspired other teachers to work together- in what ways?

13. When do teachers in this school get the time to plan, reflect and evaluate shared work programmes?

Prompts:

Formal schedule - IEPs

Importance of shop talk/ teacher talk - in staffroom, at door

14.(a) What are the important factors in setting up and sustaining shared work programmes and why do you think this is so?

Extend - as Principal is it easier to informally observe and give constructive feedback to a shared work programme than it is to a teacher working in isolation - would this Pr

contribution help to sustain such programmes?

(b) What factors can make the setting up of joint work programme difficult to do?

15.How would you describe the existing culture in this school?

Interview Questions for LS teachers

1.Tell me about your work as a LS teacher – talk me through a typical day

Prompts:

Planning – self, classroom teacher

Preparation of environment

Student Work Assignments

Prioritization

2. How do you think about your work ?

Prompts:

How is it different than mainstream teaching?

Teaching and Learning Goals,

Specific strategies, tools you use

How do you evaluate success/failure?

3. What aspects of the LS teacher's job do you find most rewarding/ challenging

4. Describe a successful in-class learning -support programme.

How did you evaluate it?

Prompts:

Success/Failure?

Goals?

Evidence - do you have documentary evidence?

Link to curricular guidelines?

Link to LS guidelines?

Involvement of Parents / students -aware?

Link to testing evidence

What evidence did you have to show you that it was a success?

5. Can you tell me what led you to using in-class support as a way of supporting the children's learning ?

Prompts– whose idea was it – how did in-class support programmes evolve in the school? - DES, principal, colleagues, students needs, PD courses, inservice, cuiditheoir, SDP

What challenges/ opportunities did it pose for you?

6. What kind of changes did you have to make to your practice? Was making changes to your practice – easy/difficult -Why?

-Prompts

how did it affect the way you see yourself as a teacher/LS teacher

-identity

Values/Goals/Evidence/Strategies/Tools/Conversations

7.Can you tell me about any attempts at working together that didn't work out?- Why do you think this happened/ or can happen?

8. What have you learned about yourself as a professional from working closely with a colleague?

Prompts

-Changes

-Identity

-Values

Teaching practices

Looking at your work

Reflection – examination of work in particular ways

Making your teaching public - How has it been for you to work closely with a

colleague? – How has it impacted on your practice /on your colleagues/ on your students' learning? – evidence?

9. Can you describe to me how you plan with others?/ how teachers in this school share practice/ reflect, assess programmes/ how teachers find time to talk about work?

10. What are the important factors for you as LS teacher in setting up and then sustaining a shared work programme/ in-class support programme?

Prompts- leadership-feedback/ colleagues feedback & willingness/ SEN team - meetings- DEIS plan?

11..How would you describe the existing culture in this school?

-Prompts

Ways of doing things here

Practices that are valued

Place of Students

Place of Parents

If inducting a new member into this school what is necessary for this new staff member to understand about this school

Thank participant – ask for possibility of further phone calls to clarify – get phone number, times etc.

Appendix 9

Observation in Lavender School

Who was involved? Class teacher, RR teacher, 2 other LS/Res teachers and 1 SNA - = 5 adults in the room and 20 Junior Infant pupils.

Where did lesson take place? Junior Infants classroom.

What type of collaborative teaching was observed? Literacy Lift -off programme. 5 workstations, all manned by one adult. Each adult had responsibility for one area –
1.Alphabet book - writing -class teacher
2. Familiar book reading - SNA
3. New book reading - LS teacher
4. Magnetic letters- initial sound v - LS teacher
5. Elkonin boxes - cvc words - stretching words, counters and writing -manned by RR teacher.
Each station lasted 6 minutes. Half hour programme, 3 days per week.

What tools for planning/recording were used by participants?
All of the children had an alphabet book and Elkonin sheets at stations 1 and 5. Work was recorded on these sheets. At the reading stations the adult recorded daily progress on a template, given by RR teacher. The RR teacher was the leader, giving sheets of the 6 week plan of work to all of the team before the beginning of the programme having met with class teacher to plan.

Other points of note by observer: All children were very engaged. Groups organised according to ability. Very systematic programme. Very little disruption as teacher moved to next table when time up. Class teacher felt it worked because it did not require extra work on her part and the children were getting small group attention. Teachers said it was an enjoyable way of working.

Appendix 10

Observation in Ivy Lane School

Who was involved? Class teacher and LS/Res teacher and 21 6th class pupils.

Where did lesson take place? 6th class classroom and resource room.

What type of collaborative teaching was observed?
pre-teaching / team teaching/ support teaching/
The LS teacher withdrew 4 pupils of mixed ability. She spent 15 minutes in the resource room going through information on 'historians' with the 4 children, supplying them with information sheets.
Meanwhile the class teacher worked with the remaining children, using a KWL graphic organiser, drawn on BB, and each pupil had her own KWL sheet. She elicited from the children as a whole group what they already knew about historians work and questioned them on what they would like to find out. The first two columns of the KWL grid were completed by the time the 4 pupils returned with LS teacher. The pupils then split up into 4 groups- they appeared very familiar with how to do this - and each of the selected 4 pupils led their group, using the information sheets, in finding out more about historians work. Much discussion took place - flashcards were used for new words- and after 15 minutes the class teacher asked them to come back as whole group to discuss what had been learned, adding this information to large KWL grid on BB. LS teacher modeled questions etc.Pupils filled out their own KWL grid and filed them away at end of lesson. Both class teacher and LS teacher circulated between the four groups during the group sessions, guiding , questioning and assisting where necessary.

What tools for planning/recording were used by participants? KWL template sheets and information sheets.

Other points of note by observer: Both teachers appeared equal in that both led at some stage and supported at another stage. Good relationship between the teachers was obvious. Excellent rapport with pupils. KWL was impressed upon pupils as an essential tool for secondary school study. Methodology used was seen as life-skill by pupils. One of the pupils spoke about this way of learning - "This way, the shy girls talk- we never hear their voices in class" and "I prefer when we have two teachers because we get more help and we do more things like groups and hear other opinions. It's more fun."

Appendix 11

Observation in Hollybush School

Who was involved? Class teacher (sub), LS teacher and 1 Resource teacher. 16 pupils in Senior Infants.

Where did lesson take place? Senior infant classroom.

What type of collaborative teaching was observed?
Station teaching. Adaptation of Literacy Lift-off. Three work stations. One adult at each.
1. Letter work - 2 groups used sheet for cvc words. Weak group used magnetic letters and large whiteboard.
2. Writing station - 2 groups writing called out words in copies. Weak group worked on blend sheet- circling sounds.
3. Independent writing- 2 grps writing own words and sentences. Weak group writing cvc words.
Each station - 10 minutes.

What tools for planning/recording were used by participants?
Copies, teacher's planning templates and assessment sheets, student work sheets,

Other points of note by observer: This model was the most complicated model I observed. The work covered was excellent but lots of preparation required and would not run as smoothly without commitment of LS teacher. Also the class teacher in this case likes to see where the children are at in all stations so the teachers take responsibility for different stations on different days - more upskilling but also more work involved. Children were very used to set up but because the weaker group were working on whiteboard, there seemed to be more movement involved. Many minutes spent on the setting up and at change time. The sub teacher was quite conscious of me observing- used to isolation? The others were oblivious.

Appendix 12

Observation in Oak Tree School

Who was involved? Class teacher, LS teacher. 18 x 6th class pupils

Where did lesson take place? 6th class classroom

What type of collaborative teaching was observed?
Supportive learning activities - Peer tutoring in English reading.
The children worked in pairs - the tutor and tutee. Each pair had a file - included sheets for recording the books read, the new words, dictionary practice and star chart. (adapted from F. King model) Also red and green flashcard envelopes for word practice. Teachers circulated and supported where necessary- or worked with one child as needs be.

What tools for planning/recording were used by participants?
Peer tutoring files prepared by LS after consultation with class teacher to sort out pairings etc. PM+ levelled readers used and independent readers. Files checked on twice weekly basis.

Other points of note by observer: Requires children to be independent in learning. Lots of preliminary work required in initial stages. Works better if reading ages of each pupil diagnosed before and after programme but this is time consuming. Disruptive/ SEN/ non-national children must be catered for. However great hive of activity. Children enjoying it. Once programme is up and running, preparation is minimal. Children more fluent and confident in reading as a result. Teacher has less control of the learning in this model but lots of informal discussion - teachers have time to observe more.

Appendix 13

DEIS PLAN SUMMARY - 3 Year Action Plan - LITERACY

TARGETS	The steps we will take
YEAR 1 (2007-2008) **Teacher testing will provide evidence that all pupils in Senior Infants, will know 40 key words by sight and know & write the 26 letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds.** **Focusing on 1st class target children, we will increase reading levels in 75% of these children to circa -6 or + 6 months from their chronological age.**	Continue and develop the early intervention literacy programme in Junior & Senior Infants so that all children, whose first language is English, will identify and write the 26 letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds. This target will be achieved at the end of 1st class for children whose first language is not English. Familiarise Senior Infants with 40 specific key words so that 80% of Senior Infants will recognise by sight the 40 words both in isolation and in reading context. (see attached sheet for key words & MIST targets) --- Reading Recovery programme on a one to one basis focusing on approx. 8 children. Develop an in-class support literacy programme in the two 1st classes adapted from the Reading Recovery programme, using station teaching model.
YEAR 2 (2008-2009) **To reduce by 30% the children in the 60-70 percentile bracket.**	All teachers to read and implement the school plan for Phonics (Term 1 and continue) All teachers to read and implement the school plan for Handwriting (Term 2 and continue) All teachers to read and implement the school plan for Oral Language (Term 3 and continue. All class teachers to meet with previous class teachers in September in relation to the progress made by each child in literacy, **identifying the target group**. All class teachers to meet formally with their LS/Res teacher in September and in January to plan IEPs , **and Group Education plans for the target group.** To extend in-class support literacy programme (as used in 1st class) by one class i.e. to introduce similar model in 2nd class. To develop and write up a school spelling policy.

YEAR 3 (2009- 2010) **To reduce by 50% the children in the 15-20 percentile bracket.**	All teachers to read and implement the school plan for Literacy continuing focusing this year on Reading and Spelling. All class teachers to meet with previous class teachers in September in relation to the progress made by each child in literacy, **identifying the target group**. All class teachers to meet formally with their LS/Res teacher in September and in January to plan IEPs , **and Group Education plans for the target group.** To extend in-class support literacy programme i.e. to introduce different models of in-class Literacy support in some or all Senior classes e.g Peer tutoring, literacy work stations as used in 1st & 2nd, classes, parental in-class support, paired reading.