

An exploratory study: Non-violent communication strategies for secondary teachers using a Quality Learning Circle approach

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List of Abbreviations

ABA – Applied Behavioural Analysis

FBA – Functional Behavioural Assessment

MOE – Ministry Of Education

NVC – Non-violent Communication

PB4L – Positive Behaviour for Learning

PD – Professional Development

PLD – Professional Learning and Development

QLC – Quality Learning Circle

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Abstract

Teachers play an important role in facilitating learning. The way they establish relationships with students is crucial to ensure that the classroom environment supports both academic and personal growth in students (Evans & Harvey, 2012). In recognising the importance of relationships inside of the classroom and their effects on student behaviour, the purpose of this study took two pathways.

First, this study involved an exploration of how a person-centred approach could help facilitate positive relationships within an educational context. An approach called Non-violent communication (NVC) was chosen because of its potential to enhance the teachers' empathy, interpersonal communication skills, as well as foster less judgemental perceptions and reactions to challenging student behaviours (Rosenberg, 2003a).

Second, a Quality Learning Circle (QLC) model was used as a method to practise and share the teachers' experiences of learning NVC together in a collegial and experiential way. A collaborative approach was chosen to counter teachers working alone in the hope that sharing responsibility in direction and decision making would encourage empowerment among the teachers. Therefore, in addition to critically analysing NVC, this study also examined the impact of a QLC on teachers' professional learning. It is a study which has a content focus (i.e., learning about the potential of NVC) and at the same time, a process focus (i.e., exploring the potential of a small group approach to teachers' professional learning to share and gain insight into their practice).

The study involved four secondary school teachers from two New Zealand urban schools. These teachers attended seven QLC meetings throughout one school term, and completed entry- as well as exit interviews to determine the impact and potential of both the content (NVC) and process (QLC) of the study. In addition, fieldnotes were taken to help document the teachers' journeys throughout the QLC. An interpretive paradigm, which centred on thematic analysis, was used as a means to analyse and interpret the findings in order to shed light on how NVC contributed to positive teacher-student relationships, as well as how the QLC afforded the teachers with a novel way to engage in professional learning.

The teachers reported that learning NVC helped them to avoid using judgements and increased their emotional awareness inside of the classroom. In particular, they used processes within NVC to help regulate their emotions when they encountered difficult situations, as well as purposely engaged in more open dialogues with their students. Furthermore, they also used NVC as a tool to critically reflect on their own teaching beliefs and how those beliefs impacted on the interactions they had with their students. The teachers also confirmed that the collaborative, experiential, and supportive aspects of the QLC provided an environment where they could safely practise a new approach. Through coming together in this way the teachers created a space where they could openly discuss ideas, share experiences, and co-create solutions to common contextual problems.

The implications of this study are twofold: First, it highlights how empathy-based programmes have the potential to increase teachers' emotional self-regulation skills and perspective taking abilities. Second, it demonstrates the benefits of structuring teachers' professional learning in a way that encourages active participation, ongoing learning, and the creation of a collaborative culture. As teachers are increasingly encountering stress and isolation within their profession, both elements of this research are pertinent to their wellbeing, as well as the wellbeing of the students they teach.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Teachers have an important role in facilitating student learning in the classroom. When strong teacher-student relationships are formed, this can have a positive impact on learning and student behaviour (Hattie, 2009; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). According to Baker, Grant, and Morlock (2008), when teachers are unable to form strong relationships with students in their classroom, student behaviour can be compromised. This can serve as a barrier to learning and represents an ongoing struggle for teachers and learners. In recognition of this, my focus is one of exploring ways that teachers can support each other in forming positive interpersonal relationships with their students to manage challenging student behaviours and make the classroom environment more cohesive to learning and teaching. While the idea of a cohesive classroom will differ from teacher to teacher, for the purpose of this research it is broadly defined as an environment where the interests of both students and teachers are taken into account, cooperation is present, and group goals are established. In such an environment, communication levels are high and conflict is dealt with in an open and non-judgemental way (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). In my thesis I use the term 'cohesive' to describe behaviours and characteristics of the cohesive classroom.

Managing behaviours is one of the many challenges for schools and there are continuing debates on the most appropriate techniques to use inside of the classroom so that teachers can be best prepared and supported to deal with challenging student behaviours when they occur (Miller, 2003). Hargreaves (1998) recognises that teaching is an emotionally demanding job which is associated with high levels of emotional labour. As emphasised by Hargreaves, the teacher's role is not just to teach content. Rather, teachers are expected to be tactful and show the right empathetic response whilst managing the classroom environment and delivering educative lessons to their students. Teaching is mediated by knowing the students' needs and creating a climate where students are actively engaged in the learning process (Gillies, Ashman, & Terwel, 2008). While part of this involves a teacher being flexible, responsive, and adaptable to a variety of different situations, another part is also comprised of having awareness that student behaviour is indicative of an internal process going on for each student, as well as the collective class as a whole (Evans & Harvey, 2012). It is therefore

crucial for teachers to develop strategies that take into account the holistic nature of student behaviours, rather than just deal with them at a superficial level.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) has also recognised the issue of needing to support teachers to manage challenging behaviours. Over the past decade, the MOE has employed a number of different strategies that address social aspects within schools, with priority being put on managing challenging behaviours. These include the implementation of restorative practices that aim to create better dialogue between students and teachers, as well as practices targeted at improving Maori engagement in schools, such as Te Kotahitanga (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010; Te Kotahitanga, 2015). Recently, the MOE has focused on applying a behaviourist model called Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L), which acknowledges the need to support teachers to manage challenging behaviours in a definitive and practical way (MOE, 2014a).

For my thesis I have taken the opportunity to explore an emerging and alternative approach to classroom behaviour management that places relationships at the centre of the classroom (Rosenberg, 2003b). This is presented as a two part study. The first part involves teachers' professional understanding of an approach called Non-violent communication (NVC). The second part of my study is centred on the potential of a collaborative learning process to address the teachers' mutual interests and concerns in developing their NVC skills towards managing students' challenging behaviours in the classroom. This thesis therefore explores the role of collegial support in teachers' development of NVC skills.

Rosenberg (2003b) defines NVC as an approach to interpersonal communication that looks to develop empathetic listening and honest expression through increasing teacher awareness of the feelings and needs that are behind student behaviours. This process is characterised by the concept of working alongside students in an egalitarian way and emphasises how focussing on interpersonal communication skills can facilitate more positive relationships in the classroom. Furthermore, in conjunction with communication skills, Hart and Kindle-Hodson (2008) purport that teachers need to examine their beliefs surrounding conflict in the classroom and co-create positive learning environments with their students. They argue that a close examination of beliefs can influence teachers' perceptions and reactions to challenging student behaviours. NVC characterises an emerging strategy that encompasses both these principles by promoting a positive emotional climate in the classroom through increasing

teachers' emotional awareness of themselves and their students, alongside emphasising interpersonal communication (Larrivee, 2000; Rosenberg, 2003b). These various aspects will be outlined in this thesis through a critical analysis of NVC, in combination with comparing and contrasting it to existing models, such as PB4L.

In the first part of this research, I argue that a study of student behaviour necessitates an interrogation into the role of emotions in addition to examining what positive behavioural support looks like. As Lazarus (1991) states, emotions tell us how well people are “getting along in their world” (p. 41). This is an important aspect for teachers when faced with challenging behaviours inside of the classroom because emotions are often evident in the students exhibiting the behaviours and convey positive and negative signals (Meyer & Turner, 2002). For instance, emotions can reveal areas of students' resistance, enjoyment, and reflect a desire to learn, as well as indicate specific opportunities for teachers to engage with students and establish dialogues which aid learning (Evans & Harvey, 2012). In my research I investigate how fostering emotional competency in a reflective environment translates to changing the types of interactions teachers have with students in their classrooms, as well as colleagues in their schools. In using the term ‘emotional competency’, I draw on the work of researchers such as Corcoran and Tormey (2010), who argue that when teachers have the ability to be reflective and analytical of their own and others' emotions, “facilitation of emotionally rich learning contexts” will follow (p. 2455).

Due to the MOE focus on behaviour noted earlier, explicit attention to providing behavioural support in a positive way is deemed to be important for addressing the problem of disengaged students and challenging behaviour. When teachers do not directly respond to problems in the classroom, appropriate behaviour and academic performance can decrease, alongside teachers' motivation and enjoyment of teaching (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010). While there are different ways to engage with challenging behaviour, such as applied behavioural analysis (Alberto & Trout, 2009) or restorative practices (Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010), which are both present in the PB4L model (MOE, 2014a), this research will investigate the potential of NVC for creating a cohesive classroom through addressing teachers' communication strategies. This will also include addressing their cognitive processes, behavioural patterns, and the language they use to support students and their learning. NVC was chosen as an approach to explore because it enables teachers to approach challenging behaviours in a way that is non-judgemental and empathetic (Rosenberg, 2003). In addition, its methods are

straightforward and structured in a clear way, making it easy to understand and communicate to teachers who have little or no previous experience of the approach.

The second part of my research is centred on the potential of a specific collaborative learning process (referred to as a Quality Learning Circle) to address the teachers mutual interests in managing students' challenging behaviours in the classroom. I have selected the Quality Learning Circle (QLC) model for its potential to invoke change through participatory, experiential, and reflective methods as teachers' converse together about a shared professional issue, in this case, the challenge of managing challenging student behaviours in the classroom (Stewart & Prebble, 1993). Notions of active learning and collaboration are central to the QLC approach (as explained in Chapter Three), with learning initiatives and responsibility falling on those within the group (Lovett, 2002). In an educational setting, a QLC typically involves small groups of teachers meeting on a regular basis to discuss and reflect on a selected theme of their choosing (Lovett & Verstappen, 2004). Previous research studies using a QLC model have shown that teacher learning is enhanced through the use of reflective and experiential processes in the presence of collegial support (Aman, 2014; Lovett & Gilmore, 2003; Pomeroy, 2007). These earlier studies have informed the design of my study, particularly my decision to introduce the QLC to my participants as a way for them to explore the merits of NVC for their classroom practice.

Increasing teachers' knowledge surrounding learning ways to improve their teaching approaches with students is also needed in addition to a curriculum focus. I argue for the importance of finding ways that teachers can learn, practice, and share knowledge which will contribute to their ongoing professional development in a practical and reflective way. With the amount of attention being placed on student learning within schools, Beijaard, Korthagen, and Verloop (2007) argue that understanding how teachers continue to refine and enhance their teaching is equally important. According to Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998), the impact of teacher educational programmes is problematic in the transfer of theory to practice. They argue that teachers often encounter difficulty in gaining control inside of the classroom and experience feelings of frustration, anger, and confusion. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) believe that this produces teachers who are "in survival mode", as well as hindering any real potential for true professional learning (p. 762). A QLC (which is a variant of a professional learning community involving active learning and collaboration) is used as a launching pad to explore how teachers can go beyond simply learning skills to survive. My

research presents an opportunity to examine how teachers can come together in a group environment and find pathways to contextualise common issues surrounding challenging behaviour and create solutions in a supportive environment. I argue that the QLC has the potential to provide opportunities for expertise to be shared alongside questions relating to issues of practice.

1.2 Research Interest

On a personal level, my interest in choosing this topic stems from my participation in a series of informal NVC workshops and its integration into my personal life, including informal talks with a friend who has used NVC in his teaching practice. My background in studying guidance and counselling, as well as Gestalt therapy has also influenced my decision to pursue this topic, as despite not being a trained teacher, I have witnessed the practical effects that communicating in an NVC language can have on interpersonal connection and self-understanding. Furthermore, I have also been influenced by discussions I have had with one counsellor and one psychotherapist here in New Zealand who incorporate NVC into their practice. They have provided me with anecdotal evidence of its usefulness in establishing strong interpersonal connections. I am particularly interested in applying NVC theory to practice, specifically in an education setting, where I believe it has its most potential. This also leads on to my interest in finding out how individuals can come together and create an approach that will help facilitate the understanding and practice of NVC.

On a theoretical level, I am conducting this research project because there is a dearth of empirical evidence that examines and definitively supports NVC ideology. With the increasing demand for empirically validated methods in an educational sector (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013), I believe this research may contribute to the growing body of literature on the use of NVC. Rosenberg (2003) suggests that humanistic approaches, such as NVC, can offer both teachers and students insightful, engaging, and meaningful ways to implement and follow educational policies within the confines of governmental and public dominant discourses. Since NVC is a relatively new approach, this prompts me to have an academic interest in asking whether an approach that has had a positive impact on my life could be of use to others, and if so, in what context. I believe that this research will be of interest to those who value open and honest communication within the classroom, as well as

those who are interested in understanding the benefits of working in a professional learning community compared to individuals working by themselves.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions for this study focus on investigating the content (NVC) and the process (QLC) of a small group of teachers that have come together with a common goal of fostering more empathetic relationships in their school environments. There are two main research questions, each with related sub-questions.

- 1) What is the potential of NVC for building more cohesive classroom environments?
 - 1.1 What are the perceived strengths of this approach?
 - 1.2 What are the perceived limitations of this approach?

- 2) What is the potential of a Quality Learning Circle for helping teachers practice NVC?
 - 2.1 What aspects are perceived as useful?
 - 2.2 What aspects are perceived as more challenging?

Chapter Two: Literature Review – Part A

2.1 Introduction

My intention in this part of the literature review is to provide an understanding of the complexity of challenging student behaviours, particularly in relation to the different ways they are viewed by teachers and how they can play a pivotal role in managing challenging behaviours to create cohesive classrooms. I start the first chapter of my literature review by examining definitions of challenging behaviour and justify my preferred definition. I then look at several important factors that determine how teachers perceive challenging behaviours and identify factors which may contribute to their presence. Next, I outline the key theoretical concepts of NVC and following this, I then set the scene in New Zealand by examining one of The Ministry of Education's primary strategies to manage challenging behaviour. A review allows me the opportunity to compare and contrast NVC in relation to current methods being applied in New Zealand. Finally, I draw on the information presented and synthesise it in order to understand how emotional understanding and positive behavioural strategies are central in creating a cohesive classroom.

2.2 Defining Challenging Behaviours: An Overview

Challenging behaviour is a term that is highly contested among educators, with its definition and classification depending on teacher perception and the context in which it occurs (Hill & Hawk, 2000). Since the term has the potential to be interpreted in a number of different ways, I will characterise the nature of challenging behaviours, as well as outline several pertinent definitions. In addition, this review highlights several important factors that are associated with this term to demonstrate the strong link between emotions and challenging behaviours.

Inside of the classroom, teachers are expected to manage challenging behaviours with minimal training and support (Chaplain, 2003). Behavioural disruptions interrupt the process of student learning, as well as a teacher's mental and emotional capacity. There are a variety of ways that student behaviours can be viewed as challenging by teachers. Examples include physical attacks on others, self-harm, shouting, swearing, verbal abuse, inappropriate sexual behaviour, distractibility, and hyperactivity (Imray, 2008). Factors that have been indicated as contributing to these types of behaviours include drug and alcohol use (Reid, 1999), noisy

classrooms (Anderson, 2001), and increased class sizes (Chaplain, 2003), in addition to pre-existing medical conditions such as Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (Towl, 2007). Since there are many different ways that behaviour can manifest inside of the classroom, it is important to explore how teachers define what constitutes a challenging behaviour.

Emerson (2001) categorises challenging behaviours in terms of behaviour which compromises the physical safety of an individual, as well as limiting, or delaying access to the use of standard facilities. The New Zealand MOE (as cited in Browne, 2013) adopts a similar stance by defining behavioural difficulties as behaviour that

[...] jeopardises the physical safety of the student or others; threatens to cause or causes significant property damage; and severely limits the student's access to ordinary settings and interferes with social acceptance, sense of personal well-being and their educational performance (p. 127).

In addition, authors such as Kaiser and Rasminksy (2007) have described challenging behaviours as any behaviour which interferes with a student's learning and development. Browne (2013) on the other hand uses the words, generally disruptive and problematic or inappropriate to teachers, to describe challenging behaviours. Furthermore, Roberts, Mazzucchelli, Taylor, and Reid (2003) deem it to be any behaviour which is socially inappropriate or culturally abnormal.

While these types of descriptions are necessary to provide workable definitions, it is important to shift perspective away from the negative aspects associated with challenging behaviours and move towards an intentional emphasis on the opportunity these behaviours present for teachers. In doing so, Imray (2008) acknowledges that challenging behaviours do not happen as isolated events, with the teacher separated from the student and their behaviour, but rather occur through a complex and inter-related relationship between teacher, student, and their environment. Imray states that challenging behaviours can be viewed as a creative challenge to solve, rather than just being another problem. In explaining the need to focus attention on how to manage challenging behaviours, he states:

the challenge to change is not only the learners, it is also **ours**, and the first **positive** response is, therefore, to celebrate our fantastically privileged position of being able to effect a **real** change and make a **real** difference to a number of lives (p. 8).

This position indicates a positive approach to challenging behaviours, and in doing so, de-emphasises the need to focus on the negative aspects of behaviours, as well as categorise

students who display physical, emotional or learning disorders as being inherently difficult. Instead, emphasis is placed on recognising that behaviour is indicative of an underlying function, which occurs because students often lack the skills to communicate their needs in an appropriate manner (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007). This in turn, provides teachers with an opportunity to contribute to a student's life in a positive way if they are willing to go beyond reacting to the superficial effects of behaviour.

In recognition of these positive aspects, I prefer a broader definition of the term challenging behaviour that acknowledges two contrasting aspects. The first aspect that has been identified by researchers includes disruption of student learning and development, socially or culturally inappropriate action, antisocial and generally disruptive behaviour, and behaviour that is problematic or inappropriate to teachers. The second aspect represents a decision to focus more on the behaviour presented by the student as an opportunity for the teacher to create, change or establish a greater connection with the student. Having outlined challenging behaviours from a positive perspective, I now shift my review towards focussing on the factors that are associated with these types of behaviours in the classroom.

2.3 Teachers' Perceptions of Challenging Behaviours in the Classroom

As a starting point for exploring how challenging behaviours can be viewed as an opportunity for teachers to reconnect with students, I purport that challenging behaviours are best viewed in relation to two primary positions; namely, the *teacher's perception* and the *context in which the behaviour occurred*. These points are centred on understanding how teachers' attitudes can affect their reactions to challenging behaviours and that behavioural difficulties are learnt responses, which while they may be appropriate in one particular context, may not be necessarily be appropriate in the classroom context (Emerson, 2001).

2.3.1 Teacher Perception

How teachers define and explain challenging behaviours demonstrates a combination of two factors; namely, concrete evidence of student behavioural patterns and subjective teacher perspective (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). Teachers' opinions on what constitutes challenging behaviours often fall within what they can tolerate on any given day, alongside their perception of what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. In addition, the way teachers conceptualise student behaviour inside of the classroom is similar to their own

emotional and cognitive responses (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002; Wearmouth, Glynn, & Berryman, 2005). This indicates that a teacher's response to challenging behaviours is centred on habitual reactions to the outward manifestations of student behaviours, rather than its function in communicating a message to the teacher. As Larrivee (2000) points out, this feature is predominant among many teachers, who stay trapped in self-generating belief systems, consisting of distortions, generalisations, and judgements of their students, if they do not practice critical reflection.

Rogers (1994) states that through focussing entirely on the action, teachers often locate blame heavily on the student and this can promote a negative focus in teachers' perspectives. Kauffman, Mostert, Trent, and Hallahan (2002) argue that this leads teachers to generate more knowledge on behaviours that they regard as inappropriate, rather than on behaviour that they would like to see. This may engender negative emotional responses in teachers which can adversely affect the students they teach. Moreover, Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, and Knight (2009) contend that the way teachers consciously and unconsciously regulate their negative emotions (e.g., anger and frustration) in order to manage their daily experiences in the classroom is important when considering how emotional relationships contribute to a cohesive classroom environment. They suggest if teachers are to transform their habitual reactions towards challenging student behaviours, there needs to be a conscious decision to create greater awareness and understanding of how emotions contribute to student action, as well as their personal responses to student behaviours. The research on teachers' emotion regulation strategies confirms the importance of emotions in the classroom with the concept of emotional intelligence being referred to numerous times (e.g., Evans & Harvey, 2012; Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014).

Emotional Intelligence

Research is increasingly indicating that challenging behaviours have an underlying function in communicating emotional messages (Browne, 2013; Moyes, 2002; Stephenson & Dowrick, 2005). In order to illustrate the importance of both teachers' and students' understanding of emotions and their role within an educational setting, I now outline several theories on emotional intelligence in order to explain how emotional understanding and knowledge can contribute to helping teachers manage challenging behaviours.

In terms of defining emotional intelligence, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) put forward a model of emotional intelligence based on ability (Salovey & Mayer, 1989). In this model, they purport that individuals have the ability to reason and think based on the emotional information presented to them in any given situation, so that they can “facilitate better decisions, thinking, and actions” (Caruso, 2008, p. 2). Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (2000) state that there are four aspects that define emotional intelligence:

- the perception and identification of emotions;
- the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes;
- emotional understanding; and
- the ability to manage one’s emotions, as well as other’s emotions (p. 401).

In their model, emotional intelligence is heavily tied into an individual’s cognitive ability to understand and process emotions. Building on this model, Goleman (1995) puts forth a definition based on competency. A competency model involves an individual’s learned ability to intelligently use their emotions in managing themselves and working with others. An example of this model is observed in Goleman’s work where he identifies five aspects of emotional intelligence. These are:

- knowledge of one’s emotions and having the capability to express them;
- recognition of emotions in others;
- the ability to self-monitor and regulate emotion;
- being able to motivate oneself and others; and
- having the necessary social skills to implement these aspects in real life (p. 43).

Goleman (1995) argues that, rather than being innate talents, these emotional competencies can be learned by individuals. While both of the models mentioned above have different criteria on what constitutes emotional intelligence, especially in comparison to models based on trait (Bar-On, 1997; Petrides, 2011), there are similarities that are relevant to my research. Both approaches maintain that creating emotional awareness, understanding the processes behind emotions, as well as having strategies to empathise with others are key factors in emotional intelligence. Building on the idea of emotional intelligence, Zins and Elias (2007) propose that social emotional learning (SEL) plays a key role in creating cohesive classroom environments. The authors describe SEL as, “the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others” (p. 234). These theories demonstrate the importance of emotional intelligence inside of the classroom.

Many of the descriptions of challenging behaviours given by teachers, along with their decisions on how to react and rectify these behaviours, do not always reflect an understanding of the student's own reasons for the behaviour. Emotional understanding and knowledge may be regarded as essential for teachers who wish to communicate in a positive way with students that display challenging behaviours (Sutton, 2005). When teachers have the emotional understanding and communication tools to examine the cause of behaviour in a reflective and empathetic way, this allows them to go beyond simply concentrating on punishing or rectifying behaviours (Hargreaves, 2000). Instead, they are able to observe and listen for the messages conveyed by the behaviour. By accessing 'student voice' in this way, positive behavioural methods that incorporate the use of empathy and understanding the function of behaviour become more apparent and desirable as a teaching tool within the classroom. While teacher perception accounts for one aspect of how challenging behaviours are viewed, I now turn to explore how the context in which the behaviour occurs can also shape how it is experienced.

2.3.2 Context of Behaviour

Various classroom climates demonstrate that different contexts lead to different explanations of behaviour. Emerson (2001) contends that challenging behaviours are relative to the contextual conditions of the classroom. For instance, while behaviour such as shouting in an English class may be viewed as disruptive, shouting during a physical education class might be encouraged by the teacher. Furthermore, even within classrooms that teach the same subject, the preference of individual teachers can lead to variations in what is acceptable and what is not (Arthur, Gordon, & Butterfield, 2003). This creates different classroom climates and demonstrates that different contexts lead to different explanations of behaviour (Watkins & Wagner, 2000). In recognition of these factors, teachers need to understand the context in which challenging behaviours occur and how the classroom climate can impact on behaviours inside of the classroom.

Classroom Climate

To date, there is a wide variety of research on the classroom climate and the role that emotions can play in creating this. For example, positive classroom environments are shown to be associated with student engagement, academic achievement, and prosocial behaviour

(Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012; Zullig, Koopman, & Huebner, 2009), reducing conflict (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana, & Evans, 2010), and creating more genuine relationships (Fovet, 2009). In addition, classroom environments are seen to be negatively impacted, in terms of academic success and student behaviour, when teachers enforce or maintain unequal power relations in the form of authoritarian and punitive actions towards students (Bowman, 2011; Tobin, Ritchie, Oakley, Mergard, & Hudson, 2013) and hold negative beliefs about their students (Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2012; Sakiz, Pape, & Hoy, 2012; Somersalo, Solantaus, & Almqvist, 2002). This research highlights the strong relationship between emotions and the creation of a classroom climate.

According to Allodi (2002), the classroom climate is composed of a range of factors pertaining to the physical features of a classroom, the educational environment, and the social environment. These include how the teacher implements instructional activities and assesses school work, as well as the relationships inside of the classroom. In applying a social emotional learning (SEL) perspective on the classroom climate, Brackett and Rivers (2014) describe five core competencies that interact within the classroom climate, which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making. The culmination of these factors contributes to what Tobin, Ritchie, Oakley, Mergard, and Hudson (2013) describe as the “collective state of emotional communion between members of a group or organization in which members’ salience of self decreases as their collective identity is enhanced” (p. 72). This demonstrates the importance of managing challenging behaviours, as when students are behaving in ways that are not conducive to others around them, the classroom climate will be impacted in a negative way and cohesion within the classroom will decrease.

The classroom climate is unique to each classroom and is comprised of a blend between the various personalities of those in the room and the general atmosphere, a factor which is primarily regulated by the teacher (Galini & Efthymia, 2009). In consideration that the dominant discourse within a classroom will usually be controlled by the teacher, it is necessary that they are conscious about how this climate may be determining what is perceived as challenging behaviour, as well as contributing to its presence (Emerson, 2001). For instance, questioning whether the rules that govern behaviour management are fair, realistic, and necessary, as well as questioning how much of the behaviour that they find

challenging is a consequence of the classroom climate that they have created is important. Acknowledgment that teachers' perception and the context of behaviour determine the impact of challenging behaviours, suggests that it is the teacher's responsibility to initiate a classroom climate that acknowledges the function of challenging behaviours, as well as find solutions that are based on positive behavioural support.

In summary, the preceding sections have shown the importance of considering challenging behaviours in a holistic way, rather than in isolation. For the students exhibiting challenging behaviours, consideration needs to be given to their intended and often unconscious purpose, alongside the positive or negative emotion-related messages they may be intending to convey. For teachers, a range of positive or negative emotions may be elicited by these challenging behaviours, often requiring deliberate emotional regulation strategies to be employed. The presence of emotions in both students and teachers therefore contributes to the overall classroom climate, as do the instructional and classroom management strategies of the teacher. In the next section, I turn towards examining an emerging strategy called Non-violent communication, which addresses the role of emotions inside of the classroom and emphasises positive behavioural strategies.

2.4 Non-violent Communication (NVC): A Humanistic Educational Theory

NVC is an approach to interpersonal communication based on an intentional focus on creating empathetic relationships (Rosenberg, 2003a). The overall goal of NVC is to establish a better quality of connection between people. This is achieved through becoming aware of one's feelings and needs in each moment, or as Rosenberg (2004) states, "connecting to what is alive in us" in the present moment (p. 27). While NVC is a dialogical process of communication, Little (2008) argues that it is also a type of consciousness, in the sense that NVC challenges the user to re-evaluate their habitual thought patterns and replace them with compassionate thoughts and feelings. This is one of the reasons why NVC is also referred to as *Compassionate Communication*. Rosenberg (2003a) credits much of NVC's theoretical foundation on humanistic concepts, taking particular influence from such theorists as Carl Rogers, Eric Fromm, and the philosophy of *ahimsa*, "a Sanskrit word used by Gandhi, which means to be free of the intention to do harm" (Cameron, 2015, p. 93). In addition, both Little (2008) and Juncadella (2013) point out that Rosenberg draws heavily from Gordon's (1974)

Teacher Effectiveness Training, an idea which is further elaborated on in the first discussion chapter.

In terms of outlining the components of NVC, the model consists of two main parts: The *honest expression* of one's feelings and needs, as well as *empathetically listening* to the feelings and needs of others (Jones, 2009). Within this model, Rosenberg (2003a) outlines four primary steps that are part of the NVC model: observations, feelings, needs, and requests. Each step can be used separately or in sequence and is outlined below in Figure 1.



Figure 1: NVC four-step model

2.4.1 Observations

The first component of the four step model involves being able to express observations that are free of judgements (Rosenberg, 2003a). This refers to commenting on observable behaviours without adding in one's own interpretation of the event. For example, instead of saying, *Julie talks too much in class*, which is an evaluation (denoted in the phrase 'too much'), NVC suggests stating what was observed, i.e., *Julie talked over-top of me yesterday during class*. NVC separates observable behaviours from internal cognitions about those behaviours and what that might mean. Rosenberg argues that when people receive evaluations that are mixed in with observations, they are more likely to hear criticism and this may trigger a defensive reaction. In the example above, if a teacher was to convey to a student that they, *talk too much in class*, it would be a "static generalisation" of the student's behaviour, rather than an observable incident (i.e, talked over top of me yesterday) that they could both agree on, which was specific to both time and context (p. 26). Hart and Kindle Hodson (2003) state that the advantage of giving concrete information to people, rather than an evaluation, is that it will foster connection, create opportunity for future dialogue, and contribute to the other person's learning.

2.4.2 Feelings

In the second step, attention is given towards the feelings that are being experienced in any given moment (Rosenberg, 2003a). While this process does require a vocabulary of feeling states, it does not require great articulation skills. Hart and Kindle Hodson (2003) suggest that “feelings can be expressed simply by using three words” (p. 84). For example, *I feel happy, I feel concerned, or I’m feeling confused*. Stating feelings in this way allows for a clear and concise expression between people. In addition, Rosenberg states that feelings indicate that our needs are either being met or unmet (see Appendix One for NVC feelings list). For example, in NVC one would say “*I feel upset because my need for consideration is not met*” or “*I feel relieved because I needed understanding and I got it*” (Hart & Kindle Hodson, 2003, p. 84). When used in this manner, the expression of feelings avoids naming another person as the cause of our feelings and instead allows for personal responsibility to be taken in connection to one’s feelings.

One important aspect in this second step is that feelings are expressed as feelings, rather than thoughts (Rosenberg, 2003a). This refers to opinions and judgements that are phrased in “feeling language” (Hart & Kindle Hodson, 2003, p. 15). For instance, saying *I feel that is unfair*, does not describe a feeling. Rather, the word unfair denotes a thought that expresses an evaluation. Translating this sentence to NVC, it may sound like: *I feel sad because I would have liked to be included more*. Another important aspect in this step surrounds the expression of anger. According to Rosenberg, rather than being a feeling, anger is an indication of a feeling (typically hurt or fear) mixed with a judgement (often including the words ‘should’ or ‘shouldn’t’). Instead of expressing anger in an accusatory way (e.g., *I am angry because you should have...*), Hart and Kindle Hodson (2003) propose that it is more useful to connect to the feelings and needs behind the anger, “*I feel upset/hurt/scared because my need for... is not being met*” (p. 86). The main point in using NVC in this way is to connect to the feelings that are present in every moment through a clear and accountable way.

2.4.3 Needs

In the third step, emphasis is placed on taking ownership of one’s emotional state; however, instead of the feeling this time, it is the need behind the feeling. A central premise of NVC is that there are universal needs that all people share (Rosenberg, 2003a). These include physical, emotional, and mental needs. For example, physical needs can include

water, food and shelter, while emotional and mental needs can include connection, empathy, support, and autonomy (see Appendix Two for NVC needs list). While Rosenberg's need theory is influenced by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, "in which basic needs [i.e., physiological needs and safety] must be met before less basic needs are aroused" (Weiten, 2011, p. 394), it differs in the fact that Rosenberg's needs are not conditioned upon each other as they are in Maslow's model. Rather, needs are acknowledged as having the possibility to occur during each moment, depending on the circumstances, and are transitory.

Rosenberg (2003a) argues that, while someone "can be the stimulus for our feelings, they are not the cause" (p. 142). Instead, feelings signify whether one's needs are being met or not. For instance, pleasurable feelings such as happiness, excitement, engagement or peacefulness convey that our feelings are being met. When our needs are unmet, unpleasant feelings such as sadness, fear, frustration or disconnection may occur. For example, *I feel frustrated because my need for support was not met.*

One important aspect of this third step is to distinguish between needs and strategies.

Rosenberg (2003a) argues that the latter indicates a way to meet a need, rather than a need itself. Rosenberg (2012) outlines this difference by saying:

One guideline for separating needs from strategies is to keep in mind that needs contain no reference to specific people taking specific action. In contrast, effective strategies – or what are more commonly referred to as wants, requests, desires, and 'solutions' – do refer to specific people taking specific actions (p. 3).

It is important to make the distinction between a need, such as cooperation, and a strategy to meet a need. While strategies, such as asking students to be quiet or asking them to complete their work by the end of the day, may fulfil a need for cooperation, it is important to realise that 'asking students to be quiet' is not a need, it is a strategy to meet a need (of cooperation in this case). By focussing on the idea that there are many ways to fulfil a need, or find a solution, NVC can help individuals explore different possibilities and strategies to meet their needs in every moment (Rosenberg, 2003b).

2.4.4 Requests

The fourth and final step in the NVC process involves asking what we would like others to do to help meet our needs. According to Hart and Kindle Hodson (2003), the key

points in making a request are to use present, positive, specific, and do-able action language. These points are outlined below with examples (Hart & Kindler Hodson, 2003, p. 91):

- A request is asking for what we *do want* to happen, rather than what we don't want to happen:
Please listen carefully to my direction. (What I do want)
Please don't talk to your neighbours. (What I don't want)
- A request asks for a *present* action:
Would you be willing to take five minutes now to put your things away? (Present)
Would you keep your desk tidy from now on? (Future)
- A request is stated in *action* language – what we want people “to do”, rather than what we want them “to be”:
Would you be willing to lower your voice while I'm reading? (Action)
Would you be more respectful of others? (Being)
- A request is specific and concrete, not general:
Would you be willing to work on your maths for 20 minutes? (Specific)
Would you do your work? (General).
- These points are summarised in the following sentence:
Would you be willing to tell me what keeps you from getting to class at 9am when it starts? (Present, positive, specific, and do-able).

Rosenberg (2003b) states that once we have a strategy in mind to meet our need, it is best to ask a request as a question (i.e. would you be willing to...?), as this demonstrates to the other person that they have a choice in deciding whether they want to fulfil the request or not. Since a request signifies only one strategy to meet a need, if the person answers with a 'No', this is considered as a starting point to opening a dialogue where other alternatives can be explored. This point leads on to the key feature of step four: knowing the difference between requests and demands. Rosenberg argues that if people hear requests as demands they are more likely to feel inclined to either say yes out of fear of blame, punishment or coercion. In NVC, a true request conveys a message of cooperation and empathy. Rosenberg states that the easiest way to see if a person has heard a request or demand is to ask them to reflect back what you have just said to them. If they heard a demand, it will be apparent in the tone and the words they use, for example, 'You said I have to do this...' The words *have to* imply that the person has heard a demand, rather than a request.

The main point that underpins the four step process is the intention to create a quality of connection that allows for everyone's needs to be met through “compassionate giving and

receiving” (CNVC, 2015, para 2). In NVC, personal responsibility is emphasised, as well as creating relationships based on cooperation. Having outlined the four steps involved in using NVC in a practical way, I now examine two aspects which play a fundamental role when expressing feelings, needs, and when making requests; these are empathy and self-empathy.

2.4.5 Empathy

Empathy, as defined by Rosenberg (2003a), primarily relates to the intention of being present with another person. Specifically, this involves listening to the experiences and understanding the meaning of these experiences in relation to someone else’s conceptual framework. This process avoids using diagnoses or interpretation and is distinctively different from mental understanding and sympathy. Rosenberg agrees with Rogers (1980) in stating that empathy involves authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and not having an intention to try and fix somebody’s problems. As Juncadella (2013) points out, it is interesting to note that Rosenberg’s definition aligns with several affective cognitive-behavioural definitions. First is Decety and Jackson’s (2004, p. 75) three major functional components of empathy: “affective sharing between the self and other, self-other awareness and mental flexibility to adopt the subjective perspective of the other, and also regulatory processes”. Second is Feshbach and Feshbach’s (2009, p. 85) three components: “the cognitive ability to discriminate affective states in others, the more mature cognitive ability to assume the perspective, and role of another person and the affective ability to experience emotions in an appropriate manner”. This parallel between Rosenberg’s definition and the two other definitions demonstrates congruency between the various models and helps bring validity to Rosenberg’s definition.

In extension to the above definitions, empathetically connecting with others using a NVC model means listening to the feelings and needs behind the words or behaviours. While Rosenberg (2003b) states that empathy is not dependent on verbal expression, if one does choose to empathise verbally, then it is recommended to connect with the other person’s feelings and needs. This process can often involve guessing what is going on for the other person. For example, if a student expresses ‘dissatisfaction’ to a teacher about the work they are currently undertaking in their Maths class, or seems unengaged, annoyed or upset, the teacher could respond empathically using NVC:

Observation: I noticed that you stopped working on that Maths problem.

Feeling: Are you feeling frustrated,

Need: because you would like to have figured out a solution by now?

Request: Would you like some help with that problem?

The above example is a classic way to empathise with someone using the NVC model. In this approach, the need is often not conveyed directly, but rather in a more casual way, as students will often not be aware of their underlying needs. Using the example above, showing a student's need for understanding, the suggested approach is to directly ask if they would like help to find a solution, (Rosenberg, 2003). In addition to empathising with others, I now turn to outlining self-empathy, a feature that is equally important within an NVC model.

2.4.6 Self-empathy

Self-empathy involves the same tools mentioned above, however, instead of reflecting outwards, empathy is reflected back onto oneself. Little (2008) states that the purpose of self-empathy is to connect with how you are feeling in the present moment and become aware of your underlying needs. In addition, this process can help an individual to become more objective about the situation that stimulated their feeling and clarify what they would have liked to happen or would like to happen now. For example, if a teacher is judging themselves because they yelled at some of their students in class (e.g., *I didn't do a great job today*), they can self-empathise with themselves. For instance, "*When heard myself use such a loud voice with the students today, I felt sad because I didn't create the connection with them that I wanted*" (Hart & Kindle Hodson, 2003, p, 95). Rosenberg (2003) argues that by cultivating self-compassion, one is more likely to "make choices motivated by our desire to contribute to life rather than out of fear, guilt, shame, duty or obligation" (p. 135). In addition, Hart and Kindle-Hodson (2003) assert that when you are unable to empathise with someone else, this is usually a sign that you need to self-empathise first. Having outlined the key concepts of NVC, I now shift the reader's attention towards the literature that has been currently published on NVC.

2.5 Non-violent Communication Studies

Within an initial literature review, studies specific to NVC were found in the following fields: Education, counselling, judicial, sociology, and public health. The databases

included in the search were ERIC (EBSCO) and PsycINFO. In addition, the official NVC website also provided a reference list of both scientific and anecdotal studies. The key terms used were, “nonviolent communication”, “non-violent communication”, “nvc”, “compassionate communication”, and "empathetic education". The first four terms were used as they encompass the different names NVC is known by, and the last term was used because prominent NVC authors (Rosenberg, 2003; Hart & Kindler Hodson) have referred to this phrase when applying NVC in an educational setting. Criteria for inclusion within this literature review were publications within the last 12 years and a topic that either directly investigated NVC theory or NVC practice in an educational context. Overarching themes that were identified included conflict-resolution, empathy training, interpersonal communication, and learning skills. In terms of the educational research, I found seven studies in primary or secondary school settings: two of these were in Scandinavian countries (Hart & Göthlin, 2002; Pedersen & Rasmussen, 2008) and involved the use of NVC throughout an entire school; two were large-scale projects in European countries (Costetti, 2001; Savic, 1996); and three involved implementing NVC on a small scale within a classroom (Albe & Gombert, 2012; Kasumagic, 2008; Little, 2008). In addition, there were also two studies at the tertiary level (Cox & Dannahy, 2005; Jones, 2009). I now provide more details of each of these contributing studies on NVC.

2.5.1 Research at the Primary and Secondary Level

Scandinavian Studies

The first study by Hart and Göthlin (2002) outlined setting up and running a predominately NVC school based in Sweden with students aged between 6-13 years old. During the four years of its operation, the authors noted greater interpersonal communication between students and teachers, an increase in community participation, and a decrease in school conflicts. These results were attributed to creating a school climate that encouraged interpersonal communication, empathetic listening, as well as increased student autonomy and participation in decision-making processes. In addition, Hart and Göthlin reported that students in the school either maintained or exceeded typical expectations in standardised tests. One of the main limitations of this study was the lack of theoretical insight to account for any changes noted in the school. Instead of theorising possible mechanisms or structural possibilities for these changes, the authors focused on providing a mostly narrative account of

their experience. In addition, the authors did not provide any quantitative details of the test results they recorded.

The second study by Pedersen and Rasmussen (2008) provided an account of several of the ways the authors introduced teachers and students to NVC in Danish primary and secondary schools. Practical ways of introducing NVC into a school environment were illustrated, with attention being placed on using storytelling, role-playing, and visual aids to communicate NVC ideas to students. The authors reported an overall decrease in conflict after applying NVC concepts in these schools. Unfortunately, Pedersen and Rasmussen only provided anecdotal evidence in their article. No statistics or research designs were outlined. If the authors had provided empirical evidence to support their claims, a stronger argument would have been made.

Small-scale Projects

In the first study by Little (2008), NVC training was given over a six session period to help 14 Canadian high school students girls (aged between 16-19 years old) cope with aggressive and violent behaviour that was impacting on their academic performance and emotional environment. This training focused on increasing empathy and compassion as a strategic response to their difficulties with aggression. Descriptive statistics were gathered using pre- and post-tests, alongside qualitative information to write a narrative. A control group was also used. The author reported an increase in conflict resolution skills in the NVC group, but not the control group. In addition, the ability to empathise with oneself and others also increased in the NVC group. This study highlights how using empathy as a form of positive behavioural support can help students to explore their emotions in a supportive environment. The main limitation of this study revolved around the small sample size, a feature common to the majority of NVC studies.

The second study by Albe and Gombert (2012) focused on recording and analysing 12th grade students' communication strategies during a global warming debate in America. During this process, students were introduced to basic key concepts of NVC and their debates were analysed to identify rhetorical processes with coding schemes based on the four main principles of NVC (observations, feelings, needs, and requests). NVC was used under the larger theoretical umbrella of socio-scientific issue teaching, which is an approach that looks

to increase students' awareness of scientific issues that impact on society. It was found that with an awareness of NVC, students were able to regulate their oral contributions to the debate by identifying judgments in their discussions, which contributed to a more cohesive interaction between students. This study highlights the immediate impact that NVC can have on interpersonal communication, particularly on the ability to distinguish observations from judgements. In addition, it also emphasises how self-regulation of judgements helped contribute to a more positive environment. However, since the scope of this study was very narrow, the results cannot be generalised into a normal classroom scenario.

The third study of importance is by Kasumagic (2008), who outlined a proposed framework for educational strategies to engage Bosnian youth (aged between 15-24 years old) from three different ethnic groups in developing community change and post-war healing. During this project, NVC was used to:

enhance the participants' awareness of the complexity of the Bosnian issue and to develop their ability to take a multidimensional view of themselves, others in the group, different identities, and the complexity of emotional responses to the realities [they] live in" (p. 384).

This study brought together teachers and students to share their experiences of the psychological and social impacts of living in a post-war country. The overall objective of this programme was to empower youth through a participatory process and to develop self-awareness and self-worth. The main criticism of this article is that it did not go into detail surrounding how NVC was used in the workshops, alongside the specific outcomes of its use.

Large-scale Projects

The first project, undertaken by Savic (1996), describes NVC's implementation in kindergartens, as well as primary and secondary schools throughout Serbia over a one and half year period (1995-1996). This study involved 13 NVC trainers holding workshops to train 552 participants from 15 towns in Serbia. The participants were made up of preschool, primary, and secondary school teachers, as well as psychologists and other people working within the education sector. Approximately 60% of those who attended the workshops implemented NVC in their own pedagogical practice through creating their own workshops. A total of 9380 school children attended these workshops throughout the entire study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered, which showed that the NVC workshops had a positive effect on how the participants communicated with their students, particularly in

relation to challenging behaviour. Savic reported that when teachers looked to understand the reasons behind challenging behaviours, they were able to change their attitudes and reactions towards students in a positive way. Furthermore, a difference in student behaviours was also noted as a result of the teachers modelling empathy. These differences included fewer conflicts, more positive self-perception, and perception of others, as well as greater cooperation between students.

Savic's findings demonstrated how increasing emotional awareness through empathy can affect the way challenging behaviours are manifested inside of the classroom and perceived by teachers. One of the strengths of this study is that NVC training was given for a total of 48 hours over a six day period, with the first training period lasting three days and the second training period one week later. This provided participants with an increased opportunity to grasp the concepts of NVC. In addition, supervision was also provided throughout the entire study. While this study shows the potential of NVC on a large-scale, credibility would have been gained if it had been submitted to a peer-reviewed process.

The second project, undertaken by Costetti (2001), implemented NVC in three primary schools in Italy over a one year period (1998-1999). The goal of this mixed-methods study was to determine whether the application (teaching and learning) of NVC modified and improved communication patterns within the Italian schools, and if so, to what extent. The participants involved one principal, 28 teachers, 438 parents, and 219 school children. A control group was also used from another school in the same region, which consisted of 102 children. Teachers received 59 hours of collective training (where the school principal and the teachers all attended together) and 25 hours of training in small groups (attended by the teachers involved and by the school principal). Once the teachers had sufficiently grasped the NVC model, they then taught this to children through organised classes. In total, 14 classes were given, with each taking 1.25 hours. During these sessions, children and teachers applied the NVC to situations taken from daily school life. In addition, three groups of parents were also given 8.5 hours training in NVC. Questionnaires were used to assess pre- and post-changes to classroom environment, including variables such as conflict, classroom behaviour, and unpleasant feelings and situation.

The overall results of the study showed that NVC facilitated an improvement in the relational climate within the school community, increased empathy, and fostered more productive

communication patterns. Additionally, questionnaires demonstrated how children, parents, and teachers placed different values on what is important to them within a classroom environment. This highlights how differing perceptions on what constitutes challenging behaviours can vary between individuals and inside of the classroom. The strength of this study was that it used quantitative data and statistical inferential analysis to obtain results, which gave more validity to the project. However, like the Serbian project, the study was not subjected to peer-review.

2.5.2 Research at the Tertiary Level

The first tertiary level study was by Cox and Dannahy (2005). It established NVC's effectiveness in mentoring Master's students through an online platform. NVC theory was applied to three mentors, with an emphasis on bringing awareness to their students' feelings and needs surrounding any issues they were having. NVC was found to bring more clarity, trust and openness to the online mentoring process, alongside accelerating a deeper relationship between the student and mentor.

A second university study by Jones (2009) focused on applying NVC theory to increase empathy among graduate teacher assistants (GTAs) through NVC workshops. This study totalled 66 participants, including two school directors, nine teachers, 15 students, and 40 GTAs. The results of this study indicated that NVC is effective in increasing cooperation, compassion, and respect in GTAs as part of their new communication strategy.

The limitations of these studies are centred on the small sample sizes that were used, as well as having no control groups. Particular to Cox and Dannahy's study is possible that the increased attention of internet mentoring alone may have produced positive results. In relation to Jones' study, only one 45 minute training session on empathy was given to the GTAs. While the researcher believed this was enough, perhaps more frequent or longer training sessions would have contributed to an improved result.

2.6 Summarising the Potential of NVC

NVC is built on a strong framework of humanistic principles, which has contributed to its formation and development. It shares many commonalities with current approaches to managing challenging behaviour. While there is a lack of empirical evidence to definitively

support NVC, existing research is supportive of its potential effectiveness in an educational environment, particularly in areas such as cultivating empathy, emotional awareness, communication skills, and decreasing conflict. However, whilst highlighting the merits of NVC, gaps in the literature must also be acknowledged. These include identifying which contexts NVC is best suited in, understanding the processes that teachers and students learn the approach – particularly what works well and what doesn't, and assessing NVC's overall efficiency and effectiveness through more in-depth, larger, and quantitative studies. While the implications of this literature review on NVC are promising, more research is needed to understand if NVC is a suitable method to apply in schools with students who display challenging behaviours. In the next section, I describe evidence-based practices that are currently underway in New Zealand for managing challenging behaviours. As will be shown, the emphasis on being proactive and building positive relationships is consistent with a focus on creating cohesive classrooms and aligns with the key principles of NVC.

2.7 The Current Approach to Challenging Behaviour in New Zealand

The importance of using evidence-based practices in an educational environment and finding approaches that teachers will actually use is a significant factor when designing educational practices (Browne, 2013). Savage, Lewis, and Colless (2011) point out that over the past decade in New Zealand, there has been a recent shift away from traditional punitive practices, such as reactive punishment, to more positive approaches, based on proactive behavioural techniques. This section will examine a recent Ministry of Education (MOE) programme called *Positive Behaviour for Learning* (PB4L), and then compare its key theoretical principles to those of NVC.

2.7.1 Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)

PB4L is a school-wide initiative that is currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The programme is based on a framework which recognises that positive behaviour can be learnt, is a necessary prerequisite for engaging students, and takes time to implement (MOE, 2014a). PB4L emphasises that teachers shift their perspective away from using punitive practices, which treat individual students as a problem, towards changing the classroom environment in order to create more positive behavioural solutions. One way of doing this is through adopting individualised behavioural interventions that are based on creating a positive learning environment in the classroom, whilst at the same time,

proactively preventing behavioural problems (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Through utilising this method, students are then given the opportunity to learn from problematic incidents, rather than just being punished (Smith, Bicard, Bicard, & Baylot Casey, 2012).

PB4L is aimed at students from early childhood through to secondary school level and has an associated programme called *The Incredible Years*, which focusses on providing training to teachers and parents for early learning in students aged three to eight years old (MOE, 2014b). These programmes encourage building positive relationships and proactively prevent difficult behaviour. Within the school, behavioural intervention is targeted in a tiered approach (Sugai & Horner, 2009). As shown in Figure 2, the bottom tier, comprising of 80-90% of students, looks at universally supportive behavioural systems across a whole school context. This involves establishing a team within the school who understand the framework of the programme, can identify the types of behaviours that need to be targeted, and create proactive strategies based on PB4L principles. The middle tier, comprising of 5-10% of students, focusses on targeted interventions for those who are not responding to the primary interventions. This is centred on implementing positive behavioural strategies and using a data system to record and evaluate this process. The top tier, comprising of 1-5% of students, is designed for those who have extremely challenging behaviour and involves individualised assessments and intensive behavioural support (Savage, Lewis, & Colless, 2011).

Designing School-Wide Systems for Student Success

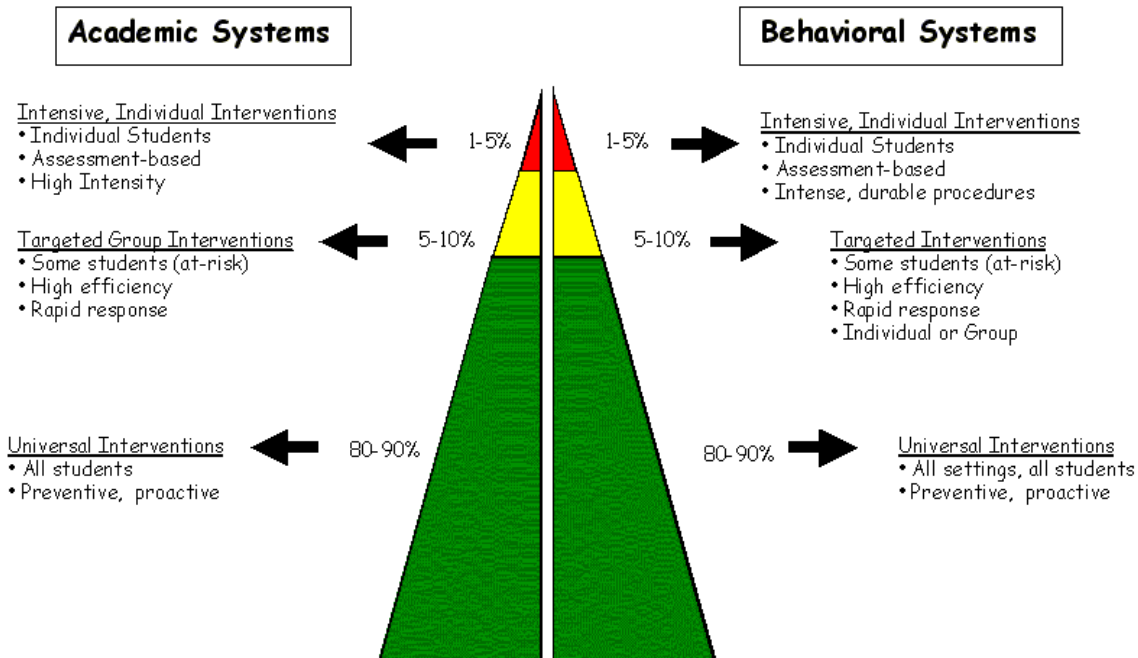


Figure 2: An outline of how PB4L is targeted at different groups of students through a tier system (PBIS, 2014).

As of June 2013, 408 New Zealand schools had undergone PB4L training, with 51% of these being primary schools, 34% secondary schools and 14% intermediate schools (MOE, 2014a). This number is expected to double by 2017. Since the implementation of PB4L is increasing throughout New Zealand, this highlights the relevance of exploring positive behavioural support programmes to address challenging student behaviours. The theoretical foundations of PB4L, which are centred on applied behaviour analysis and restorative justice principles, are presented in the section below.

Applied Behavioural Analysis

Applied behaviour analysis (ABA) is defined as “a scientific approach for discovering environmental variables that reliably influence socially significant behavior and for developing a technology of behavior change that takes practical advantage of those discoveries” (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007, p. 3). According to Ormrod (2011), the key assumption of ABA is that challenging behaviours result from the past and present environmental conditions, and by altering the present conditions, more productive behavioural responses can be elicited. In an educational setting, this implies that behaviour is

functionally related to the teaching environment. Greer (2002) states that the purpose of ABA is to provide individualised educational programmes to students. This often involves the teacher changing their pedagogical practices in order to influence existing student behaviours. As there is significant research supporting the effectiveness of ABA techniques in managing challenging behaviours (e.g., Allen, James, Evans, Hawkins, & Jenkins, 2005; McPhilemy & Dillenburger, 2013), Kerr and Nelson (2010) argue that it is critical for teachers to understand how the use of interventions based on reinforcement strategies, alongside understanding the role of consequences, can be used to manage challenging behaviours.

According to Alberto and Troutman (2009), the clarification of behavioural objectives is an important first step in implementing ABA within a school-wide approach. At an individual level, this involves teachers identifying the learner, targeting behaviours, conditions of intervention (i.e., how and when to intervene), and criteria for acceptable performance. By having a clear framework from the outset, this helps teachers form long-term educational goals and short-term behavioural objectives, as well as facilitate communication between all those involved in the programme. Within this programme, functional assessments are used to identify the circumstances preceding the behaviour, the behaviour, and consequences, so that specific behavioural strategies are effectively chosen (Omrod, 2011).

The types of behavioural modification methods used in ABA can be broadly categorised into two functions (Alberto & Troutman, 2009). The first involves arranging consequences that increase behaviours. In this category, positive and negative reinforcement are used to provide consequences that increase the frequency of that behaviour (Kearney, 2008). Positive reinforcement refers to adding a pleasant condition directly after the desired behaviour, while negative reinforcement refers to removing an adverse condition once the desired behaviour occurs. The use of primary reinforcers (edible and sensory) and secondary reinforcers (tangible or exchangeable materials, privileges, activities, and social reinforcers) are contingently based on the student displaying targeted behaviour and are immediately given or taken away (Chance, 1998). The second category involves arranging consequences that decrease behaviour. Alberto and Troutman (2009) state that the above technique of reinforcement is also used, however, the teacher has the additional option of terminating the reinforcement (extinction), using punishment, removing desirable conditions, or presenting adverse conditions (such as academic work or certain tasks). The use of these other

techniques is dependent on the severity of the behaviour, with reinforcement based strategies (positive and negative) being a preferred method of choice.

In the PB4L programme, ABA principles have been combined with positive behavioural support in order to increase student learning and engagement (Savage, Lewis, & Colless, 2011). According to Ormrod (2011), these include using aspects of behavioural theory, such as focussing on reinforcing desirable behaviour, giving students opportunities to make choices, stimulating intrinsic motivation in the student, and modifying the classroom climate to minimise conditions that trigger challenging behaviours. According to Alberto and Troutman (2009), the use of positive behavioural support helps to “increase appropriate behaviours in a student’s repertoire” (p. 208). When combined with a restorative approach (see next section), this strengthens positive relationships inside of the classroom (MOE, 2014c).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is an approach centred on humanistic principles, which focusses on creating a dialogue between victim and offender, particularly by empowering the offender in a non-coercive way, so that healing can occur in both parties and in the wider community (Schweigert, 2002). Barton (2003) categorises this approach as involving the empowerment of those involved (victim, offender, and the wider community), whilst creating healing at the individual and community level, as well as re-establishing social harmony. Restorative justice is often contrasted with retributive justice, whereby punishments are used in proportion to the offence. Wray and Hutchison (2002) argue that punitive justice is primarily centred on a mentality that somebody must win and somebody must lose. Alexander (2006) points out that when only punishments are used, they can become a regressive pattern that can create a “vicious spiral triggered by retributive values” (p. 69). While the restorative practices started out in the criminal justice system, they have found their way into schools, primarily being used to address conflict and behavioural problems (Morrison, 2007). This is seen in both a New Zealand (Deckert & Wood, 2013; Drewery & Kecskemeti, 2010; Wearmouth, McKinney, & Glynn, 2007) and an international context (Schumacher, 2014; Teasley, 2014; Vaandering, 2014).

The concept of restorative practices fits within the framework of PB4L as it promotes proactive responses to behavioural issues. In recognition of this, the MOE (2014d) adopted restorative practices in 2011 as part of an updated PB4L initiative. The MOE states four key principles that this model is established on. These are:

- positive interpersonal relationships are a major influence on behaviour;
- a culture of care supports the mana¹ of all individuals in the school community;
- cultural responsiveness is key to creating learning communities of mutual respect and inclusion;
- a restorative approach leads to individuals taking responsibility for their behaviour (p. 5).

Inside of the PB4L programme, the restorative principles are manifested in three ways. The first is through encouraging teachers to use restorative language and actions inside of their classrooms. Emphasis is placed on creating relationships that embody “respect, empathy, social responsibility, and self-regulation” (MOE, 2014d, p. 10). The second involves teachers forming collegial relationships (referred to as restorative circles) to practice the required skills needed to interact with students in a restorative way. The third way is centred on direct student intervention programmes. This is an intensive approach designed for students with severely challenging behaviours and functions to “repair harm and restore relationships” (p.11). These three principles are highlighted within the PB4L framework as one method for fostering positive relationships school-wide.

2.8 Comparing Approaches: NVC and PB4L

In this section, a comparative analysis between NVC and the PB4L programme is presented. This starts with an examination of the similarities between the two approaches, with five common points being identified. Following this, an outline of the differences between each approaches are made, with four distinct points separating NVC and PB4L. A summary is then given which draws together the information presented.

¹ Mana refers to power and authority, which “in a western paradigm ... shares characteristics of self-esteem and community standing” (Webb & Jones, 2008, p. 49).

Table 1: Similarities between NVC and PB4L in dealing with challenging behaviours

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF NVC AND PB4L
1. Focus on communication that facilitates learning, as well as positive relationships
2. Emphasises that the problem is not the student, it is the behaviour
3. Addresses the purpose, or function, of behaviour
4. Educates students (alongside teachers) on finding better strategies to create cohesive classrooms
5. Adopts restorative principles

As Table 1 highlights, NVC and PB4L are alike in a number of ways. First, they both emphasise the value of creating positive relationships when dealing with challenging behaviours. Within this idea, communication skills are valued highly. In the PB4L programme, teachers are taught to use “effective questioning, listening, clarifying, summarising, and ... language that students (in particular) relate to” (MOE, 2014c, p. 5). Part of this involves being able to distinguish between positive and negative comments, asking and telling, as well as learning how to make observations. In NVC, teachers are also encouraged to use language that is centred on creating positive relationships (Rosenberg, 2003). For instance, differences between communicating in a judgemental and objective way are outlined. In addition, empathetic language is a cornerstone of this approach, which is used to facilitate positive relationships.

A second way these two approaches are similar is that they both emphasise that it is the behaviour, not the student, which can be challenging. The MOE (2014a) states that, “it’s not about changing the students; it’s about changing the environment, systems, and practices you have in place to support them to make positive behaviour choices” (para.3). Through focussing on behaviour, distinct from the student, NVC and PB4L address challenging behaviours in relation to a specific time and context. This helps teachers to take a more objective stance when faced with these types of situations as they focus on rectifying the behaviour, rather than assigning blame or judgement to the student (Rosenberg, 2003a).

This leads on to the third similarity: By being objective, teachers are able to address the function of behaviour, rather than getting caught up in its effects. Through a PB4L approach, stimuli that precede challenging behaviours are identified as well as consequences that may be contributing to the behaviours. These are observed in a way that illuminates the function of behaviour, rather than merely attribute it to a student's disposition (Alberto & Trout, 2009). In the same way, NVC looks beyond students' actions and explores the reasons that motivate them. This is done through examining how a student's preference for certain types of behaviours, which are referred to as strategies, indicates an attempt to meet an underlying need. Through both an NVC and PB4L viewpoint, challenging behaviour often reflect a student's misguided way of trying to meet an underlying need in a socially unacceptable way.

Building on the above principle of addressing the function of behaviour, the fourth similarity demonstrates how both approaches look to find better strategies to create more cohesive classrooms. In PB4L, these strategies are centred on identifying relationships between challenging behaviours and student motivation. A range of different reinforcements (i.e., social or academic) is used to either increase or decrease behaviour. In addition, since competing reinforcers in the classroom may offer a greater incentive to students than what the teachers may offer, PB4L advises teachers to find reinforcers that students value (Alberto & Troutman, 2009). In a similar way, NVC looks to create awareness in students (and teachers) of the feelings and needs which reinforce certain behaviours (Hart & Kindle Hodson, 2003). For example, when a student is aware of what behaviours stimulate positive feelings which in turn meet underlying needs, this represents positive reinforcement. In addition, when the students realise that by ceasing behaviour, they are able to alleviate negative feelings, which indicate unmet needs, this represents negative reinforcement. This teaches students to manage their own behaviour through reflective methods and is prominent in both NVC and PB4L.

In the final comparison, both NVC and PB4L adopt restorative principles as opposed to punitive ones. According to Little (2008), NVC is positioned within a restorative practice through its focus on English language patterns and creating a socio-linguistic change from a retributive paradigm to a restorative one. The main way that NVC employs these principles is through focussing on empathy and conflict resolution skills at an interpersonal level. This aligns with the current restorative practices used by the MOE in its PB4L programme. In terms of the differences between NVC and PB4L, there are four instances which are relevant (see Table 2).

Table 2: Differences between NVC and PB4L in dealing with challenging behaviours

NVC	ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF PB4L
Primary goal is to create more honest and open relationships that facilitate compassionate giving and receiving	Primary goal is to create socially useful behaviour inside of the classroom
Emphasis is on emotions	Emphasis is on behaviours
In-depth behavioural assessments are not used	In-depth assessments behavioural are used
Does not advocate the use of punishment	Punishment is suitable in some circumstances, however, is not a preferred method

First, while many of the goals between both approaches are similar, they differ in what is regarded as fundamental. In NVC, the primary goal is to create more open and honest relationships. Rosenberg (2003) states that NVC’s primary focus is not on changing behaviours, it is instead centred on creating a quality of connection that allows for everyone’s needs to be met through “compassionate giving and receiving” (CNVC, 2015, para 2). However, several authors (Cox & Dannahy, 2005; Jones, 2009; Little, 2008) have noted that as a consequence of interacting this way, behaviours do change in ways that are socially appropriate and beneficial. In contrast, through PB4L’s use of ABA as a major method inside of the programme, attention is largely placed on the behaviours that students’ exhibit (Savage, Lewis, & Colless, 2011). As a result, the effects of changing behaviours through an in-depth and individualised way help create more positive relationships inside of the classroom. This demonstrates that, while both approaches have different foci, they align through a mutual interest in creating positive relationships inside of the classroom.

Second, building on the above idea of the goals of each approach, NVC’s primary focus is on building relationships, whereas PB4L’s primary focus is on altering behaviour. In NVC, emphasis is placed on understanding *emotions*, which are expressed through the feelings and needs of each student. Once a student’s emotional state is acknowledged, the teacher is able to explore ways that may meet the student’s emotional needs. In contrast to this, while PB4L also recognises the importance of emotions within the classroom, emphasis is placed on understanding the *behaviours*. In doing so, this also allows teachers to gain an understanding of the needs that are driving the student to act in certain ways (Alberto & Troutman, 2007).

While this difference demonstrates that each approach places value in different areas, alignment is still shown through a common interest in finding strategies that spark student motivation, with NVC preferring emotional motivation and PB4L preferring behavioural motivation.

Third, one major divergence between both approaches is seen in the use of assessment tools. On the one hand, while NVC does apply principles of reflective and critical analysis, there are no formal assessment tools that teachers can utilise. On the other hand, PB4L is strongly based on the use of ABA type assessment tools. While assessment tools do provide a distinct advantage, in terms of the large amounts of specific data that can be gathered, there are potential disadvantages. These involve issues such as whether teachers are able to learn and implement assessment tools correctly, alongside the notion that while some teachers will embrace these methods, others will prefer a more human-centred approach.

The last difference concerns the use of punishments. While both approaches avoid punishments based on punitive practices, PB4L describes some contexts where punishment is acceptable. For example, reprimanding the student or removing a reinforcer (such as another student). From a behaviourist perspective, this is typically done as a last resort. However, teachers who take on ABA methods may use punishment more frequently, especially if it is already a habitual reaction (Chance, 1998). In contrast, NVC prefers to motivate students without the use of punishment, because “when we submit to doing something solely for the purpose of avoiding punishment, our attention is distracted from the value of the action itself” (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 164). While Rosenberg acknowledges that punishment is a powerful motivational force, he believes that the moral aspects, such as a decrease in self-esteem and compassion, do not warrant its use in the classroom. Instead, empathy is used to connect with the feelings and needs of students in order to find better behavioural strategies.

In summary, while both NVC and PB4L do show differences in the way they examine, interpret, and respond to challenging behaviours, the commonalities they share overshadow their divergence in theory and present possible paths of complimentary use when managing challenging behaviours. In acknowledging that having multiple teaching strategies is both necessary and beneficial for teachers, an argument is made that supports the inclusion of methods that focus on emotions, as well as behaviours (Orlich et al., 2013).

2.9 Chapter Summary

Teachers often cite challenging student behaviours as an area that demands their attention and focus inside of the classroom (McCready & Soloway, 2010). One of the key findings in this chapter is that challenging student behaviours need to be viewed in a multidimensional way that take into account teachers' perceptions and the context in which behaviours occur. While challenging student behaviours present teachers with difficulties, they also provide an opportunity to engage with students on an emotional level. This type of interaction can pave the way for a deeper understanding of the reasons behind challenging student behaviours, as well as increase the emotional climate inside of the classroom.

NVC provides teachers with another strategy to address the underlying causes of challenging student behaviours through establishing dialogues with students and the use of positive behavioural support strategies. The strategies presented within NVC align with several of the principles already used in New Zealand's PB4L programme, such as increasing communication between teachers and students, as well as adopting restorative principles. As the literature on NVC has shown positive results in an educational setting, particularly in areas of conflict resolution and challenging behaviours, its potential looks promising. However, since there is still relatively little empirical evidence outlining NVC, there are unanswered questions surrounding how the approach may be best applied within a classroom, how it would fit into existing pedagogical practices, and methods teachers can learn the approach in a way that are contextually relevant to them. As professional learning and development characterise such a crucial part in teachers cultivating new approaches into their practice, the next chapter will explore that issue further.

Chapter Three: Literature Review – Part B

3.1 Introduction

My intention in this chapter is to foreground the cultures that support teachers and their professional learning processes. Specifically, I review the literature on how to improve the quality of provisions for teachers' professional learning, drawing attention to system and self-initiated learning agendas. Within this literature, I illustrate the characteristics of effective professional learning and development (PLD) and then turn towards professional learning communities as a form of PLD, recognising that teachers benefit from collaborative learning opportunities with colleagues rather than independent learning. In addition, the language of professional learning conversations will also be explored. Finally, I highlight one particular model that fits within a PLC framework, namely, a Quality Learning Circle (QLC) and explain its potential to bring teachers together and create contextually relevant learning processes within an educational environment.

3.2 Professional Development and Learning

In New Zealand, professional development (PD) is a requirement for teachers, with the Ministry of Education providing general guidelines and policies (Ell, 2011). However, tension surrounds who decides what the learning agendas will be and how they are taught (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). This tension is exemplified in the apparent dichotomy between self-initiated and system-initiated learning processes. Timperley (2011) argues that the latter is usually associated with teachers being given directives on what knowledge to acquire and represents a process where teachers “sit and get” knowledge and information from those ‘above them’ (p.1). This typically occurs in the form of staff development training and is founded on the premise that acquiring more knowledge leads to better teaching practices, which places emphasis on the quantity of learning opportunities versus the depth of learning. In addition, Ell (2011) argues that this kind of PD is currently heavily focused on “reducing the achievement gap and improving literacy and numeracy outcomes by implementing national standards” (p. 436).

The problems associated when PD is delivered in this way are that teachers' actual learning needs are not typically identified, with the framework for learning being more theoretically

constructed than experientially based (Timperley, 2011). Kohn (1999) argues that engaging teachers to reflect on their current knowledge and practical experiences is more difficult when extrinsic motivation is used. In addition, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) state that this type of PD is often disconnected from focussing on the relationship between teachers learning new ideas and translating them to change within the classroom. For example, PD may not be relevant to teachers' needs or be sustainable, making the transition from theory to practice difficult. Moreover, Bubb and Earley (2011) maintain that teachers' "beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours" are not always addressed when PD is undertaken within an environment that is characterised by passive participation and when learning agendas are determined by others (p. 806).

In contrast, Timperley (2011) emphasises a shift away from traditional PD towards professional learning that involves engaging teachers in making decisions on the how, why, and when of the learning approach. With this model, strategies that are more contextually relevant to teacher professional development become viable. This is because teachers are encouraged to critically explore their own assumptions of their teaching practices, and in doing so, create new professional knowledge and understanding based on new and relevant information. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) contend that when professional learning is performed in this way, three types of knowledge are created: "knowledge-*for*-practice, knowledge-*in*-practice and knowledge-*of*-practice" (p. 250). These points emphasise the central role that teachers play in constructing knowledge through connecting the theoretical and practical aspects of professional learning, as well as taking personal responsibility for their own learning processes (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002).

The main difference between traditional professional development and professional learning is seen in the latter advocating teachers' active involvement in the learning process, as opposed to a more passive method. Whilst Timperley (2011) does not argue for one approach over the other, she does state that teachers need to engage in "active inquiry, learning, and experimenting" in order to improve their practice and for the learning to be anchored in real life concerns (p. xviii). In acknowledging that it is these key points, rather than the use of either term, which is important, the term PLD is used from this point onwards to denote professional development and learning (Timperley, et al. 2007). I now turn to examine some of the different challenges associated with PLD in the context of understanding their connection to adult learning.

3.3 The Challenges of Adult Learning

Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon (1998) contend that the impact of teacher educational programmes is limited because teachers experience tension between being told how to do their job and having personal autonomy to choose their own learning agendas. The issue of understanding how teachers learn, both in initial teacher education and ongoing professional development, is therefore a crucial matter and one that depends on closer attention to ensuring that the principles of adult learning guide professional learning options and processes that support teachers.

Over the past century there has been an abundance of theories, models, assumptions, and explanations that have investigated the adult learning process (Taylor, 2008). This has led to the field of adult learning being comprised of complex and often contradictory conceptual models. Knowles (1980) characterises the key principles of adult theory as incorporating the involvement of adults in their own learning process, the ability to experience theory in action, relevance of material to learners' immediate conditions, and a focus on intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. In addition to these principles, other authors have included reflection, peer dialogue, support structures, cultural factors, and the perspective of the learner as important factors in adult learning (Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow, 1981). According to Zepeda (2012), engaging adults in learning is one of the key factors in creating successful PLD programmes for teachers. I now turn to explore several of the challenges that are inherent in this process in more detail (see Table 3).

Table 3: Key challenges associated with teacher learning (adapted from Zepeda, 2012)

Challenges associated with teacher PLD	Specific issues of each challenge
<i>Why</i> do teachers choose to learn?	Finding out what motivates teachers' decisions regarding learning
<i>What</i> kind of learning takes place?	Positioning critical learning processes within current practices and school systems
<i>How</i> is teacher learning structured?	Understanding that variations in learning styles will dictate the mechanics of teacher learning
With <i>whom</i> do teachers learn?	Establishing positive learning environments that support collegial learning

3.3.1 Why Do Teachers Choose to Learn?

Inspiring teachers to strive beyond what they already know and are comfortable with can be challenging, particularly if they have a high workload and feel exhausted. An essential element in designing effective learning is that teachers find it helpful, relevant, and enjoyable (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Rhodes, Stokes, and Hampton (2004) suggest that when adults are responsible for implementing their own learning initiatives and evaluating their own performance, they are more likely to be engaged in the learning process. Zepeda (2012) states that “adult learning is not static, what motivated an adult in previous years might not do so now” (p.61). This highlights that the processes involved in teaching new groups of students necessitates renewed learning and reflective thinking about practice. When teachers are able to link PLD into their current responsibilities and future intentions, such as career opportunities, they become more responsive to the learning process. Considering teachers’ attitudes towards learning is a crucial factor in understanding what motivates teachers to learn (Hunzicker, 2013).

3.3.2 What Kind of Learning Takes Place?

Initiatives that promote educational change can often fall-short of expectations from both teachers and those who implement the programmes (Timperley & Parr, 2005). One real challenge in determining the effectiveness of PLD involves decisions surrounding learning agendas. In addition to the idea that motivated teachers will be more interested when learning is seen as relevant to their current practice, Kegan and Lahey (2002) contend that teachers must also be willing to consider new alternatives that help them make meaning from their experiences in a critical and reflective way. Baumgartner (2001) argues that in schools, this often means challenging the status quo, as teachers learn to make critical judgements about their working environments. For instance, voicing criticism over current policies or practices that are not in the best interests of their students. Timperley et al. (2007) state this is a necessary part of PLD when “prevailing discourses [are] problematic” (p. xxvii). While being critical of one’s teaching environment can be challenging for both teachers and administrators, Nuthall (2004) concludes that if teachers are to bridge the gap between theory and practice, critical examination on the problems they face is essential.

3.3.3 How is Teacher Learning Structured?

Structuring teacher learning can be difficult, especially when recognition is placed on the idea that no two teachers learn in the same way or at the same rate (Zepeda, 2012). The experiences, skills, and needs of each teacher will be unique and will contribute to how they prefer to structure their own learning. According to Adelman (1997), when teachers are asked to take on “new responsibilities and adopt new practices that are substantially different ... [they] need time to be learners themselves” (p. 2). Knowles (1990) asserts that adults’ prior experiences need to be taken into account, as one of the main principles of adult learning is that new knowledge and skills must relate to prior learning. If this not done, PLD may be resisted as teachers need to be able to link new concepts to old ideas (Hunzicker, 2011).

In terms of structuring learning, Kolb (1984) outlines four learning styles and asserts that different styles will appeal to different people. This means that a learner will prefer to spend more time in one approach than the other depending on their personal development and preferred learning strategies. Kolb’s first learning style is learning through *concrete experience*, which involves the feelings and kinaesthetic responses of the learner. The second is *reflective observation*, which includes watching and analysing. The third involves *abstract conceptualization*, which entails critical thinking. The last style involves *active experimentation*, which is the doing part of the process. Throughout adult learning, it is necessary to place awareness on how to structure learning that is best suited to each individual and the group as a whole (Levine & Marcus, 2010). For example, different methods such as classroom observations, mentoring, and conversations about practice, will have different appeal to each teacher and influence their level of participation. Finding ways to structure and organise PLD is therefore an important factor in creating opportunities for teachers to learn.

3.3.4 With Whom do Teachers Learn?

Social relationships are important to consider when examining adult learning. Although adults can learn on their own, Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) purport that collaboration and team work are more powerful for designing learning that adults will engage in. When adults come together and begin group discussions about practice it helps to create stronger contextual significance to learning. Zins and Elias (2007) argue that effective learning is established in the context of supportive relationships where there is a willingness

to expose weaknesses and take risks. However, as Riley, Watt, Richardson, and Alwis (2012) point out, the challenges involved with teachers working together surround different levels of experience, contrasting personalities and motives, alongside time-pressures. These areas can impact on how, and if, teachers connect with each other. The relationship between the participants is critical to whether adult learning programmes succeed (Galbraith & Cohen, 1995). Within a context of learning, creating sustainable PLD means that establishing a positive social climate is essential.

In summary, there are several challenges that are identified within the literature. Teachers must be motivated to learn in ways that are contextually relevant, take into account their preferred style of learning and also challenge them to trial new approaches. If teachers choose to come together the roles and relationships between each teacher must be taken into account in order for them to collaborate together. In addition, part of effective collaboration also involves critically examining teaching practices and understanding the factors that create positive learning environments. The overriding challenge here is to put teachers at the centre of their learning, so they can shape their own learning agendas (Hunzicker, 2011). The following section builds on the challenges presented here and explores characteristics that make up effective PLD.

3.4 The Characteristics of Effective PLD

The conditions and processes that support both professional learning and development have been outlined by several authors (Corcoran, 1995; Hunzicker, 2011; Timperley, 2011). These include establishing a climate where teachers feel safe to take risks and explore new alternatives in practice, alongside motivating teachers to create their own learning agendas through active participation. While different researchers draw different conclusions on the exact aspects which make up effective PLD, there is consensus on several key features. I draw on the principles outlined by Hunzicker (2011) who states that “when professional development is supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing, teachers are more likely to consider it relevant and authentic, which is more likely to result in teacher learning and improved teaching practice” (p. 178). In addition to these principles, I acknowledge Timperley et al. (2007), who suggest that effective PLD needs to be evidence-based, empowering teachers to make informed decisions based on what works in practice. Furthermore, I include the work of Dempster, Fluckiger, and Lovett (2012), who

argue for the awareness of personal agency within PLD. This refers to motivating teachers to address areas of difficulty within their practice and create personally relevant solutions. From these principles I have created a list (shown in Figure 3) which reflects effective PLD. Following this, each point is elaborated on, with references to multiple researchers.

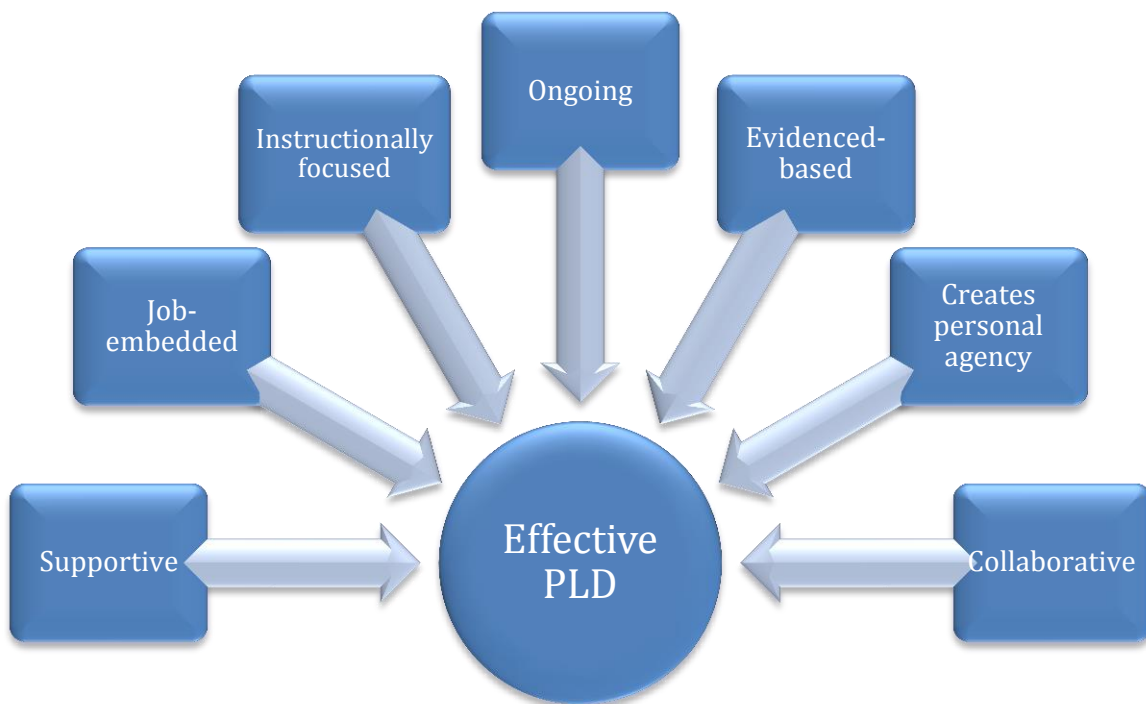


Figure 3: Elements that make up effective PLD (adapted from Hunzicker, 2011)

PLD that is supportive involves structuring learning activities in-line with teachers’ interests, personal needs and preferred styles of learning (Loucks-Horsley & Matsumoto, 1999). According to Stoll and Louis (2007), “the lack of support structures in schools including lack of time, fear of risk and lack of trust, perpetuate independent rather than interdependent thought” (p. 119). Muijs et al. (2014) highlight that “teachers cannot meet new challenges in teaching and learning alone” and call for a focus on dynamic and multi-levelled approaches to PLD (p. 249). The emotional demand of teaching, alongside the ongoing impact of curricular demands, requires continual support in order to shape teachers’ professional practices in a positive way (Tankersley, 2010). Both Hunzicker (2011) and Timperley (2011) argue that support for teachers needs to be systematic, with assistance coming from within the school, as well as from the national level.

PLD that is job-embedded prepares teachers through “personalized, work-based, and process-rich experiences”, so that newly acquired knowledge is reinforced in the workplace (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009, p. 384). Teachers often enjoy working together and job-embedded practices offer them a relevant way to be challenged and create new ideas with the support of others who know the context (Hunzicker, 2012). Corcoran (1995) contends that job-embedded PLD should be grounded in knowledge about teaching, which encompasses teachers’ expectations on student outcomes and behaviour, curriculum content, and assessment protocols within the school. When PLD is relevant to teachers’ professional needs, it better translates from theory to practice and allows participants to make real world connections to their everyday teaching practices (Fogarty & Pete, 2009; Timperley, 2011).

PLD that is instructionally focused emphasises the study and use of pedagogical practices that are focused on student outcomes (Hunzicker, 2011). It involves the active and visible implementation of change in the classroom and provides teachers with contextually relevant ways to achieve this (Hopkins, 2003; Hunzicker, 2011). According to Renkl (2014), learning from instructional examples is an effective way for adults to acquire cognitive skills. This is emphasised as “quality instruction is connected to improved student learning outcomes” (Gallucci, DeVogt Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010, p. 920). Hunzicker (2011) argues that when instructionally-focused PLD is centred on student outcomes, teachers recognise its value and significance.

PLD that is ongoing provides teachers with multiple opportunities to interact and receive follow-up support, as well as to become proficient in new strategies and integrate them into their practice (Corcoran, 1995). When teachers engage in multiple PLD sessions, they are more likely to improve their teaching practice as time between sessions allows them to trial and reflect on their actions. This is recognised by Muijs et al. (2014) who believe that sustained inquiry by teachers into what is effective for students helps them to resolve existing problems and deal with future challenges that arise. Bleach (2014) contends that ongoing PLD should be focused on the “process rather than product ... emphasis[ing] the ongoing journey of working towards quality practice” (p. 187).

PLD that is evidence-based allows teachers to identify effective pedagogical strategies by linking PLD to what works for students (King, 2014). Since learning and change is complex, teachers need to understand the relationship between teacher PLD and student outcomes

(Opfer & Pedder, 2011). According to Timperley (2011), teachers need to define success by student outcome, rather than by how many new strategies they have learnt. Through testing whether changes to teacher practice have positive outcomes on students, teachers are more likely to sustain new practices. Since evaluating the impact of change can be problematic in schools, evidence-based PLD provides teachers with reliable and validated methods to use inside of the classroom (Rhodes, Stokes, & Hampton, 2004).

PLD creates personal agency that involves teachers intentionally shaping their responses to problematic situations (Fallon & Barnett, 2009). Dempster, Fluckiger, and Lovett (2012) argue for the awareness of personal agency within PLD and the shift away from relying on systems already in place to create more self-initiated learning agendas. By becoming aware of personal agency, teachers begin to take responsibility for the content and direction of their own learning processes, as well as the relationships between themselves and others. This reflects an ontological position that “the reality of the social world is complex and constructed by the participants who engage within it [... and that] understanding the subjective world of human experience may help enhance the impact of PLD” (King, 2014, p. 103). Through acknowledging that teachers are the change-agents in PLD, the relationship between individual interests and workplace interests are more likely to converge (Billet, 2002; Bubb & Earley 2010). With the above processes in mind, Stoll and Louis (2007) argue that within any professional learning programme, the learner needs to address the questions of whether this particular programme is leading them to a deep understanding of their practice, whether it challenges them and their conceptual basis of what constitutes learning, as well as if it takes into account the varying individual and cultural needs of those involved.

PLD that is collaborative is considered fundamental in most professions. However, as DuFour (2011) points out, teachers often work in isolation from one another. Carrol (2009) maintains that “quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment, it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone” (p. 13). Timperley (2011) agrees and states that while cultivating a collaborative culture within the school can provide challenges, collaborative inquiry can lead to deeper learning, whereby teachers understand the pedagogy behind the changes they make and adapt it to suit the needs of their students. This is echoed in numerous research studies which link increased levels of student achievement to teachers who work in a collaborative way (Bevan-Brown et al., 2012; Hattie, 2009; Neill, Hammer, & Linnstaedter,

2012; Odden & Archibald, 2009). According to Glazer and Hannafin (2006), reciprocal interactions between teachers can occur through such ways as problem-solving or sharing responsibility in designing a curriculum. This emphasises Bandura's (1986) concept that learning is stimulated through personal interactions. Devlin-Scherer and Sardone (2013) also state that these types of interactions in a PLD scenario rely on positive emotional connections being made between teachers.

The seven principles outlined above reflect characteristics of effective PLD that have been identified by multiple authors and serve as a basis for teachers to establish practices based on empirical evidence. It is important to note that many of the characteristics of effective PLD emphasise a shift away from individual learning, where teachers are in isolation, towards *socially collaborative learning*. This will be discussed in the next section, with an analysis of the key components that make up effective group learning.

3.5 Professional Learning Communities

Teaching is a social profession, yet teachers often become isolated from their peers (Heider, 2005). This poses a problem in regards to PLD, as the challenges of individual learning on teachers can negatively impact on job satisfaction and contribute towards teacher attrition rates. Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2002) argue that in a profession that is increasingly becoming specialised, and consequently fragmented, it is unrealistic to expect any one teacher to obtain sufficient knowledge and skill to be competent in every scenario. When teachers study alone they lack rich interaction and discussion, as well as support (Lake, 1999; Venter, 2003). In addition, studying alone can be time-consuming and requires a high level of motivation (Croft, Dalton, & Grant, 2010). In contrast, learning in groups can help teachers to increase their knowledge base through being challenged, cultivate a sense of professional identity, as well as form cohesive collegial groups and classrooms (Argote, 1999; Slavin, 2011; Wenger, 1999). As Jonassen (1996) concludes, "groups collaboratively build more meaningful knowledge than individuals alone" (p. 34). One approach to group work that has been espoused by several authors (Martin, 2011; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Zepeda, 2012) is a professional learning community (PLC).

Stoll and Louis (2007) define a PLC as a group of people who are motivated to reflect on their ways of thinking and practice in order to grow as individuals and as a group in an

environment of trust and support. In a professional learning community involving teachers, power relations between group members become more equal as problem solving and decision making are collaborated on together and leadership within the group is shared (Martin, 2011). Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) argue that PLCs create transformation in teachers' habits and perceptions during their daily work. In addition, Hopkins and Jackson (2003) believe that this approach facilitates the building of networks within a school, which allows for the development of better teaching practices. When teachers work together in this way, emphasis is placed on group participation instead of individual agency and this can help to overcome challenges one may face at an individual level, since there are shared group knowledge and support structures (Carroll, 2011). In outlining the characteristics of PLCs, Zepeda (2012) contends that there are seven key features which are worth noting (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Seven key points of a professional learning community (adapted from Zepeda, 2012)

First, because PLCs are *collaborative*, they support growth and development among teachers in relation to their practices. Through implementing activities such as problem-solving, co-planning, observing each other, and reflecting in a group environment, teachers are able to

examine their pedagogy in a more holistic way. While Timperley (2011) points out that building a safe and effective PLC can take time, Hargreaves (1997) argues that the benefits of collaboration are significant, as it produces teachers “who have a greater willingness to take risks, to learn from mistakes, and share successful strategies with colleagues that lead to teachers having positive senses of their own efficiency, beliefs that their children can learn, and improved outcomes” (p. 68).

Second, PLCs are *inclusive environments*, where the needs of both teachers and students are taken into consideration (Zepeda, 2012). This type of environment encourages dialogue between teachers and reinforces a common vision among members of the group.

Third, PLCs *support change* within the school. According to Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, and Smith (1994), this often implies examining the complex factors associated with power in order to create PLCs that support meaningful change. This requires assistance from those in administrative roles so that leadership is distributed throughout the teachers involved (Martin, 2011). Through diffusing power in this way the division between ‘experts’ and participants is reduced and those within the PLC are regarded as both learner and teacher (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, & McIntyre, 2008).

Fourth, PLCs *support autonomy and foster connectedness among participants*. Zepeda (2012) asserts that teachers succeed in PLCs that foster independence and share a common vision about learning. This type of structure helps to build “certain norms, beliefs, and assumptions and value systems that bind educators and students” (Martin, 2011, p. 46). In addition, Stoll (2011) adds that teacher morale and job satisfaction are likely to increase within the PLC structure.

Fifth, PLCs use *reflective* methods to increase understanding and knowledge. Leitch and Day (2000) describe reflection as a cognitive process that is centred on learning from experience. The process of reflection helps teachers to explore, interpret, and understand events as well as the thoughts and emotions that accompany them (Boud, 2001). Schön (1987) purports that teachers engage in both “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action”, with the former denoting reflection whilst they are doing something (for instance, teaching a class), and the latter signifying reflection after an event has already happened (p. 31). While both of these types of reflection support job-embedded learning, Timperley (2011) warns that teachers may

feel resistant towards theories that challenge or contradict their own professional identity, so consideration regarding areas of resistance also needs to comprise reflective practices.

Sixth, PLCs thrive in a *positive school culture and climate*, where teachers develop "shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, reflective dialogue with colleagues, and peer collaboration" (Bogler & Somech, 2004, p. 285). Zepeda (2012) contends that a healthy school climate enables teachers to function and utilise opportunities for PLD in more productive ways. Furthermore, as already discussed in the previous literature review, a positive classroom climate plays a pivotal role in how behaviour is exhibited and perceived, as well as the teacher's attitude towards teaching (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Bubb and Earley (2011) maintain that schools need to play an active and positive role in regularly finding time for teachers to engage in PLD sessions.

Lastly, building on the previous characteristic, *trust and caring are central* in PLCs. Establishing relational trust, based on respect, competence, good communication, and integrity helps to form safe PLCs, while caring promotes teachers who respond to each other's needs, as well as their students' (Zepeda, 2012). While the characteristics mentioned above make up essential elements within a professional learning community, they are not a completely comprehensive list and instead, represent common points which have been enumerated by multiple researchers.

3.5.1 Learning Relationships Based on Professional Talk and Collaborative Mentoring

When teachers come together in a PLC to further their professional practice, the extent to which they engage with each other in a constructive and supportive way can determine the learning outcomes (Timperley et al., 2007). Teachers who engage in professional talk which places emphasis on student outcomes, whilst at the same time, examine the reasons behind their own actions and assumptions, encourage relationships that support the change process (Robinson et al., 2009). Collegial interactions that involve collaborative mentoring represent one way that teachers can come together to talk about issues of practice and feel comfortable taking risks.

According to Whithead and Fitzgerald (2006), mentoring programmes are gaining popularity as a useful tool in teacher PLD programmes. Bradbury (2010) points out that the definition of mentoring, and the role of a mentor have shifted over time from a traditional linear approach to learning, where the mentor was an expert and the mentee was a novice, towards a more egalitarian and collaborative approach. This shift is conceptualised in what Feiman-Nemser (1998) defines as ‘educative mentoring’. The core principles of this approach include “cultivating a disposition of inquiry, focussing attention on student thinking and understanding, and fostering disciplined talk about problems of practice” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 28). In contrast to more traditional ways of mentoring which place a high priority on ensuring novice teachers can cope within their new profession, educative mentoring focusses on addressing immediate concerns, whilst creating long-term growth and reflective knowledge (Bradbury, 2010; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005).

While educative mentoring was constructed with novice teachers in mind, its framework can be applied to teachers mentoring each other in a collaborative way (Aderibigbe, 2013). This approach to mentoring, whereby teachers mentor each other in an equal way, is emphasised as part of the PLC process. In terms of the specific techniques that teachers can use within collaborative mentoring, Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006) state that the mentor may draw on a range of different methods in order to facilitate the mentoring process. These include questioning (i.e. hypothetical, probing, and checking), listening and challenging, negotiating an agenda, helping to establish priorities, sharing experience and storytelling, encouraging new ideas and creativity, helping in decisions and problem solving, agreeing on action plans, as well as monitoring and reviewing these plans. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (2000), mentoring “concerns teachers' increasing needs for emotional support” and helps teachers form strong relationships with each other and to inquire into their practices (p. 52).

In summary, PLCs help to provide an inclusive and positive environment, support change, create collaboration, foster autonomy, and provide a place for reflection. Furthermore, the use of collaborative mentoring within a PLC can provide teachers with additional support and provide a pathway where individuals can come together to contextualise common issues and create solutions in a supportive environment. In the next section I will describe and place emphasis on one particular model that fits within a PLC paradigm and provides teachers with an opportunity to use collaborative mentoring. This model is referred to as a Quality Learning Circle.

3.6 The Quality Learning Circle

The Quality Learning Circle (QLC) model is an approach to professional learning that looks to invoke change through participatory, experiential, and reflective methods (Stewart & Prebble, 1993). The purpose of the QLC is to bring together those with shared interests and focus their attention on creating better work practices. The ideas of active learning and collaboration are central, with learning initiatives and responsibility falling on those within the group (Lovett, 2002). In an educational setting, a QLC typically involves small groups of teachers meeting on a regular basis to discuss and reflect on a selected theme (Lovett & Verstappen, 2004). This process is cyclical in nature. Stewart and Prebble (1993) characterise the QLC model as:

- selection of a common theme for exploration;
- discussion and storytelling within the group about experiences relating to the theme;
- observations in classrooms to enhance the meaning of the stories;
- discussion of these observations on pairs, then with the whole group; and
- sharing examples of practice within the group (p. 137).

The QLC model develops the idea that teachers are active learners who control and shape their own learning processes. Rather than forming a reliance on those above them to provide learning opportunities, teachers within a QLC are responsible for deciding what they learn and how they learn it. A core feature of the QLC is to establish a professional culture that reflectively analyses and inquires on the work of teachers in order to improve professional practice.

In regards to the research to support this model, the implementation of QLCs in New Zealand have occurred at both a formal and informal level in an educational environment (Aman, 2014; Edwards, 2012; Guerin, 2008; Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, & Schwarcz, 2010; Lovett & Gilmore, 2003; Lovett & Verstappen, 2004; McPherson & Borthwick, 2011; Pomeroy, 2007). The reported strengths of the approach include gaining feedback from colleagues who understand each other's position and can comment from an insider's perspective, a chance to establish higher levels of connection and trust with colleagues, less isolation as commonalities are shared between teachers, and more engagement in

understanding theory and translating it into practice. The challenges involved in using a QLC model include working together with colleagues that you have not chosen or do not have a strong relationship with, fear of criticism or judgement from others in the group that may lead to not fully opening up or taking risks, difficulty in going beyond a superficial level of investigation into one’s own professional practice, and the time it can take to establish a QLC where structure, direction, and collaboration happen naturally and effortlessly.

Overall, the QLC experience represents an exciting approach to professional learning for teachers who are willing to engage at a deeper and more reflective level with their colleagues. Research validates its use with teachers in educational environments and the principles that make up a QLC align with several already identified characteristics of effective PLD (see Table 4). In summary, the QLC model provides teachers with a regular way to form collaborative and supportive relationships in order to develop new techniques to trial inside their classrooms. These factors create motivation to change and generate personal agency in teachers.

Table 4: Characteristics of effective PLD that are manifested within the QLC model (adapted from Hunzicker, 2011)

Characteristics of effective PLD	How the QLC model aligns with effective PLD
Supportive	Teachers solve problems together to find solutions to common issues and create a network of support
Job-embedded	Teachers discuss themes and share stories relating to their practice, which create both personal and professional relevance with what they are doing
Collaborative	Teachers work together in a way that empowers collegial relationships and creates leadership
Ongoing	Meetings are held at regular intervals, typically over prolonged periods of time
Creates personal agency	Through teachers discussing problematic situations with each other, they are motivated to create solutions together and take responsibility for changing their own practice.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This part of the literature review has focused on the processes involved in teachers' PLD. Some of the key challenges teachers face in their PLD pertain to making decisions on the how, why, and who of learning. The characteristics of effective PLD have been explored with several themes recurring throughout this section. Namely:

- teachers need to take an active role in their own PLD in order to create personal agency;
- teachers learn better together, hence, collaboration is essential;
- critical reflection is an integral part of transformational learning; and
- PLD needs to be ongoing, job-embedded, and supportive of teachers' needs.

Additionally, a QLC has been shown to embody multiple aspects of effective PLD, providing teachers with an ongoing way to structure their learning. Having analysed key literature pertaining to managing challenging behaviours and PLD processes that support this, I now present the research methodologies which have been used as a basis of my research.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the details of how this research was carried out and the reasons for doing so. First, a description of a qualitative methodology is presented, followed by an outline of the characteristics of a single case study and an interpretive approach. Second, data gathering procedures as well as ethical considerations are summarised in a clear and concise way. Third, data analysis is described so that the reader is aware of the process behind the interpretation of the data. The significance of this research involves investigating teacher voice regarding their perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable student behaviour in classroom settings. In my study I introduced the teachers to NVC as another approach to address challenging student behaviours, as well as the QLC model as an alternative way of learning a new approach.

4.2 Qualitative Research Methodology

This research adopted qualitative methodology in order to obtain an insider perspective on how the teachers experienced NVC in terms of their language, ideas, and belief systems. Lichtman (2013) states that qualitative methodology is an approach that looks to describe, understand, and interpret human behaviour. In terms of researching educational issues, Klenke (2008) suggests that qualitative methods are useful to “capture the richness of people’s experiences in their own terms” (p. 10). According to Punch (2009), this means understanding what goes on in the educational environment from the viewpoint of those involved, rather than from those ‘outside’ the arena.

Within this research, the teachers involved functioned as insiders and allowed me to capture their views and gain a personalised account of their experiences. This involved understanding not only the teachers’ thoughts, but also the ways they constructed experience more generally, including their feelings and the interpersonal relationships they had with their colleagues and students. By choosing a qualitative methodology, I sought to gain a rich and holistic understanding of the teachers’ experiences, in terms of exploring the key themes of the teachers in a group, as well as maintaining their individual voices (Thomas, 2003). As I was investigating a group of teacher’s experiences in-depth and within a real-life context, I

chose to utilise a qualitative single case study as the means of my empirical inquiry (Yin, 2014). This approach is described in the next section.

4.3 Single Case Study

I heeded the advice of Yin (2014) and selected a single case study research in order to capture the richness of teachers' experiences when using NVC as an approach to deal with challenging behaviours. Yin maintains that in order to gain a deep understanding of a concept, it must be studied in relation to its context. Therefore, my case study involved a small group of four teachers from two different schools who were invited to form a new professional learning group which I named as a Quality Learning Circle.

Creswell (1994) argues that a case study is a “single instance of a bounded system” (p. 12), an opinion shared by Adelman, Kemmis, and Jenkins (1980). I have deliberately chosen this method because I believe rich data can be drawn from a small group. My group of teachers had been invited to share an experiential process. As the researcher, my intention had been to follow that experience and live it with them in order to illustrate a deep understanding of how each teacher perceived their time in this research project. In following this group of teachers, week-by-week, over one school term, I was providing them with an opportunity to engage in discussion of NVC centred in practice, record change as it occurred, and how it impacted upon each teacher. This case study is therefore an intervention, which I evaluated through research questions, using interviews, a Quality Learning Circle, and fieldnotes.

There are numerous ways of classifying case study approaches. Merriam (2007) characterises three types of case study: descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative. The *descriptive* element is common amongst a number of authors who write about the merits of classifying case studies in this way (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). A descriptive approach provides the opportunity to collect the necessary information that is needed to help understand a phenomenon, idea or concept. In relation to my research project, this entails providing a rich account of the processes involved in setting up a group learning approach with teachers who are working alongside one another. The *interpretive* element is also commonly used by researchers to understand the reality of those whom they study (Bassey, 1999; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). I have adopted this approach in order to explore how the participants have applied NVC principles in their practices and to provide a narrative account of this process. The

evaluative element, as mentioned by several authors (Bassey, 1999, Yin, 2014), involves deciding how worthwhile an educational programme is and determining its suitability in a particular context. In my research, both the content (NVC) and process (QLC) are attributed equal value as I am interested in the strengths and limitations of the NVC approach to behaviour management and at the same time the process by which teachers are able to add new learning to their existing teaching repertoires of practice.

In addition to the approaches mentioned above, Stake (1995) outlines the difference between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An *intrinsic* case study is driven by a desire to understand the case in its entirety, as well as the person or people involved. For instance, Creswell (2012) contends that this type of case study can be focused on evaluating an educational programme, in terms of its unique context, and that it “resembles the focus of narrative research” (p. 100). In comparison, an *instrumental* case study is focused on a particular issue or concern and looks to extend theory or generalise the results. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) describe the difference between these two types of case studies, not being the actual case, but rather by the intention or purpose of the research. I chose to utilise an intrinsic approach, based on the realisation that NVC is a relatively new model. I wanted to understand its processes in the context that it was implemented without generalising the results. An intrinsic approach has the potential to make sense of the implications of combining both these approaches to show that attention to what teachers learn and how they acquire new learning matters.

4.4 Interpretive Approach

An interpretive paradigm is used to understand and interpret reality from the perspective of the teachers. Interpretive research considers that reality is shaped by the participants and is open to many different interpretations (Bassey, 1999). As Merriam (2009) contends, “interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed ... [with] multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not ‘find’ knowledge, they construct it” (pp. 8-9). Within an interpretive paradigm, I have used rich and descriptive narrative data to understand and convey what attracted these teachers towards choosing to participate in an NVC/QLC group, their learning journey, and what they got out of the process.

In addition to analysing socially constructed knowledge, interpretive research is also useful in describing the linguistic challenges present in education. This refers to the way that language is used in a classroom, the meanings that are conveyed, and the specific contexts in which it is applied (Ellis & McCartney, 2011). Cook-Gumpertz (1981) states “language is seen as existing within a complex pattern of social behaviour to be used to achieve socially defined goals” (p.27). Green and Stewart (2012) argue that “language is constitutive of educational processes as well as an outcome of the work of people in formal and informal educational settings” (p. 61). I chose to use an interpretive approach in order to understand how the participating teachers used language, both within and outside of an NVC framework, to create, maintain, and conclude contact within the educational setting, as well as to understand what their goals and needs were within that context. I now turn to discuss the selection of participants and provide an explanation of the research setting, as well as the methods selected to explore the participants’ views and experiences throughout this research.

4.5 My Participants

Recruitment initially took place in one school within a New Zealand urban setting. I chose this school because of my previous contact with two teachers who worked there and had already expressed an interest in NVC: one was a friend, while the other (who was his colleague) had spoken to me about NVC in an informal conversation preceding the study. Upon arranging a meeting with the Deputy Principal (who was very supportive and pivotal in helping me recruit other teachers), information and consent sheets were emailed out to all the staff. In total, I received four consent forms back. In addition to these four participants, the Deputy Principal had also contacted a former teacher of the school, who was working in another school in the same city, and passed on my details. From this, I was able to recruit one more teacher, bringing the total to five. However, after the first QLC, one teacher pulled out for personal reasons, leaving me with just four teachers from two different secondary schools as my participants. A brief description of each participant is now outlined with pseudonyms being applied. The baseline data presented here was gathered from the entry interviews and outlines several areas of satisfaction and frustration that each teacher encountered in their teaching role, as well as their previous experience in NVC. Drawing on my entry interviews has helped me to convey a more detailed description of my participants.

Jake has been teaching for six years. His main satisfaction about his job involved creative ways to present new ideas to his students. In particular, he enjoyed seeing when his students were engaged in an enjoyable activity that he has planned for them. Conversely, Jake found it challenging when his students were not engaged in the learning process and did not respond as he had hoped they would (i.e., choosing not to participate and instead talking to their friends). In addition, he was also frustrated when staff meetings at school were unproductive and did not provide any tangible benefit to his teaching practice.

Prior to this research, Jake had attended an informal NVC workshop, bought several NVC books and attempted to apply the principles in the classroom on multiple occasions. This application of NVC principles mostly occurred by him creating a dialogue with students he perceived as disengaged. For example, he told me he would share his observations with the student (conveying that he noticed that they seemed disinterested), and would then ask what the student would rather be doing. From there, he would look to collaborate with the student to find a way to engage them in something relevant to his class. Jake explained to me that learning NVC had appealed to him because it was a way of avoiding judgments and getting closer to understanding the feelings of his students. By participating in this research, Jake said he hoped to improve his communication skills, self-awareness, and understanding of his reactions by using NVC in order to feel more empowered in the classroom.

Michael has been teaching for two and a half years. His main satisfaction surrounding teaching was helping his students to learn new things and see the world in a different way. Michael explained he felt useful when he could contribute to his students' lives and believed his role as a teacher provided him with plenty of opportunities to do that. Michael noted that he found certain aspects of the nationwide curriculum frustrating. For example, he said that in his class he would prefer to teach specific concepts that related to his subject, however, he stated that he also needed to conform to what would be in future exams and what the students needed to learn for university.

Prior to this research, Michael informed me that he had been using some of the basic concepts of NVC with his senior students, particularly in the form of showing empathy. For instance, if he encountered challenging student behaviours he told me he would investigate why the students were acting in that way. Moreover, if it was because the work was too hard, he would explain it more; if students were chatting with each other instead of working, he

would go over and start a dialogue about the lesson, rather than telling them off. In each case, Michael would ask himself how he may have been contributing to the situation and then tried to determine what the students' underlying needs were. Michael's reasons for partaking in this research included a desire to enhance his reflective skills, reduce negative reactions and replace them empathy, as well as increase his emotional awareness. Michael told me he wanted to find new strategies to connect with students and provide support to them.

Sarah has been teaching for 10 years and also worked as a counsellor within the school. She explained her primary source of job satisfaction as interactions with students and being able to help them in different ways, through both teaching and counselling. In terms of her challenges surrounding teaching, Sarah outlined that she was most frustrated with the way bureaucratic systems took her time away from focussing on the students.

While Sarah had heard of NVC before participating in this research (through colleagues in the counselling field) she had not trialled it in an educational setting. Sarah welcomed another potential tool for interacting with students, as well as colleagues, and was motivated to increase her empathetic skills and ability to be non-judgemental.

Peter has been teaching for 15 years. He had taught at the same school as the above participants for a short time, however, he was now teaching at another school. Peter reported that his main satisfaction surrounding teaching was helping his students to achieve their goals and experience moments of success. In addition, he also considered he was doing something worthwhile for society. Peter stated that his main frustration revolved around the hierarchical relationships between teachers and students that had been established in his school, such as the way students were required to address him and the types of discipline that was expected. He believed this provoked confrontation and alienated him from his students.

Whilst Peter's interests and skills extended to areas related to NVC ideology, such as using 'I' statements to acknowledge his own feelings and needs, as well as modelling positive interactions with his students, he told me that he had had no experience of NVC specifically. However, from having briefly researched NVC prior to the first interview, Peter believed the approach would fit into his current teaching practice as he thought it would help to increase his emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, as well as aid him in finding ways to manage challenging behaviour that avoid using coercion.

In drawing together the background information on the teachers, their experience ranged from 2.5-15 years, with a mean average of eight years. Interpersonal relationships with the students were rated highly by each of them who gained satisfaction from forming positive relationships which contributed to student learning. Frustrations mentioned included difficulties in creating productive and positive relationships with students, conversely, being because poor relationships inhibited the learning process featured as an area that challenged teachers. Additionally, several of the teachers had issues surrounding the lack of efficiency within school policies and aspects of the curriculum that were imposed on them from above. The main reasons for wanting to trial NVC in their teaching practice revolved around finding ways to manage challenging behaviours without using punitive methods, as well as increasing their own emotional awareness and empathetic responses in order to avoid reacting negatively in difficult situations.

4.6 My Study: Methods

Mutch (2013) defines the term ‘method’ as “a coherent set of strategies or a particular process that you use to gather one kind of data” (p. 104). This study adopted multiple methods to source its data. The three main data collection methods for this study were interviews, researcher fieldnotes, and a Quality Learning Circle. These methods were selected for their consistency with qualitative research methods and because they offered an appropriate and efficient way to gather information for this study. An outline of each approach is listed below.

4.6.1 Interviews

I selected interviewing because it seemed to be a useful way to understand how people “symbolize their experience through language” (Seidman, 2013, p. 8). It allowed participants to respond to questions using their own experiences and provided an understanding of how they interpreted their reality. Additionally, because the interview is a conversation between a researcher and participant there was an opportunity to check that the participant had understood the question. There are three primary types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured, with each type offering its own advantages and disadvantages. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research because they allowed me as the researcher to directly ask key questions that were pertinent to the study,

whilst allowing the participants to answer in an open-ended and reflective manner (Mutch, 2013).

Before beginning my data gathering I completed a pilot interview with a teacher who was not participating in the study to check whether there were any alternative interpretations of the questions and also to ensure that the questions allowed me to gain data about which I was curious. This process allowed me the opportunity to refine my questions and practice my interviewing skills prior to commencing the study. For example, after the pilot interview I changed one question from asking about *the most* challenging student the teacher had worked with, to naming *a recent* challenging student they had worked with, to avoid teachers becoming ‘stuck’ on ‘the most’ part of the question. In addition, I also formulated prompts for each question to make sure that during the interview I would stay focused on each question.

Interviews were conducted at two points during this research; the initial interviews were carried out one week prior to commencement of the first group meeting (later explained as a Quality Learning Circle, QLC) and the final interviews were completed the last week of the QLC. A full copy of the both interview schedules is presented in Appendix Three. Interviews were conducted face to face and a list of questions determined prior to the interview guided the process. The interview schedule was given to the participants in advance to give them a chance to think over the questions and not be ‘put on the spot’. All interviews took place at a venue and a time that was negotiated with participants once consent forms had been received. Each interview was recorded using a dictaphone to ensure that all the information gathered was available for analysis (Merriam, 2009). Upon completion, each interview was then transcribed.

Each of the initial interviews commenced with background information on the teachers, such as the amount of years they had spent teaching, as well as what they found satisfying and frustrating about their job. This allowed me to place the teachers in a context, relating to their personal experiences of being a teacher. In addition, these background questions were intended to help the participants feel comfortable giving answers, and for the interviews to be more of a conversation between interested individuals rather than an interrogation. In regards to the initial interview, the main questions were designed to:

- gauge how the teachers experienced challenging behaviour, how they dealt with it and how it affected their classroom environment;
- understand what kind of professional development they had in relation to managing challenging behaviours;
- establish areas of interest among the participants in regards to NVC; and
- determine their preferred style of learning.

A further round of interviews, referred to as the final interviews, were used to determine any practical changes made by the participants, their thoughts on the QLC process, development of NVC ideology, applicability of NVC in the classroom, and interest in continuing the learning into NVC. This included questions that asked:

- what ways they had incorporated NVC into their teaching practice;
- how NVC had affected their emotional awareness;
- how the quality learning circle aligned with their preferred learning style; and
- the perceived benefits and limitations of both the NVC and QLC approach.

The decision to undertake two interviews gave me the opportunity to compare the teachers' experiences of both the NVC and QLC model at the beginning and end of the research. In addition, opting for semi structured interviews allowed me to be flexible in my responses to the participants. I was able to ensure that the questions asked in the interview were clear, as I could repeat and rephrase questions for participants where necessary. The interview situation also enabled me to probe participants for more information if I felt it was necessary to extend or clarify their contributions (Burns, 1997). Next, I examine the process by which I documented my own note taking throughout the research.

4.6.2 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes constitute the formal and informal collection of data preceding, during, and after "immersion in the field" (Mutch, 2013, p. 144). They are an important part of qualitative research as they allow the researcher to collect and remember data from observational sessions in order to understand the complexities behind them better (Martella, Nelson, Morgan, & Marchand-Martella, 2013). In this research, I used a combination of descriptive, reflective, and analytical fieldnotes. Descriptive fieldnotes were used to accurately document factual data, settings, actions, behaviours, and conversations that I observed (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). Reflective fieldnotes involved recording my thoughts, ideas, questions, and

concerns alongside my observations. Analytical fieldnotes were used to explore any emerging patterns and themes that I noticed. For example, I noticed similarities in the teachers' experiences of NVC techniques used within their classrooms. Wallen and Fraenkel (2011) state that the use of field notes in educational research prompts the researcher to constantly re-evaluate the questions they ask and the relevance of the data that is collected and I heeded that advice. As a researcher I took detailed fieldnotes straight after each QLC session while the information was fresh in my memory and reviewed these fieldnotes in order to provide ideas for planning the subsequent meetings. I now turn to introduce the Quality Learning Circle model to define and justify this data gathering method for my study.

4.6.3 Quality Learning Circle

As already discussed in the literature review, and outlined in Figure 5 below, the QLC model is comprised of four key points: a shared focus, conversation about practice, experiential learning, classroom observation, and reflective analysis (Lovett & Verstappen, 2004). These points lead teachers to establish a professional culture of active inquiry in order to improve their practices in contextually relevant ways.

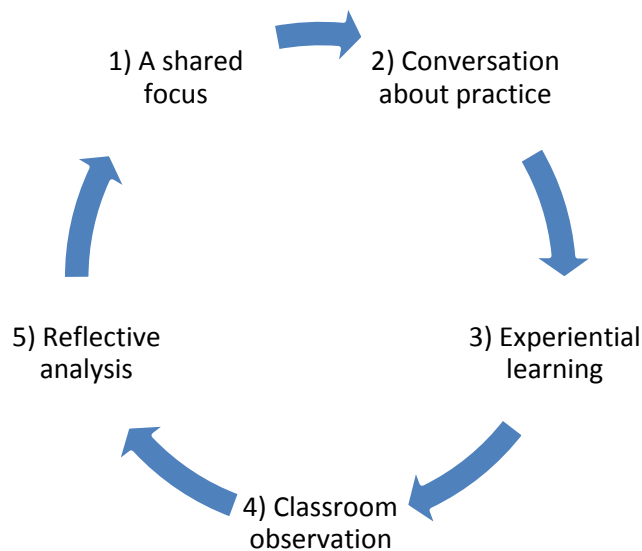


Figure 5: The four key elements of a Quality Learning Circle

The decision to adopt a QLC approach in this research was chosen for two main reasons. First, to counter teachers working alone so that shared responsibility in direction and decision making would encourage empowerment among the teachers. Second, I believed the teachers

needed to participate in group learning and learning by experience for me to capture the ways they were able to translate the model to their practice (Pomeroy, 2007). Southworth (2004) argues that “learning partnerships can increase the power of experiential learning”, by combining multiple forms of learning (p. 140). In the case of this research, NVC strategies were learnt through a QLC model, specifically through a reflective process of teachers supporting one another with their questions in, on, and about their practice. Through being reflective, teachers were encouraged to ask questions surrounding their experiences and use sense-making as a way that they could come together and question, challenge, and support one another through talk. Both Bruner (1996), as well as Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2005) agree that reflective learning can have a positive impact on the learning experience. Kolb (1984) outlines this below in relation to an educational process:

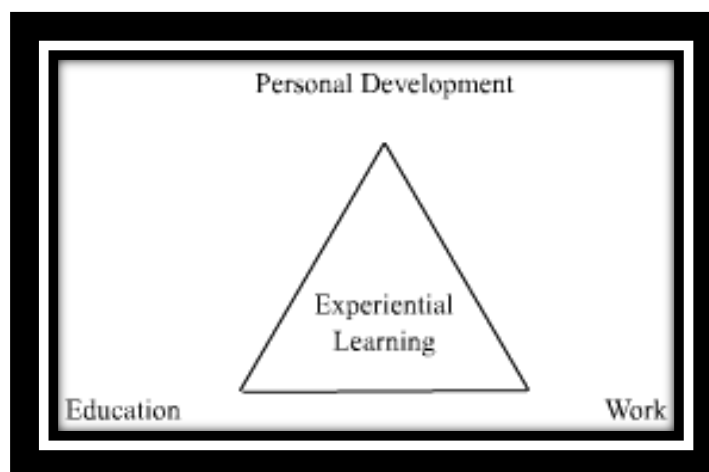


Figure 6: Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984)

Kolb’s diagram (Figure Six) shows the relationship between three core concepts: education, work and personal development. Through a process of experiential learning (in this case the QLC), a reflective framework was provided that supported teachers in creating new and personally relevant NVC teaching strategies in a context that was focused and supportive of their needs within an educational environment. Ovens (2000) maintains when teachers adopt reflective practices they become more responsive to their students and the dynamic nature of the classroom. Through asking themselves what areas they can still improve on, the usefulness of activities they utilise, and whether the relationships they maintain with their students hinders or helps learning in the classroom, teachers can be helped to create environments that encourage positive change.

In addition to reflective practices through experiential learning, the QLC approach was actively employed for its potential to construct knowledge that was socially relevant to the teachers. As Meyer (2001) states, the acquisition of practical knowledge can help to uncover how meaningful something is and whether it is appropriate in a given set of circumstances. I therefore adopted an interpretive approach within the framework of the QLC to explain the motivations and beliefs of the teachers in relation to their actions and the journey they took towards learning and developing their professional practice and personal belief systems.

4.6.4 Modifications of the QLC approach

While there are some common and defining features of the QLC model, such as collaboration and reflection, the model also allows for some flexibility. I now turn to illustrate this flexibility and show how I have modified the model in comparison to Stewart and Prebble's (1993) original model below. The areas that have been modified are indicated in light blue (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Characteristics of a QLC (adapted from Stewart & Prebble, 1993)

According to Stewart and Prebble (1993), the QLC model promotes active learning through teachers' becoming responsible for choosing what and how they learn. This typically involves small groups of teachers who meet at regular intervals to collaborate and reflect on

their practices. *The first difference* in the way I have presented the QLC relates to the selection of a theme. In Stewart and Prebble's model, themes are chosen during the QLC by the participants. In my research, a central theme was already chosen prior to the QLCs commencement; namely, NVC. Teachers were recruited who already had an interest in developing this teaching tool in the classroom. However, while this central theme was pre-determined, areas of interest were chosen by the teachers during the QLC. *The second difference* surrounded the use of classroom observation by QLC members. While this is a central theme in Stewart and Prebble's model, it was not in mine. Instead, observation was an option that was discussed with participants before the study commenced. However, while they showed initial interest, the group members chose not to take this path. I chose to discuss having observation as an option, rather than a necessity, as I did not want the teachers to feel pressured or uncomfortable at the prospect of being observed trialling a relatively new approach.

4.7 My study: QLC with a Shared Content Focus on NVC

As NVC was chosen as a central theme for this QLC, much of the content surrounded exploring how to implement the key concepts of NVC into teachers' practices. I will now explain the general structure of the QLCs in my study, followed by an outline of the key points covered during each meeting.

The QLCs were structured in a way that encouraged participants to create their own learning objectives and collaborate with each other to achieve these objectives. Each participant was asked to share their own experiences, desires, and challenges within a learning context in order to direct the focus of the group and own their personal learning agenda. The main focus for the group was to acknowledge and extend existing repertoires of managing challenging behaviours through exploring the potential of NVC and how they might use this within their classroom. Seven QLC sessions were held weekly during term two of the school year. The QLC sessions provided data on how the teachers had developed an understanding of NVC, trialled it in their respective schools, and come together as a group to share their experiences.

Each QLC session was focused on several different theoretical and practical applications of NVC, depending on the needs of the teachers at the time. The first session centred on introducing the key aspects of what constitutes a QLC, along with introductions, group

boundaries, and going over several key concepts of NVC. The second session focused on sharing past experiences of NVC and deciding on how to run the group. This included discussing what aspects of NVC interested each member, as well as sharing their preferences on how they would like to learn about NVC. The remainder of the QLC sessions became more experiential in nature, with members trialling aspects of NVC, sharing their stories, and building on these experiences to co-construct new ideas. Within this process critical reflection and experiential learning were encouraged. The content of the QLCs is illustrated below in Figure 8:

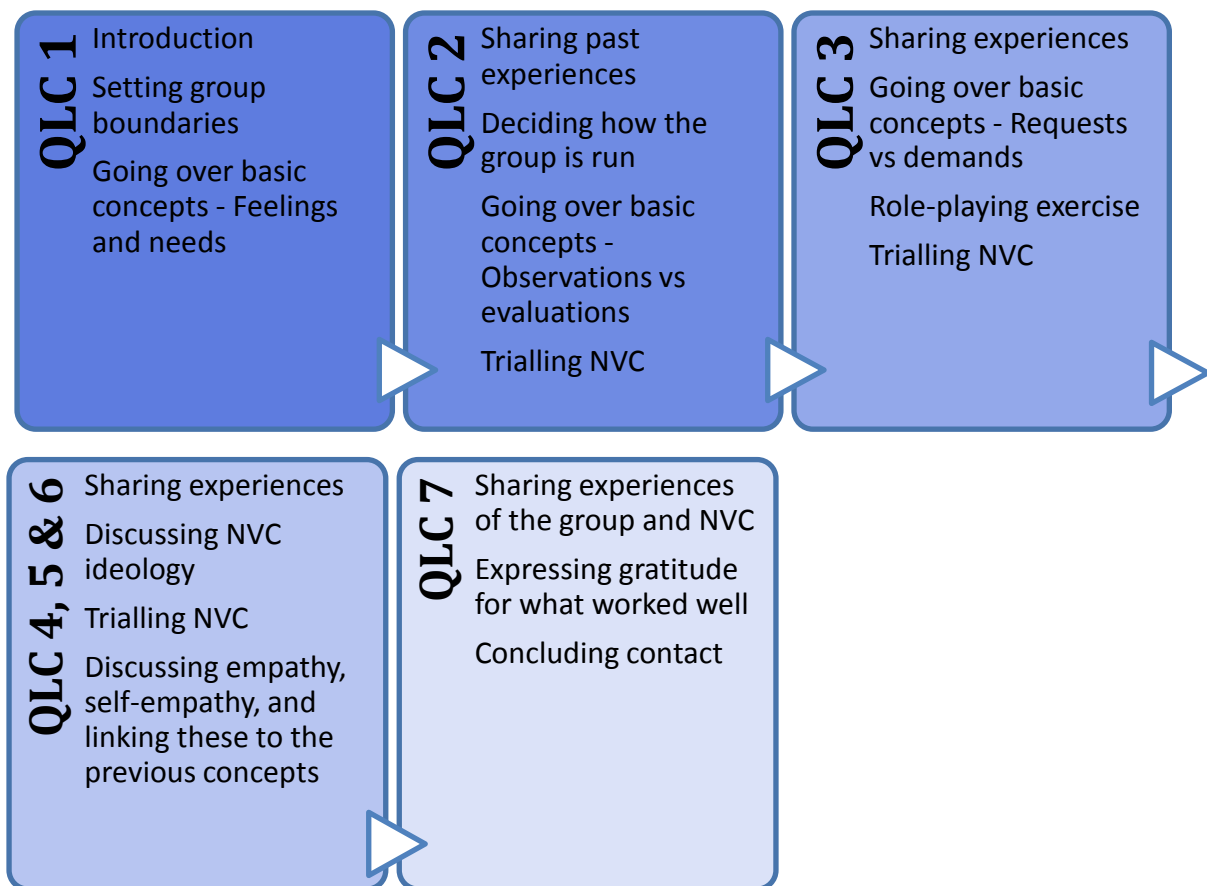


Figure 8: Format of QLC meetings

During the QLC, my role was that of facilitator and observer. The first role entailed organising the initial QLC sessions, providing support, selected literature, and knowledge of NVC, as well as guiding and mediating the journey in an unobtrusive way as possible. As the power dynamics of the group shifted towards a more collaborative and equal approach, my role also shifted to becoming more of an observer. While this did not happen completely, my

role as facilitator reduced as the QLC progressed. I noticed this started occurring during the third QLC meeting and progressively during each subsequent meeting.

In general, two core features of NVC guided teachers' explorations during the QLCs. The first feature to highlight was the compassionate and honest expression of their feelings and needs. The second feature was empathetic listening to the feelings and needs of others. Within this approach, emphasis was placed on Rosenberg's (2003) four step model, namely: *observations, feelings, needs, and requests*, with empathy and self-empathy playing an important role across all steps. In order to assist the participants in their theoretical understanding of NVC, I presented each teacher with a copy of the book '*Life-enriching education*' (Rosenberg, 2003b) to read after their first interview. The teachers were asked to read the first two chapters, which pertained to the four step model mentioned above. I now present the core aspects of NVC as they manifested throughout each QLC.

QLC 1

The first QLC primarily focused on creating a comfortable and inclusive environment for the teachers. I began with introducing myself and reiterated the purpose of the group. I then explained the key concepts of a QLC and how these worked in practice (i.e., exploring and trialling new ideas). Next, we discussed group protocols and I presented some initial ideas, which were built on by the teachers. Following this, an icebreaker exercise was used in order to encourage the teachers to share a personal story (a positive experience). This was then related to step two and three of the NVC model (feelings and needs). The teachers were reminded that these concepts, as well as the proceedings ones, were outlined in Chapter Two of the book. Lastly, I had given them two exercises to be completed by the next meeting (Appendix Four). This meeting ran for 30 minutes.

QLC 2

The second QLC began with a 'check-in' to allow each teacher to express how they were feeling at that moment. The purpose of this was to gain information on each teacher's state of mind, to balance the teacher's participation (so that talkative and quiet members start the group equally), and to produce a sense of mutuality and group concern. I then addressed the fact that one participant had chosen to leave and how it would be the four of them from now on. After this, the teachers shared their experiences of trialling NVC through the exercises I had given them from the previous week. From there, I mentioned that one of the

main features of the QLC was that they choose their own direction of learning about NVC. Following this, a discussion ensued on the different key components of NVC, areas to which the approach could be applied, and how they might go about learning about it. The teachers agreed that focussing on the four main points of NVC (observations, feelings, needs, and requests) would be best, in order to gain a firm understanding on the model. In terms of how they wanted to learn – roleplaying, group discussions (both theoretical and practical), and sharing examples of real-life issues appealed to the teachers. Once this was decided on, we discussed step one (observations) and I presented the teachers with another exercise (Appendix Five). At the end of the meeting one of the teachers mentioned that 30 minutes was not long enough for this group, prompting the others to agree. It was decided that the future meetings would be scheduled for one hour.

QLC 3

This QLC was largely composed of teachers deciding in the moment what and how they would like to learn. After sharing their experiences from the exercises I had given them, the teachers openly talked about any challenges they were facing and how applying NVC might help them. Several situations were discussed and a role-play occurred regarding a student with a challenging behaviour. Afterwards, we discussed step four (requests versus demands). It was during this QLC I noticed my role in the group moving from a facilitator towards more of an observer. This occurred because the majority of this meeting was directed by the teachers structuring their own learning, rather than me explaining and demonstrating the key aspects of NVC.

QLC 4-6

The remaining meetings were guided by the teachers' weekly experiences of teaching in their respective classes. They decided on how they wanted to trial NVC and which students they would target. The choice of student was usually determined by behavioural issues and aspects of teaching with which the teachers were either struggling or wished to improve. Discussion on key NVC concepts involved all the teachers' input and personal experiences of trialling NVC, which led to relevant and practical discussions. During this time I also introduced the final key NVC concept of empathy.

QLC 7

The final meeting followed a similar structure to the previous three meetings; namely, sharing of experiences and discussion on applying NVC in practice. An additional aspect of this meeting (introduced by the researcher) was time to express gratitude for what we had enjoyed about the group, what had worked well, and what, if any, future direction we might like to take with NVC. How I worked with the teachers to create a safe and conducive learning environment mattered. I now explain the ethical considerations.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

An awareness of the importance of ethical considerations in research is a fundamental requirement when conducting qualitative research (Mutch, 2013). This is particularly true in the social sciences, where increased governance and regulations have meant that ethical issues need to be accounted for in more stringent ways than ever before (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012). In terms of addressing ethical considerations, Burgess (2005) states that there are numerous issues of which to be aware, such as philosophical, sociological, and psychological viewpoints, which relate to moral, social, and mental health considerations. Throughout this research I maintained awareness of all the ethical issues which are outlined in the university's ethics documentation (ERHEC, 2012), seeing them as my personal obligations as a researcher. I now take each of these ethical considerations in turn to highlight how they formed an integral part of my study design:

- obtaining informed and voluntary consent;
- showing respect for rights of privacy and confidentiality;
- ensuring the limitation of deception;
- ensuring the minimisation of risk; and
- personal obligations as a researcher.

Informed Consent

In accordance with the first principle, participants were given an information sheet (Appendix Six) and a consent form (Appendix Seven) that clearly stated the specific requirements of the research. The participants who accepted my invitation to be a part of the research were reminded of the purpose of the study, their right to decline involvement and terminate their participation in the group at any time and the withdrawal of any information

they provided. In addition, prior to the study being undertaken, I approached the school's deputy principal to discuss and explain the project (Appendix Eight).

Privacy and Confidentiality

The second principle of privacy and confidentiality is about protecting the integrity of those involved, so that they will not be identified at any point, before, during or after the completion of the research. Biklen and Bogdan (2007) point out that anonymity must extend beyond the writing process into “the verbal reporting of information that you [the researcher] have learned through observation” (p. 50). Those taking part in my research project were informed that aliases and pseudonyms would be used for both people and places. Whilst I was able to guarantee that I would, in no way, breach the participants' privacy and confidentiality, I was not able to ensure that individual confidentiality would be able to be maintained within the QLC as the participants would see who was involved in the research and their colleagues might also ask them what they were doing or merely see a meeting going on and be curious. As Tolich and Davidson (2011) argue, “Confidentiality is problematic in focus groups... [because they] cannot offer participants internal confidentiality” (p.158). However, I informed the participants of their duty to preserve confidentiality as well as ensuring that they were made aware during recruitment of the possibility that others in the group might breach this confidentiality. In terms of recorded information, all data was securely stored in a lockable filing cabinet with access to information being limited to me. In addition, information stored on my laptop was password protected and back-up data stored on the password protected university server.

Limitation of Deception

The third principle involves limiting deception within the research. Snook (2003) argues that researchers should “deal with their participants and their research community in an honest and truthful way” (p. 162). As there was no reason to partially or fully deceive participants in this research, each person was made fully aware of my motivations, programme outlines, and outcomes of the research. In addition, member checking of transcripts was offered to the participants with an option to add or delete information from the transcripts, however, none of the participants chose to utilise this option.

Minimisation of Risk

The fourth principle relates to the minimisation of risk throughout the research. In terms of this research project, the emotional safety of those involved needed to be ensured. This is because of the intimate nature of connecting through NVC language. Since much of NVC is based on creating emotional awareness, in terms of understanding feelings and needs, there was a possibility for participants to feel vulnerable or exposed throughout the QLC. While none of the participants expressed these emotional states during any of the QLCs, I viewed my role as a facilitator as a way to ensure that I could support them during this process through being empathetic. In addition to this, I also aimed to be aware of each participant's personal boundaries during group work and either 'checked-in' with them if I thought they needed it, or made sure they had an opportunity to express themselves.

Personal Obligations as a Researcher

In terms of my own personal responsibilities as a researcher, I maintained awareness of any bias that I could bring into the study, made sure that the participants were comfortable as possible during the interviews and QLC, as well as considered my impact on the dynamics of the QLC and each participant. Since this research was primarily conducted for the purpose of creating better conditions for those involved, all practical and ethical considerations were centred on this idea to ensure that the teachers participating gained maximum value from this programme.

4.9 Data Analysis

This section outlines the methods used to analyse and interpret the data during my research. In this research an interpretive framework was used to explain the relevance and meaning of the findings. Common themes of the data are therefore interpreted and presented in a logical and systematic fashion in order to provide a coherent and understandable account of the research presented. Within such an interpretive framework, I adopted inductive thematic analysis to report the findings in order to link them to the theories that underpin the topic of this research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). An explanation of this term is now provided.

4.9.1 Inductive Thematic Analysis

Inductive analysis involves investigating specific phenomenon in order to generate understanding through finding connections between each element and creating a meaningful

whole. It is a form of data-driven research, whereby data is coded “without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). According to Willig, (2013) inductive thematic analysis is particularly useful for research relating to people’s experiences, views, and perceptions. This appealed to me because I was attempting to capture the rich detail involved in a small group of teachers learning NVC together and at the same time, gaining an understanding of how this process was being interpreted by each of the teachers. Furthermore, Mutch (2005) argues that using inductive reasoning and reflexive thinking (whereby conclusions are sought from the available evidence through critical analysis) allows phenomenon to be studied in a naturalistic way and avoids falling into mechanical processes.

Within thematic analysis, I have also applied semiotic inquiry to emphasise and understand the significance of the language the teachers used. According to Mutch (2013), “semiotic analysis looks at the internal composition and relations of grammatical and syntactical elements, that is, what can be learned from the way particular words are selected” (p. 165). This approach was chosen as NVC is primarily a communication-based approach, which places heavy emphasis on creating empathy through the use of language. Chung (2006) maintains that applying semiotic inquiry in an educational setting can help the researcher to understand how language is a subtle, yet powerful, reflection of teachers’ cognitive processes. Through linking both thematic and semiotic analysis, patterns and themes within the data were able to be identified and grouped in a systematic way. I now turn to the processes that formed the basis of my data analysis: coding data and forming themes.

4.9.2 Coding Data and Forming Themes

Throughout the process of data analysis, information was read and re-read so that I became familiar with the interview and QLC transcripts. This was an iterative process that enabled me to gain a better understanding of what the teachers were conveying, as well as to identify the emergent themes (Mutch, 2005). The procedure I have used during coding follows King and Horrock’s (2010) three stage process. The first stage involved developing *descriptive* coding. For my study this involved grouping the data into descriptive blocks of information. I divided the data into teachers’ individual responses during both sets of interviews, as well as during each QLC. For instance, during the initial interview, data was

categorised into codes surrounding each teacher's experience of challenging student behaviours and PLD.

Once I had the descriptive information coded in this way, the next stage concerned *interpreting* those codes. This process involved manually highlighting words and phrases on printed out transcripts, as well as cutting and pasting data using a word processor and grouping it together. During this procedure I searched through the data looking for similarities, differences, and themes mentioned by other researchers. The final stage centred on creating *overarching themes*. Throughout this process, themes were revised and reorganised into more specific categories. In addition, data were also grouped to fit in with the research questions, which involved identifying the teachers' perceptions of the strengths and limitations of both the NVC and QLC model, as well as gauging the potential of each approach in relation to teachers working with challenging behaviours. From this, I was able to relate major themes within the research to theories which had been explored in the literature review. This allowed meaning to be taken from this research and gave validation to the importance of conducting this project (Flick, 2014).

4.10 Chapter Summary

This section has outlined and justified both the research methodology and methods. The characteristics of a single case study are supported by an interpretive approach. Furthermore, the methods used within this research allowed teachers to have a great amount of control throughout the QLC and provided them with opportunities to express themselves in detail during both interviews. Engaging teachers in creating and exploring their own PLD was a major part of designing this research and the teachers' needs were emphasised as central from start to finish. The next chapter outlines the results of my research and examines the emergent themes, which are divided into two major areas. The first is centred on understanding the teachers' experiences of NVC, while the second is focused on gauging the teachers' experiences of participating in a QLC.

Chapter Five: Results

5.1 Introduction

The findings I present in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which a small group of teachers have integrated the Non-violent communication (NVC) model as a strategy to manage challenging behaviours in the classroom. In addition, the teachers' experiences of professional learning in a QLC model are also outlined. The emergent themes, which are presented in chronological order, begin with the entry interviews in which the teachers' outlined their thoughts and experiences on challenging behaviours and PLD. Next, I describe the QLCs, which are gleaned from the fieldnotes and provide insight into how each meeting shaped the next. I complete the chapter by drawing upon the exit interviews in which the teachers described their overall experiences of both the content (NVC) and process (QLC) of this research project. Specific examples are taken from each of the teachers (Peter, Michael, Jake, and Sarah) to allow all individual voices to be captured.

5.2 Entry Interviews

The initial interviews were primarily divided into two parts. The first part explored the teachers' views on challenging student behaviours and understanding their strategies in use. The second part established any relevant PLD they had received in relation to behavioural management. Likewise, I ascertained what support was available to them in their respective schools, and determined their preferred style of learning. I begin with the teachers' experiences of challenging student behaviours.

5.2.1 Challenging Student Behaviours

I began the interviews by asking the teachers to recount a challenging situation involving a student and describe the details in terms of the student's behaviour, their own internal and external reactions, and how this incident affected the classroom environment. The intention was to gauge how all four teachers experienced and reacted to challenging student behaviours. Several complaints were mentioned which involved students being disengaged from the learning process. This took the form of students not paying attention to the teacher, talking to their friends, playing video games during class, joking aloud, and not

turning up to class. For example, Peter's main concern was *student disengagement* which he explained by saying:

I've got this boy and he sees his role in the class just to build relationships with his friends at the cost of his learning, so ... he's got no value, there's no buy-in to learning ... and he would seek confrontation or if he did have confrontation, I try to be respectful, but I would just see him turn off. He looks down and he goes yep, yep, yep, and you're like, oh hang on, I'm talking to a brick wall right now ... He's totally disengaged.

Sarah explained her difficulty in helping *a student who did not turn up to class*. She said:

There is a challenging student I have been working with recently. He thinks he's very bright and he may well be, but he doesn't go to class. He comes to class sometimes and writes stuff and apparently that's good that he's written and handed it in ... but ultimately it's very difficult [for me] to help him learn. It's like he's got so many barriers built up.

Michael and Jake also stated that *interacting with students who have learning disabilities sometimes presented a challenge*. This challenge involved certain types of behaviour that students sometimes showed, as well as the amount of time required when interacting with these students. For example, Michael described interacting with a student whom he referred to as slightly on the autistic spectrum. He said:

The first time he was in my class it was tense. I was telling him to do stuff that he wouldn't do, that he didn't want to do, and he would tear his page and get furious and I didn't know what to do ... So now I know how to not get him furious, but it's still hard to get him to learn something.

Outlining a similar situation about a girl whom he described as 'learning disabled', Jake recalled that:

She demands a lot of attention, so I explain something to her, like what we're doing today is this and this. I demonstrate it to her; you need to apply the paint in this way, or you need to mix the paint in this way and she doesn't listen, she loses attention. So I spent like one minute explaining this stuff but she only heard five seconds, so I'm having to repeat myself multiple times ... [she is] taking all this attention but behind me there are others waiting for me to help them ... So I'm focused on one person but then there is a whole lot of other stuff going on that affects it.

When asked how the teachers individually felt whilst interacting with these types of challenging student behaviour they all were able to respond using words that directly represented feeling states, as opposed to words that reflected thoughts, judgements or diagnoses. All four teachers responded that they felt frustrated, when confronted with these challenging behaviours. In addition, the teachers mentioned that they also felt pressured and

exhausted at times. Continuing on from examples of a challenging behaviour from their practice, the following comments were made in the interviews:

I felt frustrated because I was trying to enable him to do what he said he wanted earlier in the week ... there is no point in me just backing off because that's not going to help (Sarah).

I feel frustrated. I know that it's a challenge every time I interact with him, so I'm a bit on the defensive. I know that when I interact with him my brain works harder than when I interact with other people and it's exhausting (Michael).

I also feel pressure from above ... I've got to make him do something productive today and he's got no interest in doing it (Peter).

In addition, Jake also commented on how challenging behaviours could frustrate him:

I start to feel frustrated really quickly and with him [the student] ... I asked him to stop and five minutes later, the same thing, the same behaviour and I said quite firmly to him, I'd like you to leave now.

In contrast to the other teachers, Jake then went onto discuss this situation in a positive frame of reference by stating that *when he directly and successfully dealt with challenging behaviours he felt empowered*:

I think for me it's a bit about power, it's about feeling empowered. But not a power over [someone else], but [rather] being empowered as a teacher. I've got the role to keep the people safe but also ensure that people are engaging and learning.

These examples show that when challenging behaviours occur, the way teachers interpret what happens inside the classroom depends on the context of the behaviour and the teachers' appraisal of the situation. When negative emotions such as frustration arise, they appear to be elicited due to the teachers' concerns about the effects of challenging behaviours on their students' learning. Their descriptions reveal that this can be emotionally demanding, as well as create barriers that effect student-teacher relationships.

In terms of the strategies used to manage challenging behaviour, all the teachers answered that *establishing an interpersonal connection with the students was the most effective strategy*. This typically involved being honest with the student, communicating the problematic behaviour in a clear manner, and treating the student with respect. For instance, Peter stated that:

At the start of the year there was this one boy, pretty switched on, and he just enjoyed being confrontational. I was like, look, if you don't start managing, I'm going to have to start transferring; Oh pick me, transfer me, transfer me [they answered]. I was like, hang on, that didn't work. So I took him out and I said hey, what's going on? I'm not a

bad guy; you're not a bad guy. You look like you're actually purposely trying to wind me up. Would you agree? And he's like, yeah. [I said] Oh ok, it would be really good ... if you [would] stop doing that, and he said, oh fair enough, alright. So as soon as I built that relationship, his behaviour changed. So it's about relationships. That's the key. Relationships don't get built when you're constantly angry at kids.

In another example, Jake noted that having one-on-one conversations with students was useful:

That's a strategy that I know that works because it bypasses that kind of emotional stuff. I don't get into that anger or have to tell them to leave. I say, it's your call. You can leave if you want, you don't have to be here, but if you are here I need you to be engaged or doing something that's relevant to what is going on here. So that tends to work well, because I don't get worked up, I don't get that same emotional response [in myself].

In addition to creating interpersonal connections with students, the teachers also noted that they self-monitored, modelled behaviour in a constructive way and overall, and tried to establish positive relationships with their students. Furthermore, three of the teachers said *they also would either transfer or organise a time-out with students if things got too out of hand*. This highlights that while teachers preferred to establish positive encounters with their students, if things got too tough, they would send their students out of the class. As several teachers mentioned, sending their students out was a way to prevent more disturbances in their classrooms. For example, Michael stated that “challenging behaviour, just sparks more challenging behaviours and it's very hard to control”, while Peter commented that, “it can also disrupt the learning of others and that's when it's a problem”. However, while Peter acknowledged that he did send students out of his classroom, he was not entirely happy with that method:

I don't think our school is currently equipped well enough ... the systems are: you try stuff in class and then you transfer these kids and if they're transferred a certain number of times, they come on the radar of a dean who will dish out discipline. It's all coercion and punishment based. That's the system you've got to use for support and I don't think that works.

The teachers' comments on strategies to help them manage challenging student behaviours emphasised their preference for establishing positive student-teacher relationships that were based on establishing interpersonal communication, rather than using retributive processes based on punishments. In addition, while there were systems in place within the school, such as transferring and discipline from the deans, they did not necessarily align with the teachers' preferred methods of behavioural support.

As many teachers acquire new pedagogical strategies through professional learning and development (PLD), the second part of the interview outlines the teachers' experience of PLD related to behavioural management in their respective schools, the support structures that are available to them, and their preferred style of learning.

5.2.2 Teachers' PLD

During this part of the interview, it was revealed that three of the teachers had not had any PLD that centred on behavioural management since leaving their initial teacher education programmes. Reporting on their lack of behavioural PLD, Jake and Michael respectively commented:

I haven't really done any ... I don't think I've done any since I trained.

All the PD has been around either IT or teaching practices but not behaviour management ... What I've done was when I was at the College of Education, when I did my teaching practices, and then probably half of what we did, if not three quarters, was about behaviour management.

Without formal PLD, the teachers stated that *informal conversations with colleagues constituted a large part of their behavioural management strategy*. In addition to talking to colleagues, the teachers stated that support structures within the school were also utilised, such as specialist classroom teachers, mentors, and PALs (Peer-assisted learning strategies) groups. However, when commenting on the usefulness of these support structures, the teachers indicated dissatisfaction. For example, when referring to the PALs programme, Peter said:

Instead of a briefing in the morning you'll have a PALs meeting. [In this group] there are five teachers and they can talk about what's going well and what might improve. It used to be better than it is now. It used to be facilitated in a more meaningful way. Now there is a piece of paper with some headings on and you just fill it in ... one teacher goes, Oh, well I think they're great, I'm loving this class. Boom. No one else will say anything because they don't feel safe, because as soon as you say, Oh this guy's really tough ... you're being judged and you are no longer safe to share openly. They are not facilitated so that's an issue I think the school has to come back to.

As another example, Jake spoke about his experience with a specialist teacher, "we have a specialist classroom teacher, who is a nice fella, but he's not necessarily that helpful or available or someone that I necessarily feel is a very suitable person for that role". These

statements demonstrate that *while support is available to the teachers, their desire to use it may be limited*. In addition, a lack of formal PLD in behavioural management highlights a gap in their PLD. When asked how the teachers would prefer to structure their own PLD, they all responded that *collaboration in small groups* would form an integral part. Specifically, Michael and Jake both liked observing and partaking in group conversations and activities; however, they indicated that they did find it stressful at times. For example, Jake stated that:

I think I need to participate to be learning stuff, but I usually observe more than participate, depending on how big the group is. If it's a large group I will just observe. I hate talking in large groups. But in a smaller group I find it easier to talk.

Peter responded that he liked to get practical and concrete results and therefore valued experiential learning:

I quite like to get results. I like to walk away from it feeling I got something out of it ... I get really frustrated if I go to something and at the end of it I can't see the purpose to it. I value expert input. I value the chance to think creatively and work collaboratively with others.

Sarah commented that she needs a group to be a safe and non-judgemental environment, "I don't like learning in isolation ... I prefer to be with others learning if it's in a safe group that I'm comfortable with".

In summary, the overall findings from the initial interview highlighted that forming positive interpersonal relationships with students was an important issue for the teachers and a central reason why they had chosen to learn NVC. While all the teachers stated that they were using positive behavioural management strategies, they also indicated a desire to expand their repertoire of strategies to avoid reactionary responses to challenging behaviours. As three out of the four teachers had not experienced PLD in their schools that addressed new ways to approach challenging behaviours, the QLC opportunity had the potential to ensure they could come together in a small group and explore issues that were important and relevant to them.

5.3 Quality Learning Circles

The following section provides selected examples of the teachers' voices that highlight the broad themes pertinent to each QLC, alongside a summary of the meetings and my personal reflections. Additionally, from the second to sixth QLC, I describe how each meeting shaped and contributed to the following meeting.

5.3.1 QLC 1 (Theme - Feelings and Needs)

The purpose of the first QLC was to introduce the teachers to several of the fundamental concepts of NVC and establish a good dynamic within the group in order to facilitate an open dialogue. For this, and the second QLC, I had opted to focus on steps two and three of the NVC model (i.e., feelings and needs). I chose these steps for two reasons: firstly, because I considered they were the most pivotal within NVC ideology, and secondly, because of their potential basis for creating empathetic relationships. After the teachers were presented with these concepts, I asked them to share a pleasant experience and talk about how they felt during it and what needs may have been met. This was done to familiarise the teachers with NVC in a practical context.

In Peter's example, he spoke about trialling NVC with a student who had been transferred out of another class by his teacher earlier that day:

I had a nice little moment today with a student who I teach and I bumped into him at the end of a class and he's like, Mr ... I had my first transfer at the end of period two today. I had a crack at some NVC and said, Ah, how do you feel about that? Anyway, we got talking about that and then he said the nicest thing to me. He said, cause you're really peaceful and you try to work things out, as opposed to this other teacher ... which made me feel good, cause I'm not sure that approach [transferring] has been working ... so it's nice to hear that, I kind of needed that.

When Peter connected with the student's feelings around the transfer, the student expressed gratitude in the form of telling him how he appreciated that Peter listens and tries to work things out. In describing this encounter, Peter said that he felt valued, appreciated and, relieved because he needed validation that he was contributing to his students' lives in a positive way, and this contact provided him with that. As a large part of NVC is based on identifying the feelings and needs in ourselves and others, as well as being comfortable with expressing these, this exercise helped to familiarise the teachers with this aspect of NVC.

While Peter had decided to share a job-embedded experience pertaining to his use of NVC, the other three teachers had selected more personal examples to share that centred instead on family and friends. During each story, I noted how the teachers gave each other their full attention and the space to investigate how they felt and what need was met. This component of the QLC provided an opportunity for the teachers to open up and share experiences that were important to them in a group environment that openly valued their contribution. At the

end of the first QLC I asked the teachers to spend some time during the following week focussing on identifying their own feelings and needs. In addition, if they felt comfortable doing so, they were asked to create a connection with someone in their school (either a student or colleague) and centre on feelings and needs, such as Peter had done.

Summary and personal reflections

In summary, the first QLC served as a starting platform for either introducing or re-establishing the basics of NVC ideology and forming a cohesive group environment. The structure of the QLC followed a pattern of discussing an idea, sharing examples of how the teachers had applied it in a practical way and reflecting on these experiences. Since this was the first QLC meeting, the icebreaker exercise served as a platform for sharing experiences. In terms of my own reflections, I noted that I contributed the most in this QLC in regards to talking, though this was expected due to the time constraint of a 30 minute meeting and my part in outlining the basic NVC concepts. Having explained how I facilitated the first QLC and how the teachers responded, I now continue with the remaining QLC meetings. I highlight the learnings about NVC from the teachers' illustrative examples and what we learnt about the application of a QLC approach to our NVC learning.

5.3.2 QLC 2 (Theme - Feelings and Needs)

To start the second QLC, I experimented with conducting a brief check-in that involved answering the question, *what is alive in you right now?* This type of phrase is commonly used within NVC to address the feelings and needs of a person in the present moment. The purpose of asking this question was to gain information on each teacher's state of being, to balance the teachers' participation (so that talkative and quiet teachers started the group equally), and to produce a sense of mutuality and group concern. After explaining the meaning of this question and modelling an answer, each participant briefly stated what was going on for them in that present moment. Once check-in was over, Michael and Peter shared their experiences of trialling NVC, which related to the concept of feelings and needs that were discussed in the last meeting. In his first example, Michael described an incident in his classroom with two students who were French kissing in his class:

I was the only one seeing it 'cos they were all the way at the back ... I had to say something or they would never have noticed that I've seen them. I had to say stop, stop this ... [laughing] that just stopped me in my tracks ... I felt frustrated.

With the help of the other teachers in the QLC, Michael came to the conclusion that he had felt frustrated because he had a need for connection and trust. He thought that the students had decided to not pay attention anymore in class because it was too intense for them; however, they weren't conveying this to him. While Michael did not confirm this theory by directly asking the students, the fact that he investigated his own emotions and those of his students demonstrated a step towards more empathetic connection in his teaching practice.

In his second example, Michael reported applying NVC to an informal conversation with a colleague named Stephanie (pseudonym) who had come across as being somewhat aggressive. In this example, Michael had difficulty conveying his feelings and needs to Stephanie and noticed that his intention during that conversation had shifted from establishing a positive connection towards venting his frustration:

I said [to her], I feel a bit like I'm put in a box ... like I'm labelled and you judge me on that. So that was not really a good way of expressing a feeling ... and all I got back was, yeah, you are in a box, that's how it is. At this point I realised that my purpose was not the process of NVC anymore, my purpose was to get my frustration out and so I just stopped.

Michael counted this example as a failure as he told Stephanie what he thought she was doing (judging him) rather than how he was feeling. Michael believed this happened because:

I was not fluent enough in NVC to use it effectively ... [and] it was too hard to hear the needs behind Stephanie's words in that moment.

After recounting this experience, Michael decided that he would try to empathise with Stephanie more in their next encounter. Next, Peter talked about how he had started to take more personal responsibility for his feelings inside of the classroom. He mentioned that when he felt frustrated he now looks inwards to explore what he needs, rather than getting angry at the students:

I've been using it [NVC] all the time now and I find that it is really good for me to catch myself and self-monitor ... so I've been catching myself and going, What are you feeling Peter? ... What are you needing? ... [and] most of it comes down to me needing to feel like I am doing a good job.

This reflects a shift in thinking from an habitual and reactionary response to challenging student behaviour, towards a more reflective and self-exploratory process. In an example that he shared with the group, Peter described how he had been approaching students who had been noisy during class:

I've been going up to individuals and saying, look guys, you keep calling across the room and it's making me feel quite anxious because I need to feel like I am doing a

good job and if someone walks past And they [the students] listen to you ... Their behaviour sometimes carries on, but I think there is a long game here ... I feel like they are slowly modifying themselves and self-managing [their behaviour], rather than me just saying, stop doing that, stop doing that.

In this example, Peter attributes his honesty surrounding his fear of being perceived of not doing a good job as the motivating factor for changing student behaviour. He believed that by being honest in this way his students were able to empathise with him and were more likely to change their behaviour as they could understand his needs.

As Jake and Sarah did not have an example to share for this meeting, I introduced the next key concept of NVC: observations and evaluations. This involved giving examples of each, with emphasis on how using evaluations in the form of moralistic judgements can be perceived as criticism and trigger defensiveness in individuals. I then gave the teachers a hand-out that outlined this step and concluded the meeting by addressing the collaborative nature of shaping the QLC. This aspect is outlined in the following, and each subsequent, section.

Shaping the second QLC meeting

At the end of the group meeting, I drew attention to key features of the QLC as a professional learning tool. Namely, that in each QLC I would provide some clarification about NVC principles and then we would discuss them by identifying issues and examples from practice. I then described different areas of NVC that they may want to focus on (e.g., four-step process of NVC, empathy, and conflict resolution) and different methods to explore NVC (e.g., role-playing, group discussions on key concepts of NVC, as well as sharing examples in their professional lives and working together to find solutions). During this process I emphasised that the way the group would be run would be determined by the teachers themselves.

There was a general consensus from all the teachers that they thought working on the central four-step process was most important, alongside ways to use empathy in conflict situations. Sarah stated that she wanted to focus on practical examples that pertained to everyday situations in the classroom. For instance, one method that Sarah wanted to utilise was using role-playing with real life examples. In addressing Michael, who was also a colleague at her school, she stated:

I find that [role-playing] quite useful to practice because it is rooted in real life problems ... and it would be lovely to come up with a common strategy that we are both using so that the students notice this.

Sarah also mentioned that 30 minutes was not long enough for this group as the interesting conversations often began near the end of the meeting and had to be cut short because of time. In remarking on this, she asserted:

I'm wondering whether an hour's blitz would help us move forward in it [NVC] because I feel like I'm getting a bit behind in it ... I feel like I'm just about getting into it, then I'm out again ... So I would like to invest a bit more time ... I'm not giving it the attention I would like to.

Through voicing her opinion on both matters, a discussion ensued by the teachers on how they potentially wanted to structure the following QLC and a decision was made to try out role-playing in the next meeting, alongside increasing the length of the meeting to an hour.

Summary and personal reflections

In summary, this QLC marked the beginning of power shifting from myself facilitating the group, towards the teachers discussing what they wanted to focus on and how they would go about doing this. At this stage, three out of the four main points of NVC ideology had been outlined (observations, feelings, and needs), which provided a firm basis for the teachers to step off from. Whilst I was aware that my intention at the beginning of this research was to create a space where the teachers could direct their own learning process, I grappled with ensuring that they understood the mechanics of NVC in order to progress their learning of the approach. I believe this led to a tension between my role as a facilitator, who essentially organised the structure of the first two QLCs, and the teachers' ability to co-construct their own learning. Having been propelled by the teachers' desire to take more control of the group, I decided to 'let go' of the reins in order for the following QLCs to become more experimental in nature. In addition, since the time would increase from 30 to 60 minutes in the next meeting, this would allow more space for the teachers to discuss and contribute to each other's ideas. This was important because I noticed myself becoming very conscious of the length of time each teacher spoke, as I wanted to ensure even participation within the group.

5.3.3 QLC 3 (Theme – Observations versus Evaluations)

In the third QLC (from which Sarah was absent due to a scheduling conflict) the teachers began to share their experiences using NVC in a more detailed way. Having outlined the differences between observations and evaluations during the previous meeting, the teachers had gone away with several ideas about how to apply this in a practical setting. The following stories reflect their individual experiences since the last meeting.

Jake started the conversation by sharing with the group how it was much easier for him to separate observations from evaluations retrospectively, as opposed to in the moment. He gave an example of an interaction he had had with a student last week, saying:

I had this situation last week with a student who has a really relaxed attitude towards his learning and I find that quite difficult to work with because he is a senior student and I have expectations for him ... I went to talk to him in class, but he wasn't there and then five minutes later I saw him with his girlfriend ... he had just left the class to go find her and he was eating his lunch and it was like 11:30am in my class. So I went up to him and said I wasn't happy with the way he was engaging in the class ... it wasn't very NVC, I was quite in my emotions ... What was amazing though was that he said ... I don't really want an assessment from this class, I've never wanted that, all I want is to do cool projects ... That conversation was really useful for me as it brought me into myself. I'd assumed that he wanted credits and to do the assessments.

During this story Michael responded by summarising what Jake had said in order to clarify what had happened:

So when you said that he is not engaging in the work it turned out that he is just not interested in the assessments. So by sticking to the observation, without the assumptions, we are never wrong ... and by just sticking to the observation it gives him [the student] an open door to respond in exactly the way he did.

This comment prompted Jake to further elaborate on why he reacted the way he did:

The other thing is the expectation on us in our role as teachers and what the school expects from us and for me it's huge ... I feel like I'm carrying this all by myself and I feel a big pressure to get results and promote this [teaching] area ... and that came into that [conversation with the student] a bit for me ... it's quite interesting to be confronted with that.

Jake's experience highlights how external pressures influenced his interpretation of challenging behaviours and affected the way he communicated with this student. In this instance, as the student was aware of what he wanted from Jake's class, his directness and honesty had helped Jake to understand and empathise with his reasons for not engaging in the way that Jake had expected of him. This dialogue helped remind Jake to connect to his own feelings and to re-evaluate his own expectations on what his students need.

Building on Jake's comment, Michael also noted how it was difficult to apply NVC in the moment, providing two examples of this from his practice. In his first example, he commented:

I always think about it [NVC] too late ... For example, I gave exams back today in my junior class ... I generally try not to judge, I just give the results back ... the results were generally good overall ... [However,] one student told me he was disappointed because he didn't do well ... and I said yeah, it's true, you didn't do very well. In retrospect, I could have responded differently.

While in his second example, he said:

I had some university students come into class today to give a presentation and the students were not very focused and being a bit noisy. I was disappointed that they weren't showing proper respect to our guests and told them to please make an effort tomorrow to show more respect ... I don't think it was judgemental, but I did see a few of them looking down disappointed at their tables, and that's not really what I want, I want to emphasise a positive connection with the students ... It's too bad, as I had half an hour to think about what I was going to say and it never came into my mind to try and use NVC.

However, despite these instances where Michael did not think about using NVC in the moment, he did provide one example of talking to a student who was consistently becoming absent from class. In this conversation, Michael said:

I tried to stick to observations ... I showed him the schedule with all the afternoons he misses ... and we had a good conversation ... and I thought about it only because we are having these conversations here ... so at least I have one example where I know I've done it, so I can try to reproduce it with other students.

While both Jake and Michael had focused on observations within the classroom, Peter shared an example of using NVC (feelings and needs) to address a student who he perceived to be unmotivated and that frequently made loud comments during class. In confronting the student on this behaviour, Peter said:

Hey... I need to feel like everyone has the opportunity to do their best and my job is to manage that. I feel like you're not really taking that on board ... I didn't go into his needs right then because that's actually quite difficult to figure out ... and then I just said, hey you've got a choice, either come in and self-manage or I will have to ask you to leave ... He [the student] responded, yeah, fair enough, and shifted where he was sitting and quietened down.

In this example, while Peter's expression of his feelings were mixed in with his thoughts (i.e., *I feel like you're not really taking that on board*), he was able to convey his underlying need of being able to contribute to student learning (i.e., *I need to feel like everyone has the opportunity to do their best*). After sharing this example, Peter went on to say:

I've been using it [NVC] all the time and what I'm finding is that when I'm not doing it [NVC] perfectly every time I can hear when I get it wrong and I can see the reactions the students have ... and then I just back-pedal and say, hey, what I meant to say was...

From this remark the conversation then shifted towards how the teachers thought it was often difficult to communicate with students who displayed challenging behaviours in the moment. As Peter stated, "students expect to be told off as the first strategy", while Michael commented, "that just telling them off is a quick fix that has bad consequences in the long term, but in the short term it works".

The overall conversation during this meeting reflected a general desire by the teachers in the QLC to move towards a form of communication that acknowledged the underlying reasons behind challenging student behaviours and emphasised forming more cohesive relationships with their students. At the end of the meeting, I introduced step four (request versus demands) and gave the teachers information on this aspect of NVC, which we then briefly discussed before concluding the meeting.

Shaping the third QLC meeting

During this meeting I noticed that the input from the teachers increased as I began to gradually shift from being a participant to more of an observer. As all the teachers who were present had trialled NVC in their classrooms, they each had stories to share and were eager to collaborate together to see if, and how, NVC could be incorporated into their respective practices. An example of this is illustrated when Michael suggested role-playing a scenario for Peter who had expressed difficulty in motivating his students to learn in one of his classes and wanted to practice creating a conversation with that student. During this role play, Peter focused on expressing his own feelings and needs to the student, however, he then realised it was better to focus on the student's feelings and needs through empathy. In speaking to Michael, who portrayed one of his students, Peter said:

I noticed that you haven't started your work yet ... and I feel that if you're here you should be using your time constructively. I just want to see you using your time well; otherwise I question whether you should be here.

Michael pointed out to Peter that he felt judged (as the student) and suggested that Peter empathise with the student's needs first, rather than go straight into expressing his own needs. From this conversation, Peter came up with a sentence stem to focus on the student's needs as opposed to his own, "what do you feel you need out of this hour to help you learn?"

In this example, while Peter was able to point out an observation (I noticed you haven't started your work yet), he then expressed an evaluation of what he thought the student *should* be doing (I feel you should be using your time constructively), rather than how he felt about it. Through a discussion with Michael, he decided that focussing on the student's needs in that instance would be of more value in creating a connection and facilitating student learning. This type of collaboration between the teachers manifested several times throughout the meeting, with all the teachers encouraging each other to explore their stories critically and come up with new ideas. Additionally, the teachers reflected on how the language they used could either facilitate or hinder student-teacher relationships. I believe that these processes helped to create a supportive and positive environment within the group and allowed space for the teachers to take risks, such as role-playing on the spot, in order to develop new strategies.

At the end of the meeting, I asked the teachers if there were some situations that they would like to trial NVC in before the next meeting. Peter mentioned that he wanted to practice using requests rather than demands, while Jake responded that he would like to use requests with several of his students and try to acknowledge the positive side of what they are doing more. Michael stated that he would like to see what scenarios came up during the week and apply NVC spontaneously.

Summary and personal reflections

The major theme involved in this QLC centred on discussing the differences between observations and evaluations, as well as the difficulty of applying theory into practice. My overall impression at the time was that this QLC meeting flowed really well in comparison to the previous two meetings. This was borne out in the transcripts as shown above. As it became more experiential from the teachers' perspectives I was able to step back, which allowed the teachers to engage in more in-depth discussions. However, I was still aware that I could not take a 'back-seat' completely until the teachers had a firm grasp of the basic fundamentals of NVC, so my participation in several of the conversations continued.

5.3.4 QLC 4 (Theme – Requests versus Demands)

In the fourth QLC (from which Peter was absent due to a scheduling conflict) the teachers continued the process of sharing their experiences of trialling NVC in the classroom,

as well as discussing its theoretical application on a personal and professional level. Jake began by stating to the group how he was often aware of situations when he could have used NVC after they had occurred and that when these situations involved challenging behaviours, it was difficult to not evaluate a student's intentions or motivations. In telling the group about this, he said:

When I perceive that students are not engaged in learning in my class I'll go over there and talk to them in a way that's sort of, why aren't you guys doing what I asked you? I think it's very subtle ... you can easily get them on the wrong side. They might actually be completely engaged in a really good conversation about learning, but I typically judge it as, you guys are disengaged and not really doing any learning.

However, Jake went on to say that he was able to be more objective in an encounter with a student that week. The scenario involved a year nine student who sometimes walked out of class without telling him. This had begun to frustrate Jake, so he waited until a time when he was feeling relaxed, and then approached the student to say:

You're in a couple of my classes, I want to share some of my observations with you ... I noticed that you will just disappear during my classes and from my perspective I feel a bit concerned because I don't know where you're going and you don't tell me, you just leave ... I wondered if you'd be willing to let me know if you need to go out of the classroom?

During this talk, Jake commented that the student was quite attentive to him and responded that he would be happy to tell him when he wanted to leave class. Jake stated that this interaction was quite easy for him as there was not much conflict during that situation. In the next example, Sarah recalled an experience she had with two of her students who expressed disinterest towards sitting one of their final exams and had started becoming absent from her class. This had frustrated Sarah and she stated her desire to discuss this within the group in order to find a way to communicate with the students. She said, "I feel quite frustrated because we are doing all this theory and it is going to be really hard for them to catch up. I'm concerned because they are missing out on this learning". Upon reflecting on this statement with the group members, Sarah believed she was feeling frustrated for two main reasons:

I am concerned that if they fail that I will be held accountable for their failing ... [and] ... If they make their choice (not to engage), I need to know it has nothing to do with the fact that I have failed in some way to provide a meaningful learning experience.

Sarah talked to the group about how to express this to her students and she decided that rather than expressing her own frustration, it would be better to empathise with the students. From this discussion, Sarah came up with the sentence, "I feel worried that you are not getting what

you need ... and I'm worried that if you are sitting this exam you will struggle to pass". Sarah thought that this would be a good dialogue to start a conversation with the students and if they told her that they were not interested in passing her class then she would not feel bad about their performance, since their intentions had been made clear to her. This example demonstrates how Sarah's initial feelings of frustration given way to feelings of empathy when she thought about what the students may have needed.

In regards to Michael, he stated that while there were a couple of times when he had applied NVC with his students in the form of trying to empathise with their needs in the moment, perhaps the most significant role it had played so far was with a colleague of his named Stephanie (referred to in the second QLC meeting). In a recent conversation with Stephanie, Michael had told the group that he was able to identify the judgements that he heard from Stephanie and reflected those back to her. Michael said that following the conversation, Stephanie came back and apologised to him, which was something out of the ordinary. Michael believed that if he were able to add in empathy the next time he had a conflict with Stephanie it might help improve their collegial relationship further. Following this conversation, I introduced the final major component of NVC (empathy) and handed out an information sheet to the teachers, which we then briefly discussed before concluding the meeting.

Shaping the fourth QLC meeting

Throughout this meeting the teachers continued to provide support and empathy towards each other, which often encouraged the formation of new ideas and topics of conversation. For instance, during the conversation where Sarah outlined her preference for focussing on her students, Jake challenged her to explore her own feelings and needs, whilst Michael provided some suggestions on what Sarah's underlying needs might have been. In another example where Jake shared a story about a group of students who had not done the task he had asked of them, Sarah paraphrased what he had said and then suggested some needs that may have been present in Jake. While these suggestions were not entirely accurate, they did help Jake to clarify how he had actually felt. Through establishing discussions which placed emphasis on examining the reasons behind their own actions and assumptions, the teachers encouraged the creation of new ideas together and continued to establish a culture of professional talk within the group. At the end of the meeting I asked the teachers if there were

any other ways in which they wanted to trial NVC. Each teacher mentioned a particular student that they had in mind.

Summary and personal reflections

Throughout this QLC the teachers discussed all the aspects of NVC simultaneously, as opposed to mainly focussing on one concept at time. I believe this reflected that they were more comfortable and familiar with the concepts involved in NVC and felt freer to explore its application in multiple ways. I also noticed that the teachers were reflecting more on their role in creating and influencing the relationships inside their classrooms. Reflection was also the most prominent factor operating during this meeting, as most of the talk involved the teachers reflecting on how they would like to use NVC, as opposed to discussing examples of its actual usage.

5.3.5 QLC 5 (Theme – Empathy)

In the fifth QLC, which had been scheduled three school days after the previous one (due to scheduling conflicts), three out of the four teachers stated that there had not been time to trial NVC in their classrooms. Subsequently only Peter, who had been absent from the previous meeting, had examples to share of trialling NVC. Fortunately, these examples provided a good base for creating discussion amongst the group, both at a practical and theoretical level.

In his first example, Peter had applied NVC with a student whom he had seen as off-task during class. This student named Ben² was continually using his phone whilst Peter was talking. Peter went up to him and said, “Ben, you keep looking at your phone and right now I need your full attention”. Peter stated to the group that as soon as he said that the students face changed and he looked down towards his desk. In response to this reaction Peter said, “Ben, I think I might have just blown it there. I’ll come and talk to you shortly”. Peter then went back to the student after a short time and said:

Look, I can tell by the change in you that I might have really blown it and I think I may have really upset you ... and he said, yeah, you should see what I’m doing before you growl at me, cause I had my device and was researching these questions while you were talking ... I said to him, I got that so wrong, I’m really sorry ... because you probably need to have some sense of fairness ... You must feel really angry at me?

² Pseudonym

Peter felt like he built a stronger relationship with Ben by being honest and acknowledging how his comment may have impacted him. He shared this sentiment with the group:

I have to reconnect and show empathy that he [Ben] must feel quite negative feelings towards me because of my actions, and I need to own that, and I did that with him and he really appreciated that.

After telling this story, Peter laughed and told the group that Ben then said to him, “actually, that time you saw me I was playing a game”. Peter believed that because he was upfront with Ben about ‘getting it wrong’, Ben had felt more comfortable to admit that he was in fact playing a game instead of working and this he felt helped to create a more honest encounter between them.

In his second example, Peter described using NVC with a whole class. He recounted having another teacher come in and observe his toughest class (bottom year nine). After the class ended she had given him feedback, with some of it in the form of negative critiques. When he had that class next he brought up these critiques with his students:

Last week I had Miss ... observe as you know and I felt that it went alright, but she had some critiques of me [which he outlined to the class] ... I need to feel like I am doing the best I can for you guys so I’m going to focus today on having your full attention.

Peter decided to express his feelings about the other teacher’s comments because he believed that, “sharing what you’re doing and why you’re doing it is really powerful in creating positive relationships within the classroom”. Peter commented that since trialling NVC, he has been more willing to share his reasons for doing things with his students.

In his final example, Peter talked about a student who was using his phone during class. Peter went up to him and said, “I notice you’re still playing with your phone and it’s a full attention time and I need your full focus. So, would you be willing to put it away?” Peter then went away from the student, whom continued using his phone. At the end of the class Peter began a dialogue with this student, saying:

You really struggled to self-manage with your phone, how do you feel about that? He said, yeah, you’re right. [So I said] well, moving forward, any idea how we solve this together? He said to me, next time you should take my phone from me, that’s what other teachers do. I said, that’s one strategy, but really, I don’t feel like I would be helping you ... this is about you managing yourself.

After sharing this experience, the group began a conversation about what the student’s needs may have been in that situation and his reaction towards self-managing. During this conversation, Sarah proposed that Peter could have said, “I’m curious why you want me to do

that? ... And in that answer, you look for his feelings and needs". This comment demonstrates an increasing movement towards examining students' needs behind their actions.

Building on the conversation above, Sarah informed the group that she was having difficulty thinking in terms of her own needs. She outlined that she had a preference for focussing on students' needs rather than her own in the classroom. This decision to focus her empathy onto her students rather than on herself meant that she was less inclined to examine her own needs during the QLCs and in the classroom. When speaking about using NVC to focus on her own needs, Sarah stated:

I am still struggling to work through conceptually placing my own needs as important as the students' in the classroom ... I don't want to dump my needs on them when it's not appropriate to do so ... that's my thing, that's not their thing.

As a result of this, Sarah was more likely to think about and ask students what they needed during class and reflect on how she could fit in with their needs. Keeping in line with exploring needs, Jake gave an example of a group of students whom he perceived as being defiant and how his perception influenced the way he communicated with them. Jake told the group that he was not clear about what his needs were during that encounter and wanted to do more exploration around that. He thought that once he had self-empathised, he would be better able to empathise with these students:

When I talked to them today I was quite accusatory in my tone ... I need to build empathy because I think I'm getting off-side with them ... I'm getting annoyed and impatient with them. I think that my real feeling underneath is that I'm concerned, or worried, or stressed that I can't trust them ... that they aren't going to be productive during this class. I think I need to put a framework around them being in class that is clearer.

This comment highlights how Jake's perception of these students stemmed from his frustration surrounding his need for trust. Discussing this with the group allowed Jake to gain clarity on the processes behind his perception of challenging behaviours in this instance and indicated that creating clearer boundaries would help facilitate him to be more empathetic towards these students.

In addition to Jake, Michael also noted how he wanted to be more empathetic towards his students. He recalled a class that he had earlier in the day where he talked to the students about their test results, particularly how some students had not done well in the test.

I acknowledged that they (the students) have worked really hard and that it is an excellent class ... and that when I saw the test results weren't great, I took responsibility by saying that perhaps I rushed them through the school work too fast and I reminded them that they still have enough time to work through it ... usually I put the responsibility on the students, but this time I took some on myself.

Michael said that he thought the students took his acknowledgment of their hard work ironically, because they had not done so well in the test. He mentioned to the group that perhaps he could have empathised with them more, but was unsure of how to do that with an entire class in that moment. This example concluded the teachers' stories in this QLC.

Shaping the fifth QLC meeting

Following on from the previous meeting, the teachers continued to provide support and feedback to each other and within this meeting several of the teachers also challenged each other's assumptions. During this I did not notice any defensiveness regarding these comments, but rather a development of ideas, which I believe helped to establish a climate where the teachers' felt comfortable and safe to both give and receive critical feedback.

The teachers also talked more about presenting their students with choices and a large amount of the conversation was direct towards exploring ways to empathise with students and present them with different ways to fulfil their learning needs. Peter believed the students learnt that, "teachers are there to tell you what to do and make you do what you don't want to do". In response, Sarah stated that:

It's important to bring up a balance between being aware of our feelings and needs and the students' feelings and needs ... there are many reasons why students can be challenging ... they may have issues at home ... I think that being clear to them about what the problems is and giving them a choice is important.

At the end of the meeting Sarah stayed behind to discuss this idea further with me, as she wanted to explore ways to acknowledge her own needs, while at the same time, not imposing them on her students. I suggested to her that she could be aware of her feelings and needs in the moment, however, keep this as an internal dialogue and focus on the students' feelings and needs. From this, she could then engage in a direct conversation geared towards empathising with her students, rather than herself.

Summary and personal reflections

During this QLC I became more acutely aware of the preferences that each teacher held in regards to their application of NVC. While I believe that all the teachers shared a balanced focus between applying NVC towards their own self-development and that of their students, their stories showed that there was a distinctive difference in the way that certain teachers chose to apply NVC – either inwardly or outwardly. For instance, on one hand, Peter’s primary focus was on exploring his own feelings and needs throughout the group meetings so that he could better influence his teaching practice. On the other, Sarah chose to principally focus on understanding her students’ feelings and needs, rather than her own. While I believe that neither position held an advantage over the other, they did reflect each teacher’s needs at a particular time and the strategies that they chose to take in order to connect with their students. In regards to Michael and Jake, I had noticed that they lay somewhere in the middle and chiefly used reflection as a tool to explore ways that they could apply NVC in retrospective scenarios.

5.3.6 QLC 6 (Theme - Integrating NVC into practice)

In the sixth QLC (from which Sarah was absent due to a scheduling conflict) the meeting went much like the previous ones in that the teachers continued sharing their experiences of using NVC in the classroom. Peter began the meeting by talking about a class he had at the end of the day. At the start of this class he had a task that required around eight minutes of the students’ full attention. Realising that his students may were possibly tired he acknowledged this aloud to the class, “I know its last period but I really want to set everyone up for success really well, so I really need to have your full attention”. Peter said that worked really well and the students gave him their attention. However, a minute before it was over he had had one more thing to convey to the class and they started to get restless. He said:

I sense you’re getting restless and it’s really important to me that I feel like I’ve given everybody really clear instructions. You’ve done really well so far, would you be willing to manage yourselves for 60 more seconds?

Peter told the group that he was surprised that the students were silent for the remainder of the time. After sharing this experience I asked Peter what he would have done if one or more of the students had voiced opposition to his request, such as saying ‘No’. He responded:

Well, that would be ok too. I would have said something like ... Ok, well if you feel ready to go, there are the instruction sheets and computers ... if anyone wants me to clarify things, come and see me.

In another example, Peter recalled a situation in one of his year nine classes where there had been conflict between several students, involving a group of male students teasing another student, who Peter said was already a victim of bullying within the school. Peter recalled that he was stern in his response and had told the main antagonist to wait outside. Once the classroom climate returned to normal, Peter went out to this student and said:

I acknowledge I lost my cool, I needed to manage that situation and I felt that you deliberately said something that was antagonistic ... and I thought it was really inappropriate. I need to get learning happening in the class and was feeling really frustrated ... so I imagine you may feel frustrated or angry with me? And he said, aww, no ... I think the fact that I empathised with the student helped, even though the student didn't want to talk about how he was feeling.

Peter believed that by acknowledging that he lost his temper and providing empathy, it helped him to establish a connection with the student, despite the uneasy circumstances. In addition to the examples above, Peter also mentioned his thoughts on NVC so far:

I'm loving it and I'm finding pretty much all of my interactions with students are based around NVC ... however, every now and then it doesn't seem appropriate or doesn't happen ... [For instance] when a student isn't responding the way I like, I sometimes say, I'm feeling confused, I'd like to understand better how you're feeling or how what I'm saying is affecting you ... I think that some students are just not aware of their needs and I find it is sometimes difficult to connect with them ... it seems the older they are, the easier it is.

Peter's comment demonstrates his increasing enthusiasm in using NVC, while at the same time, acknowledges its limitations, which involved Peter not feeling confident in applying the approach or thinking it was not suitable in a particular situation.

In regards to Jake, he mentioned to the group that he had been finding it quite difficult to apply NVC concepts with students who displayed challenging behaviours. He said:

I had a year nine student who didn't come to both days of health day. He called in sick and told me afterwards that he didn't find the classes relevant and his parents supported that. I felt quite angry and challenged him on it ... saying something like, you should have been there ... why weren't you there? It didn't go so well and that was really frustrating ... Afterwards I realised I hadn't been using NVC.

During this conversation Jake mentioned that he would have liked to empathise with the student more and would have preferred to say something like, "why was it that you thought it wasn't important to come to those days?" Jake realised he was getting caught up in his own emotions and was not able to empathise with the student during that moment and create a positive relationship:

I think that self-understanding and self-empathy are important to remember, as it's hard to empathise with a student when you are angry or frustrated with them. If I'm not in a place where I am grounded, it is really easy for me to be triggered by students.

Continuing on from a conversation in the previous QLC, this example again highlighted how important it was for Jake to become aware of his own internal processes and how they affected his ability to empathise with his students. In alignment with Jake, Michael also talked about the importance of empathy. In his example, Michael recalled a conversation with a colleague regarding an email which he didn't realise they had read. Michael told the group that his colleague felt hurt at the contents of the email and approached him about it. In describing the conversation, Michael said:

They came up to me about something I had written in an email and I didn't realise that it was being read at first. And then I didn't realise they were being hurt ... I explained why I wrote that in an email, where I was coming from, and what I was feeling ... and at the same time I realised that my colleague was getting a bit defensive ... I realised I couldn't just end the conversation there because it was not enough for them. So I sat down for another ten minutes and listened. I think I empathised just by listening.

As his colleague was defensive during that interaction, this indicated to Michael that they needed empathy before they were able to hear Michael's reasons for sending the email, alongside how he felt. By shifting from trying to explain his actions towards giving empathy to his colleague surrounding how she felt, Michael was able to help create a more cohesive connection. This example concluded the teachers' stories in this QLC.

Shaping the sixth QLC meeting

At the end of the meeting, I reminded the group that there was only one more scheduled meeting left and asked them if they had any thoughts on how they wanted to develop the final meeting. The teachers responded that they were happy to continue with the structure that had been established; namely, sharing experiences and working together to find common solutions to the problems that they encountered, such as challenging student behaviours.

Summary and personal reflections

I had noticed that since the third QLC, where the length of the meeting had been extended to one hour, the teachers had more time to share stories and examine ways to implement NVC in their practices. As a consequence of this, I had observed a repeated pattern with each meeting; they followed a similar format with the teachers retelling their

experiences of trialling NVC, talking about using NVC retrospectively and using exercises such as role-playing to develop their ideas surrounding NVC. From my perspective, I believe that the teachers appeared to enjoy structuring their own learning in the moment and this format seemed to suit them well. In addition, I also noticed by this point how difficult it was to arrange a time that would suit everybody's busy schedules and so far, this had resulted in one person's absence in three out of the six meetings.

5.3.7 QLC 7 (Theme – Integrating NVC into practice)

In the final QLC all the teachers were present. Jake started the meeting by discussing how his own needs as a teacher influenced his perception of challenging student behaviours. In his example, Jake first outlined an experience where he indirectly requested empathy from several of his students. In this situation, Jake's class was working both inside and directly outside of the classroom, with Jake going between both areas. When he went outside he saw a small group of students skateboarding and joking around. He approached them and said:

Guys, it's important for me that when you're outside the class that you are sensible and back in time, because for me, I'm worried if you're distracted out there or skating around, it will look bad on me ... and they responded, yeah, we get that.

Jake mentioned that the students' response showed more understanding than previous encounters he had had with them. He then reflected on some of his own underlying reasons for feeling stressed when interacting with students who did not seem interested in being in class:

I get stressed out when I see kids disengaged in my classes ... I take responsibility for their learning ... it's about me being successful as an educator ... that's a really important need of mine ... if they're not getting results or not engaging in class, I see that as a reflection of myself, which isn't necessarily good, but it's what I do.

After Jake expressed this, Peter nodded his head and went onto say, "I feel that too, and if I'm totally honest, one of my needs is to be judged positively by my peers." During this conversation, Jake and Peter shared a similar viewpoint and acknowledged how their own needs as individuals and as teachers contributed to how they felt interacting with certain students. This led Peter to share an experience of how he sometimes had to manage a student who made a lot of noise during class. Peter recalled how he had approached this student who was talking while he was giving out instructions to the class and said to him:

Look, I'm feeling frustrated about the noise and my need to manage it, and I don't feel like I'm doing that really well. To me it's really important we get these instructions

done and I can do it pretty quickly. Would you be willing to manage yourself for one minute?

The student thought about it for a moment and then said yes. Following on from this example, Peter mentioned that he had been trying hard to keep judgements out of his interactions and was mindful that what he said did not come across as a judgement. So he had told the group that his next step was to keep practicing his skills with NVC and link it with the student key competencies. Peter said that he had already done one inquiry with NVC and was considering doing a second loop, where he could refine making it more visible to the students.

In regards to Michael, while he remarked that he still ‘got wound up’ when interacting with his colleague Stephanie, he did mention that their relationship had improved:

The relationship has improved a lot and we get on much better now ... there is much less tension now when we speak ... I am able to become more aware of what is not going well with the dialogue and how I may be contributing to it, and this process is quicker and more frequent than before.

During the course of the QLC meetings, Michael was able to shift from a habitual and reactionary response of defensiveness when confronted with judgements from Stephanie towards a more understanding response based on regulating his own emotions and providing empathy. In turn, this helped to facilitate a better interpersonal connection between the two colleagues.

In terms of Sarah, she reflected on moments during the past week where she could have used NVC during her teaching practice. Sarah recalled a situation where a student was being noisier than she wanted during class and as a response, she scowled at him. In retrospect, when she thought about the situation and having already spoken with the student several times before, she told the group that she would have preferred to have said:

In your practice exam you said that you needed to work harder to get through this exam. I feel a bit confused because I thought that you might find this helpful, and I’m wondering if you’re wanting to learn about this or have you given up on this one? ... If this is not helpful, what could we do that helps to meet your needs?

In commenting on using NVC as reflective tool, Sarah remarked that she is self-monitoring more on whether she is communicating in a judgemental way with her students:

For me, it’s helping to understand judgements ... that they can be both negative and positive ... NVC language has helped me to work through that and examine that

through observation ... Whether I say 'you're noisy', as opposed to making a direct observation.

Sarah then concluded by saying how she thought that some of the other teachers in her school would benefit using this approach and said that she intended to organise a slot in the next staff meeting for the group members (excluding Peter who worked in another school) to explain the principles of NVC and talk about their experiences to the other teachers in order to find out if they were interested in forming a group on their own within the school.

The meeting then concluded with each member, including myself, sharing their gratitude for the aspects of the group that had enriched their lives in some way. This idea, which is often used within an NVC framework, was initiated by me as a way to celebrate and share the successes within the group. The results of this part have been included in the next section, as they closely align with the teachers' overall perceptions of NVC.

Summary and personal reflections

Upon reflection after the group had finished, I noticed that the teachers were bringing all the different aspects of NVC together (observations, feelings, needs, requests, and empathy) and integrating them to various degrees to solve hypothetical cases, as well as real-life experiences. While there were instances where they had mixed up feelings and needs, projected their own needs onto others, and chosen not to empathise, their ability to theoretically grasp the concepts of NVC and transfer them to practice was impressive. This was all despite only having had a total of between four to seven hours within the group (this includes times of absence). Following the final meeting, the exit interviews were scheduled with all the teachers later that week. I now present these in detail.

5.4 Exit Interviews

The exit interviews were divided into two parts. In the first part, which dealt with the NVC portion of the interview, the teachers summarised the challenges they had faced translating NVC theory to practice, as well as their overall thoughts on the approach. In the second part, which involved the QLC aspect of the interview, the teachers discussed what they thought the main strengths and limitations were of the QLC and offered their suggestions for other teachers who might consider using this approach. I now present the first part of the exit interview, which examined the teachers' experiences of NVC.

5.4.1 Challenges Associated with Implementing NVC

In this section I outline several challenges associated with implementing NVC from the perspectives of the teachers who trialled the approach. I explore the aspects of NVC that they struggled with and present examples in their own words about what they had found difficult. These difficulties fall into three main categories. These differences were hesitancy in applying a new approach, vulnerability in expressing emotions, and knowing how and when to use empathy.

Hesitancy in applying a new approach

In regards to the first challenge, Michael, Jake, and Sarah noted that not being familiar with some of the NVC concepts impacted on their confidence to use NVC as much as they would have liked to, particularly in the beginning of the QLCs. For instance, Michael conveyed the thought that he was still not fluent enough in NVC to use it effectively, “I feel clumsy and slow using NVC and this makes me hesitant to use it”. This led these teachers to avoid using NVC with students with whom that they found particularly, and in turn, lessened the opportunities that they had to apply NVC. An example of this involved using NVC with students who have learning disabilities. For instance, Michael mentioned how he thought it would be really difficult to use NVC with a student in his class with autism.

You try NVC on a kid like this and it won't work, he won't understand. He doesn't link with my feelings, he's detached ... If we give him empathy he is not going to understand what this is ... he is just in his bubble.

While this comment demonstrates Michael's hesitation for engaging in an NVC dialogue with an autistic student, it also reflects his confidence in applying NVC, which he had mentioned throughout the research project. Since the research had been conducted over one school term, there were only seven meetings for the teachers to learn, trial, and understand the processes of NVC. This is likely to have been a contributing factor towards the teachers lack of confidence in applying NVC.

However, despite this hesitancy, several of the teachers expressed that having a facilitator who was confident in applying NVC also helped them understand the basic concepts of NVC and learn to apply them in practical situations. In regards to this, Peter mentioned, “I really liked that there was an expert who could validate it [practicing NVC] for me ... It really

helped me feel more confident”. The mix of responses reflects that the teachers’ adoption and implementation of NVC depended on multiple influences, as well as individual needs.

Vulnerability in expressing emotions

In regards to the second challenge, several of the teachers responded that expressing their feelings and needs to students in such an honest and direct way had been a daunting prospect. In addition, the teachers found that they were more vulnerable when expressing themselves to a class, as opposed to individual or small groups of students. For example, Michael stated, “in my classes I didn’t use it much because I was a bit shy”. In an example of expressing vulnerability during class, Peter recalled an experience where he had expressed his feelings to his students, saying “look, I am feeling a little scared right now because the behaviours are such that, if someone observed me they might think I am bad teacher, and that scares me”. Peter mentioned that he had talked to his colleagues at school about being this honest. Several of them had responded that they would be hesitant to relate to students in this way because they thought the students might use what they said as ammunition to make fun of them. However, in response to this, Peter told his colleagues that in his experience the students would usually not ridicule him. If one of them did, he said he would address the student in a direct and honest way. In an example of this, he said:

Look I am feeling a little frustrated and confused why you think that [ridiculing] is a good thing to do. I am curious to know what you’re feeling and what need is behind you trying to ridicule your teacher?

While Peter acknowledged that a student was often not going to be aware of their feelings and needs, he thought that this would be a way to open a dialogue with the student without telling them off or punishing them, as well as allowing a platform for the teacher to express their emotions in a direct way.

Using empathy

In regards to the third challenge, several of the teachers reported a difficulty in knowing when and how to convey empathy towards their students. Michael commented:

Giving empathy to students is not the easiest thing. I can do it a bit, but it’s not super easy. What I find easier is identifying their feelings and my feelings, but then the deeper step [giving empathy], I find that challenging.

Michael also added that sometimes, “it is too hard to hear the needs behind someone’s words in a particular moment”. In addition, Jake mentioned that when he was feeling stressed or

frustrated he also had difficulty in empathising with students. In regards to this he said, “I almost need to be able to be empathetic towards myself before I can empathise with others”. Furthermore, in addition to challenges associated with empathising with others, several teachers reported that self-empathy also presented a challenge. Commenting on this, Michael mentioned:

There are a few things that are a bit challenging ... Self-empathy, I tend to think that I don't need it so much. That if I need it, I'll take care of it later, after class or when I'm at lunch break. I'm going to self-empathise and I'll be fine. But maybe I need to self-empathise on the situation when it happens, to act differently, so that the situation becomes less challenging.

Jake also agreed and noted that he needed to, “empathise with students or myself more, instead of feeling external pressure on myself and expectations on the students”. However, not all the teachers felt this way about self-empathy. On the contrary, Sarah questioned the appropriateness of focussing on herself during a class instead of her students:

It's about whether it's about my needs or not. I prefer to focus on supporting students to meet their needs, rather than meeting my own needs ... I am still struggling to work through conceptually placing my own needs as important as the students in the classroom.

This comment demonstrates a difference in the way teachers chose to think about and use empathy. The data collected regarding the challenges teachers faced in learning and applying NVC show a mix of factors that impact how, when, and if they used the approach. For some teachers, these challenges were minor obstacles to overcome, while for others they presented a very real barrier for deciding whether to use NVC in a particular situation.

5.4.2 Teachers' Overall Impressions of NVC

Data on the teachers' overall opinions of NVC came from the final QLC session, as well as the final interviews, where the teachers expressed how certain aspects of NVC and the group work had enriched their lives. All the teachers reported that their experiences of learning NVC were positive. The comments teachers gave centred on the benefit of using NVC to create stronger interpersonal relationships with their students, increase their own self-analysis, and emotional awareness, as well as to avoid judgements inside of the classroom. Reflecting on his overall impressions of NVC, Jake stated:

The main way I've incorporated it is sort of as a reflective tool, I haven't necessarily adapted my practice over the course of the study that much. I've used it and there have been some slight adaptations ... but overall it has helped me to reflect on my emotional

response to students ... I've used it most when students aren't necessarily engaging in learning in the way I would like them to.

Extending on his comment regarding NVCs effect on his emotional response to students, Jake stated:

I think its effect on my emotional awareness has probably been quite significant. It has helped me to clarify what is going on inside of myself and understand what might be going on inside of my students ... I almost need to be able to be empathetic towards myself before I can empathise with others.

Jake then went on to say that his students reacted well during the times he applied NVC in the classroom:

They've reacted quite well ... better than I thought ... they didn't challenge my use of NVC, they responded in a positive way to the NVC language ... [With NVC] you can form non-hierarchical relationships with students and I think that is a much stronger and more powerful way to work with them.

Jake's description of how NVC had helped him to become more reflective was also echoed by Michael. In expressing his opinion on NVC, he said:

I've really enjoyed this group. I don't think I've progressed much in the way I talk ... I knew a bit of NVC before, but just the basics without applying, and now I'm much faster at analysing ... I'm able to analyse the situations and myself better ... I'm more aware of the emotions and where they're coming from and what they're driving me to.

Michael went onto say that he has found NVC to be particularly useful in conflict situations, stating:

It's useful for all sorts of misunderstandings, conflicts or tensions. Where there is a problem, is when I've found NVC to be useful, even if in some cases I haven't used it during that moment. Afterwards I've reflected on the situation and thought, of course it would have worked, I'm convinced it would have been efficient [in that moment] ... I think I would recommend it for something that I'm not doing yet, which is to use it so much in our day to day practice that we are modelling it, and through this modelling, our students are learning it too.

When asked how his students had reacted to his use of NVC, Michael reported that he thought it had been minimal, because he had not trialled the approach enough:

In my classes not much because I didn't make it very clear ... I haven't used it enough for them to get into it ... but at least I got the message across that there are better ways to interact, especially with more of the senior students I teach. I've shared it with several of them and there is one girl whose father knows about NVC and she's totally convinced that it's fantastic and really helps and I've realised that she's using NVC all the time without us even noticing.

In contrast to Jake and Michael who had primarily used NVC as a reflective tool, Peter had trialled the approach many times within the classroom on an individual and group basis. In outlining his experience of NVC, Peter stated:

My experience of NVC is that it is a really good way to make deep relationships with what could be difficult kids, as opposed to entering combative relationships. I think NVC is another process to use to connect with people and myself empathically. It helps to by-pass anger and I am way more mindful of what is going on in my students ... Rather than thinking this student is being bad and annoying and is trying to wreck my class, I now think that they probably need some empathy because something is not going right for them ... NVC [also] provides a rationale that teachers can buy into, which is creating positive relationships.

In describing the types of situations for which NVC had been useful for, Peter stated:

I use it to manage situations that aren't meeting my needs ... in every class there are one or two students who are battling the system and when I talk to them using NVC I feel a sense of engagement with them ... Rather than telling off students who are struggling to stay focused, I now have the assumption that they are not getting what they are needing during class ... I think it [NVC] is a good approach when there are call-outs at really inappropriate times and when there are disruptive and really unmotivated students.

Peter also described some of his students' reactions to his use of NVC. He said:

I think the students expect to be yelled at when they are misbehaving and they react really positively when I give empathy to them. [For example], there is this one student whose head was down and didn't seem to be listening when I talked to him. He's just hearing, blah blah blah right now. He emotionally checked out of the conversation completely and whatever I say is not getting through ... He's hearing it all as demand, demand, demand ... Well, that student now, I'm able to have conversations with him. He's starting to be honest with me about his conduct in the classroom.

In another example I heard second hand that a student that I teach, who has regular meetings with the assistant principal, said that he quite likes how I interact with him because I try to help him think things through and work them out.

These examples highlight how Peter had used NVC as a tool to form better interpersonal connections with his students on an individual level. Additionally, Peter had also conducted a short survey between the sixth and final QLC. This survey was conducted on his own accord and for ethical reasons the full results cannot be described here. However, Peter did give a generalised account in his own words during his final interview. In this, he outlined how he had surveyed 40 students from three different classes. The purpose of the survey was to gauge whether the students had noticed his use of NVC during class (he described this in the survey) and if they thought it was a good strategy. Peter told me that out of the 40 students, 38 (95%) noticed his usage of NVC, while 2 (5%) did not. In terms of whether the students

thought this new way of interacting with them was good, 10 students (25%) said ‘definitely’, 23 (57.5%) said ‘yes’, four (10%) said ‘maybe’, one (2.5%) said ‘no’, and two students (5%) had ‘no answer’. Overall, Peter expressed a positive opinion about the results he had received and said he would continue using NVC within his classes.

In terms of Sarah’ experiences, she described her overall thoughts on NVC by saying:

I believe in having empathy with the students and having a connection with each one of them and this [NVC] is a good strategy for that ... it provides another method to engage with students in a conversational manner ... and helps me analyse these types of situations and provide the language to facilitate this style of communication.

Sarah’s desire to avoid judgements and communicate with her students in an empathetic way was one of the defining points in her usage of NVC. In telling me about how she incorporated NVC into her practice, she said:

I’m more likely to think about and ask students what they need ... while I usually empathise with my students, I’m now directly asking them what they need ... and I’m also self-monitoring more whether I’m talking in a judgemental way, as well as articulating requests in a ‘clean way’ – not as a demand but very specific, as opposed to vague and fuzzy.

When I asked how her students had reacted to her use of NVC, Sarah responded, “positively, though the way I use NVC is similar to how I act, so it is not so out of the ordinary for my students to experience”.

The overall opinions of the teachers on the content of NVC were positive, showing that they valued how it could help them to avoid judgements, create empathy, increase their emotional awareness, as well as foster deeper and more positive relationships. I now turn to the second part of the interview where the teachers outlined their experiences of learning through a QLC model.

5.4.3 Teachers’ Overall Impressions of the QLC

When asked about his overall impressions of the group and what he found useful, Jake responded:

What I’ve found most useful, and perhaps the way that I’ve incorporated it most, is that I’ve been reflecting through the support of meeting in team. I don’t know whether I would do that without that team situation ... It gave me the opportunity to learn in a practical way and reflect on my practice ... and we built a safe container as a group, which was important to me.

Reflection and support characterised two main areas of the QLC that Jake found particularly valuable throughout this process. In addition, he also went on to mention how collaboration was an important factor within the group, stating, “I liked the way that people came in with problems and we all got to figure it out together as a group. I thought that was a powerful force”. In discussing any barriers or frustrations he had during the QLC, Jake said:

Allowing each person in the group to have equal time and space. I think that wasn't necessarily a problem, but at times I noticed that I wasn't able to get my part in and that was one of my little frustrations.

While this only represented a minor problem for Jake, it does highlight the importance of equal participation within the QLC so that each participant has a chance to express their ideas. In offering guidance to other teachers considering the QLC model, Jake commented, “I think it important to make sure there is a really clear etiquette within the group and that everyone is given space to speak and it's adaptable to the needs of the group members”.

In regards to Michael's experiences, he described how collaboration was a central feature for him during the QLCs, stating:

I think it's great to share the stories at the beginning about what happened through the week because there is so much to discuss and this is the best way to learn NVC. Taking a situation and unravelling everything and everybody tries to sort out all the tight knots. That was the main success ... listening and participating in these conversations and sharing my own stories at the beginning of the session were great.

In addition, he also pointed out how he valued the ongoing nature of the QLC, even though it was another meeting in his agenda. Commenting on this, he said:

Weekly meetings are good even though sometimes it feels like nothing has happened during the week ... sharing stories and bringing food is always good too, it's a motivation that everyone will show up ... I definitely recommend doing it to everyone. It's another meeting on top of all the other meetings, but it's one of the most productive ones I've had.

When asked about any frustrations or barriers that he noticed during the QLCs, Michael responded:

There were some weeks where I was a bit too overwhelmed to really think about NVC before I was teaching a class ... I just didn't think about it, I was just jumping from one class to the next and then comes the next meeting and I'm thinking, a week has passed by and I haven't got anything... so that's one of my main frustrations.

In summarising his thoughts on the QLC process, Michael said:

It was perfectly aligned with my preferred learning style ... Conversations in a small group, it's exactly the way I like to learn ... You come and then go through the hour of

talking and you start thinking, wow this is so important ... and it's great the progress we made, so yeah, it is my preferred learning style for that type of content.

Turning to Peter's experience of the QLCs, he mentioned how the collaborative aspect of the group helped to motivate his learning. He said:

Having accountability, as in turning up to the group and trialling things, helped motivate me. I enjoyed sharing my stories ... I felt like I was contributing to others in the group and I felt good about that ... The size of the group was also good and it felt safe. There was good communication between everyone.

Additionally, Peter also discussed how he valued the experiential aspect of the meetings, "the group met my needs for thinking creatively with the information ... and [from that] I was able to come back to my classroom and focus on practicing it [NVC]". Peter then discussed several of his frustrations regarding the meetings, stating that they mainly revolved around expressing himself in the group and the time-pressures of his work:

Sometimes the messages I wanted to say were perceived differently than I had intended them to be and that was frustrating ... also, the time-pressures of work and making it to the meetings were another frustration.

In summarising his opinion and offering advice to anyone wanting to partake in a QLC, Peter expressed:

I think this method works really well ... creating knowledge together and personalising it through linking the ideas to your practice ... and we did a lot of reflection in an organic and unstructured way, which worked really well, but perhaps having some specific and scaffolded time during the meeting to plan out some strategies would have been good.

In terms of Sarah, she discussed how the collegial support was really helpful for her during the group:

I found it helpful to have the group to discuss ideas, particularly with the people who knew who I was talking about. They could give an informed picture ... When Jake talked about the boys we could empathise with him as we knew who he was talking about and we could share our own experiences ... I learn much more from interacting with people than reading a book on my own ... I like being able to discuss the ideas and hear another point of view.

When Sarah discussed her frustrations surrounding the group, she pointed out that fitting the meetings into her busy schedule was the primary barrier regarding her participation – a point that was mentioned by three of the teachers during the interview. In offering guidance to other teachers considering the QLC model, Sarah commented, "establishing what everyone's expectations are at the start of the group and reviewing how they fit in with others expectations is key ... I think that helps teachers to buy into the process". This comment is in

reference to the start of the second QLC, where Sarah brought some ideas regarding how she wanted the meetings to be structured. The overall opinions of the teachers on the process of the QLC were positive, highlighting how collaboration, reflection, collegial support, and ongoing nature of the meetings were all contributing factors towards its success.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the experiences and insights that the teachers gained whilst learning NVC within a QLC model. Specific examples throughout highlight how both the content and process of their learning allowed for positive change to occur at both the individual and classroom level for each teacher. The findings from this chapter will now be expanded on in the following chapters to better understand how this information ties into the theory which was presented in both the literature review chapters.

Chapter Six: Discussion – Learning about NVC

6.1 Introduction

The first part of my discussion centres on exploring the teachers' experience of the NVC aspect of the study. These findings address the first research question: *What is the potential of NVC for building more cohesive classroom environments?* As the four-step process (observations, feelings, needs, and requests) was such an integral part of learning about NVC, I outline three conceptual themes to demonstrate their relevance towards how the teachers experienced NVC, as well as their perception of its strengths and limitations. These are:

- identifying behaviours objectively;
- empathy; and
- providing choice

6.2 Theme 1 – Identifying Behaviours Objectively

In the first theme, I show how the teachers' increased use of *observations* (step one) led to more specificity in describing the observable aspects of challenging behaviours, as opposed to the teachers' interpretations of these behaviours. For example, instead of telling a student that they were too noisy, disruptive or constantly absent, the teachers had learnt to be more specific in their feedback, stating the type of behaviour and how often it occurred. In exploring the teachers' use of observations, I highlight two existing theoretical concepts which show similarities to NVC: functional behavioural assessment (as used in the PB4L programme), and teacher effectiveness training.

6.2.1 Functional Behavioural Assessment and PB4L

One method that is frequently used to gather observable information on student behaviour is Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA), whereby the antecedents, behaviour, and consequences are recorded in order to determine the function of the behaviour (Moreno, 2011). This approach is currently being used within the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) programme in New Zealand to help teachers identify challenging student behaviours in operational terms, such as the observable aspects (e.g., late to class three times this week), duration, and frequency of the behaviours (Horner & Crone, 2005). When reporting on the

implementation of PB4L in several New Zealand schools, Savage, Lewis, and Colless (2011), found that teachers' conceptions of student behaviours were well-defined (i.e., measurable), PB4L helped them to "look at the behaviours objectively without making judgements about the individual [which] meant that they were able to look at behaviour in a rational and less emotional way" (p. 34). Furthermore, when the teachers reported observations rather than evaluations, they were able to explain to the students why they had responded to the behaviour and justify their actions. This implies that when teachers report behaviours more objectively, they are less reactive in their response and more cognisant of the underlying reasons behind challenging student behaviours.

In my findings, Michael provided an example during the third QLC of how he had applied observations in the classroom. When talking to a student who was becoming consistently absent from class, Michael told the group how he had showed the student a schedule with all the afternoons he had missed in order to illustrate an observable point. Additionally, during a conversation in the same QLC, Jake talked about a student who "had a relaxed attitude towards learning". He told the group that he had assumed the student wanted to do the assessments and when he approached him, the student told Jake that this was not the case. In response to Jake's story, Michael replied by stating how Jake's assumption of the student being disengaged was not accurate and said that, "by sticking to the observation, without the assumptions, we are never wrong". The way that Michael used observations in these two examples shares affinity with the FBA used in PB4L, in that a measurable occurrence (i.e., number of classes missed) was shared with the student (through a schedule) in order to highlight a behaviour, which at this stage, is divorced from interpretation.

In regards to evaluating student behaviour, McKinney, Campbell-Whately, and Kea (2005) contend that "behaviour problem analysis should always begin with the teacher's careful examination of personal beliefs and values that are reflected in their teaching practices and interactions with students" (p. 17). This type of critical self-reflection was also apparent during the QLCs. For instance, Jake shared with the group during the fourth QLC how it was difficult not to evaluate a student's intentions or motivations and shared a story of how he had made a conscious effort to approach students in a less judgemental way. As McKinney, Campbell-Whately, and Kea (2005) state, becoming aware of how one's interpretations of a situation can cloud objectivity in reporting behaviours is important and can change "the culture of blaming the student, to educators taking responsibility to consider elements that are

within their power to change” (p. 19). While FBA provides teachers with one method to identify behaviours in an objective way, Teacher Effectiveness Training is another approach that may be used. This approach, which shares an affinity with several principles outlined in NVC, is outlined next.

6.2.2 Teacher Effectiveness Training

Based on the work of Thomas Gordon, Teacher Effectiveness Training (T.E.T.) is a technique linked to conflict resolution that involves enhancing non-verbal and verbal communication skills (Wiseman & Hunt, 2014). The key principles of Gordon’s model include: active listening (also described as empathetic listening), roadblocks to facilitating effective communication, ‘I’ messages, taking personal responsibility of problems, and a ‘no-lose’ approach to conflict resolution (Gordon, 1974). Gordon’s methods, alongside variations of it, have been applied to a range of different approaches, both in- and outside of the classroom, with positive results (Davidson & Wood, 2004; Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, & Lintunen, 2015). As Juncadella (2013) points out, there is a strong degree of commonality between T.E.T and NVC, with both approaches emphasising the use of observations over evaluations when describing behaviour. One of the most striking similarities is seen when comparing Rosenberg’s (2003) four-step model and Gordon’s (1974) ‘I’ message, with both approaches suggesting that individuals take personal responsibility for their own feelings, thoughts and actions, whilst avoiding language that involves moralising, judging, praising, and name-calling.

In a recent study, Talvio, Lonka, Komulainen, Kuusela, and Lintunen (2015) looked at teachers’ responses to challenging student behaviours after a four day T.E.T. training programme. The researchers reported that the teachers changed from using “generalized labels and subjective interpretations of pupils’ behaviour” and instead focused on the observable aspects that both parties could agree upon (p. 97). In addition, teachers’ use of praise (which is a positive interpretation of behaviour), and positive rewards decreased and were replaced with the teachers providing “a detailed comment that included descriptions of the pupils’ behaviour and the emotions and effects experienced by the teacher as a result of that behaviour” (p. 107). These findings, whereby teachers communicated with their students’ direct observations, alongside how these behaviours were experienced, are also echoed within several of the participants’ stories in my findings. For example, in the fourth QLC Jake told

the group how he had approached a student who sometimes walked out of class without telling him. During this talk, Jake stated his observation (the student leaving class), shared the impact of this behaviour on him and provided the student with a choice on what action could be taken (a concept discussed more in the final section). In another example that Peter described in the seventh QLC, he outlined talking to a student who was talking aloud during class. Peter's approach was similar to Jake's, in that Peter connected his observation (noise in the classroom) to its impact on him (not feeling competent in managing noise levels), and ending with a request.

As already highlighted in Chapter two, teachers' perceptions of challenging student behaviours play an important role in how they are perceived and reacted to inside of the classroom. When teacher adopt practices that de-emphasise the use of judgements, and in turn, emphasis more objective analysis of challenging behaviours, positive communication is facilitated to a greater degree. Overall, observations as used in NVC align with both FBA and T.E.T. approaches, which help provide credibility to step one of the NVC process, as well as highlight the potential strengths of applying NVC in teachers' practices to facilitate a non-judgemental classroom environment, which is more cohesive for learning. Having discussed the teachers' use of observations, I now turn to outline how empathy played an important role in the way the teachers communicated with their students.

6.3 Theme 2 – Empathy

In the second theme, I focus on the role of empathy in creating positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom and demonstrate how an increased awareness of *feelings* and *needs* (step two and three) contributed to a more cohesive classroom environment. As explained by Arnold (2005), empathy is an integral part of establishing effective communication and learning relationships in the classroom, which includes processes such as “attunement, de-centring, conjecture, and introspection” (p.86). In terms of defining empathy, multiple perspectives exist, ranging from humanistic descriptions that focus on “perceiving the internal frame of reference of another [...] without ever losing the *as if* condition” (Rogers, 1959, pp. 210-211); neuropsychological outlooks that emphasise the role of mirror neurons and “shared neural representations” (Jackson, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2005, p. 777); and developmental aspects that outline empathy as having affective, cognitive, and behavioural components (Knafo, Zahn-Waxler, Van Hulle, Robinson, & Rhee, 2008). According to

Decety and Cowell (2014), these variations in description have led to ambiguity amongst researchers when describing empathy. The authors go on to argue that “the concept of empathy has become an umbrella term” that is used to convey multiple meanings and “it is critical to distinguish among the different facets of empathy” (p. 525). In recognition of the need to identify specific aspects of empathy, and based on the conversations I had with the teachers and observing them in the QLC, I have looked at empathy from three different ways, all of which have been outlined by various authors as being constructs of empathy: *emotional self-regulation* (Gross & Feldman Barrett, 2011), *perspective-taking* (Bandura, 2002), and *emotional sharing* (Decety & Cowell, 2014). I now turn to each of these approaches to understand the concept of empathy.

6.3.1 Emotional Self-regulation

Gross and Feldman Barrett (2011) state that emotional self-regulation involves “a set of separate processes that either stop the emotion from launching or prevent it from being expressed once it is triggered” (p. 11). From an appraisal perspective, the authors outline five types of emotional self-regulation that can occur: 1) *situation selection*, which involves pre-emptive action to either increase positive or avoid negative emotional situations; 2) *situation modification*, which refers to changing a situation as it occurs in order to modify the emotional effect; 3) *attentional deployment*, which requires focussing attention onto or away from an emotional situation; 4) *cognitive changes*, which involves altering the appraisal of the situation; and 5) *response modulation*, which includes attempting to modify the “experiential, behavioral, and physiological response systems” (p. 12).

In my findings, the teachers used several of these strategies to regulate their emotions. For instance, in many of the group discussions the teachers talked about ways to approach students in a positive manner and discussed scenarios that involved challenging student behaviours. During a story that was shared in the sixth QLC, Peter told the group how one of the students in his classroom was being bullied by another student. In an effort to regulate the emotional situation, Peter told the antagonist to leave the classroom, thereby modifying the external environment. However, after a short time Peter went out to address the student’s behaviour and provided empathy in the form of perspective-taking (a concept discussed further in the proceeding section). This example demonstrates situation modification, followed by an additional empathetic response. In another example that occurred in the fourth

QLC, Sarah talked to the group about how she intended to start an empathetic dialogue with two of her students whom she perceived as disengaged in class. In addition, throughout the QLCs Michael predicated an emotional response of frustration when interacting with his colleague Stephanie, and in turn, looked to apply empathy with her in his upcoming encounters. These two examples represent a pre-emptive cognitive change and demonstrate Sarah and Michael choosing to approach a future situation from a particular emotional perspective (i.e., an empathetic one). Sutton (2004) argues that when teachers engage in self-reflective conversations with their colleagues, and approach a situation in a positive way, they use “attention deployment” as a type of preventative strategy to help them regulate their emotions during certain situations (p. 381).

Lastly, in a scenario that involved a student who was using his phone in class, Peter told the group during the fifth QLC how he went to the student, pointed out that he was continually looking at his phone, and asked the student for his full attention. However, as Peter noticed the student withdrawing and looking down towards his desk, Peter reinterpreted his viewpoint, adjusted his approach towards the student, and began empathising with him by acknowledging how he probably had a need for a sense of fairness. This demonstrates the use of cognitive reappraisal through Peter changing his focus, and response modulation as Peter adjusted his behaviour towards the student. These last two types of emotional self-regulation occurred the most frequently during the QLCs, with cognitive reappraisal most often taking the form of self-empathy or self-compassion when applied to oneself, and perspective-taking when applied to others, which then led onto situation modification. Multiple authors have noted the importance of self-compassion as a positive coping strategy in students (vanOyen Witvliet, Knoll, Hinman, & DeYoung, 2010), teachers (Jennings, 2015) and adults (Gillanders, Sinclair, MacLean, & Jardine, 2015), as well as the importance of cognitive appraisal in forming empathetic concern (Lebowitz & Dovidio, 2015; Lockwood, Seara-Cardoso, & Viding, 2014), which can lead to increased conflict resolution skills (Halperin, 2014).

6.3.2 Perspective-taking

Social interaction involves “shared representations as well as cognitive flexibility” as individuals will often interpret phenomena differently, as well as have divergent perspectives on the nature and meaning of experiences (Ruby & Decety, 2003, p. 2475). According to

Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, and White (2008), “perspective-takers are able to step outside the constraints of their own immediate, biased frames of reference” in order to consider an alternative viewpoint (p. 379). Subsequently, possessing the ability to take another’s perspective can be viewed as an active strategy for an individual to “interpret the internal frame of others” (Duncan, 2011, p. 15) and is advantageous in increasing communication between different groups of individuals (Todd, Bodenhausen, & Galinsky, 2012; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). Perspective-taking in an educational environment, and from an NVC viewpoint, involves teachers actively striving to understand, interpret, and adopt their students’ perspectives in order to establish an interpersonal connection where the students’ needs are likely to be met and inclusive attitudes are established. Multiple studies have shown the value of increasing perspective-taking abilities in order to create more inclusive classroom environments by encouraging this strategy at both the student-level (Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012; Miller, 2013; Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, & Hertzman, 2012), as well as the teacher-level (Barr, 2011; Roth, Kanat-Maymon, & Bibi, 2011; Swartz & McElwain, 2012).

In terms of specific perspective-taking strategies that teachers may choose to adopt, Gehlbach and Brinkworth (2012) outline “projection, developing multiple hypotheses, drawing on background information, comparing and contrasting, and reflection” (p. 23) as several possible methods. In my findings, several of these methods manifested during the group discussions (i.e., storytelling) and group exercises (i.e., role-playing). For instance, during a group conversation in the fifth QLC, Sarah outlined to the group how she thought it was important to “bring up a balance between being aware of our [the group members’] feelings and the needs and the students’ feelings and needs”, stating how essential it was to be aware that “there are many reasons why students can be challenging”. In another example that occurred during the third QLC, Peter and Michael discussed how it was difficult to establish dialogues with students who displayed challenging behaviours, and how “students expect to be told off as a first strategy”. Through sharing their stories with each other in the QLC, the teachers were able to engage in dialogues surrounding the needs of their students and consider their perspectives. This idea is echoed by Black (2008), who contends that storytelling “has the potential to encourage perspective taking in groups ... [and] enable dialogic moments [by allowing] group members to negotiate the tension between self and other that is present in their interaction” (pp. 105-109).

In addition to using storytelling, the teachers also implemented role-playing exercises during the third and fourth QLC, which encouraged them to adopt multiple perspectives through acting out situations with the other group members. Commenting on this, Sarah stated how she found role-playing “quite useful to practise because it is rooted in real life problems”. The use of role-playing techniques, which are based on real-life scenarios, has been suggested by several authors as a valuable technique to stimulate perspective-taking in groups of individuals (Goldstein & Winner, 2012; Kouprie & Visser, 2009). Overall, through the group discussions and role-playing the teachers were able to develop their perspective-taking skills, and as a result, were more likely to consider the needs of their students, as well as create solutions to contextually based problems together. This highlights the potential of applying NVC techniques through these methods by providing a creative platform to share and create new experiences (Hoever, van Knippenberg, van Ginkel, & Barkema, 2012).

6.3.3 Emotional Sharing

As empathy is a personal experience which is based in a social context, it allows teachers to build and maintain effective learning relationships in the classroom by creating a supportive environment. According to Decety and Cowell (2014), emotional sharing is an essential component of empathy, which drives individuals to care about each other and creates social bonds. One way of achieving this is through directly forming dialogues, whereby the needs of others are interpreted and responded to in an empathetic way. Zaki (2014) contends that individuals “either avoid or approach empathy” based on a risk-assessment model and cites at least three negative motivators (“suffering, material costs, and interference with competition”), as well as three positive motivators (“positive affect, affiliation, and social desirability”) which are primary factors that influence individuals (pp. 1608-1609).

In my findings, several of the teachers used an empathetic approach to see a positive change in regards to challenging student behaviours, and for social desirability, which relates to interactions they had with their colleagues. For instance, going back to the example mentioned earlier about the student using his phone in class, Peter expressed emotional concern towards this student in order to create a more positive relationship, which in turn, prompted the student to become more honest with Peter about his use of the phone. This example reflects a motivator of ‘positive affect’ (Zaki, 2014, p. 1609). In another example

that Peter disclosed during the fifth QLC, he shared with his students his concerns of having other teachers come into his class and finding the noise levels too high. Peter believed that “sharing what you’re doing and why you’re doing it is really powerful in creating positive relationships within the classroom”, and went onto say to the group how one of his needs “is to be judged positively by [his] peers”. This example reflects a motivated use of empathising with the class based on social desirability. While both the above examples involve a direct effort by Peter to use empathy in a social context, emotional sharing also occurred in an indirect way through the effects of emotional contagion.

When individuals enter into a group environment they become exposed to the emotions of the other members and can either consciously or unconsciously ‘take on’ a new emotional state. For instance, when one group member displays empathy, the other group members are more likely to ‘pick up’ on this emotion and also feel this way (Duncan, 2011). Nakahashi and Ohtsuki (2015) describe emotional contagion as the “spontaneous copying of others’ emotional state followed by an affective reaction to that state” and argue that it functions as “a kind of social learning strategy” that is distinctly different from “behavioural mimicry”, which represents copying another’s behaviour without actually having the corresponding feelings (pp. 480-481). Harvey, Bimler, Evans, Kirkland, and Pechtel (2012) suggest that emotional contagion plays an important role in creating a positive classroom climate and is an important concept to consider for teachers who are focussing on increasing the emotional wellbeing of their students.

Throughout the QLCs I observed that when one teacher approached a situation with empathy, the other teachers appeared to adopt a similar viewpoint. For instance, in a conversation during the fourth QLC that started out with the teachers expressing their own frustrations surrounding students who were not paying attention in class, Sarah began to adopt an empathetic viewpoint (i.e., perspective-taking). This resulted in the other teachers also considering the students’ needs and problem-solving together on how to approach ‘disengaged’ students. These results are similar to a study conducted by Barsade (2002), who also noted the influence of a “positive emotional contagion” within a group to increase cooperation, and decrease conflict (p. 644). In addition, while I did not observe the teachers’ classroom environments, and cannot comment on the role of emotional contagion inside of the classroom, Michael noted during the final interview how he had become aware that one of his students was already “using NVC all the time without us even noticing”. This example

provides an interesting insight into a possible example of emotional contagion at work and may indicate an unconscious transfer of emotions inside of the classroom. As NVC is primarily an empathetic approach to interpersonal communication, it is likely that the student's use of NVC was centred on facilitating empathy within the classroom.

In summarising this section, several constructs of empathy were found to provide positive valence for the teachers, both within the QLC groups, and inside their classrooms. Emotional self-regulation, often in the form of cognitive reappraisal, was used to regulate negative emotions associated with judgements. This gave the teachers more opportunity to apply perspective-taking in order to facilitate better interpersonal communication. In addition, emotional sharing played an important role in unifying the teachers' attention towards more positive perceptions, as well as focussing on their students' needs. It is also interesting to note that emotional regulation, recognition of emotions in others, and the integrating these skills in a social setting, are all aspects of emotional intelligence as outlined by Goleman (1995). Furthermore, as Corcoran and Tormey (2010) tentatively state in their research paper on developing emotional competencies in third year student teachers, "emotional intelligence skills may be able to be increased in student teachers through appropriately structured educational programmes" (p. 2455). As teachers continually need to re-evaluate their practice and new learn strategies, the use of NVC in my study highlights the potential of an empathy-based programme to contribute to social cohesion both within teachers' PLD groups, as well as their classroom environments.

6.4 Theme 3 – Providing Choice

In the third theme, I link the teachers' use of *requests* (NVC, step 4) as one method of creating more choice in the classroom and increasing intrinsic motivation. Rather than telling their students what to do, the teachers used requests or stated options to them. As empathy is a central part in NVC, these dialogues were often underpinned by the teachers' focus on the students' underlying needs, which meant that the teachers shifted away from assuming they knew what was best for the students and moved towards entering dialogues to find out what the students actually needed. As the analysis of this section is based on *choice theory*, an outline of this theory is provided below.

6.4.1 Choice Theory

Developed by Glasser (1988), choice theory is based on the central tenet that providing choice to individuals will increase their intrinsic motivation and self-determination. Wubbolding et al. (2004) state that individuals choose behaviours that are “purposeful and goal-directed” in order to meet their needs and that problems can occur when individuals feel coerced, manipulated or controlled into behaving a certain way (p. 221). According to Thompson and Beymer (2015), students who are given choice in the classroom are more likely to be motivated and feel supported in fostering autonomy. As every student is motivated to learn differently, Erwin (2003) suggests opening dialogues with students will allow them to find their own method that suits them best, which in turn will increase their motivation to learn. Furthermore, Wubbolding et al. purport that allowing students the opportunity to create their own learning agenda helps foster empowerment, which is an important aspect to develop, as Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar (2005) state that “schools appear to tighten controls and reduce choices just as students’ autonomy needs begin to increase” (p. 192).

In terms of strategies that teachers can use to encourage choice in the classroom, there are multiple methods available, such as offering students the choice of assignment topics and due dates, as well as the teacher providing a rationale on why they are presenting the student with certain lesson plans, as this increases the student’s cognitive autonomy (Patall, Cooper, & Wynn, 2010; Tsai, Kunter, Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Ryan, 2008). However, in a recent meta-analysis, Chernev, Böckenholt, and Goodman (2015), state that providing too much choice to individuals can result in ‘choice overload’ and result in “greater probability of choice deferral, greater switching likelihood, decreased preference for larger assortments, and greater preference for easily justifiable options” (p. 335). In addition, Thompson and Beymer (2015) also add that not all students will want the option to choose aspects of their learning agenda, as they may feel uncomfortable with the added responsibility. In recognition of the benefits and limitations, choice in the classroom is best viewed as an important facet to provide students with autonomy, though it is beneficial to regulate the amount of choice that is given by providing students with multiple options, rather than complete freedom in order to avoid overwhelming them.

Throughout the QLCs, three of the teachers explicitly mentioned choice when discussing how they approached their students. For example, during the third QLC Peter told the group about

an encounter he had with a student who kept on talking aloud during class. After confronting the student on this issue and explaining why he was talking to him, Peter ended the conversation by saying: “You’ve got a choice, either come in and self-manage or I will have to ask you to leave”. While this example reflects a limited choice (i.e., only two options), it outlines the boundaries of the classroom to the student and emphasises his choice in the matter. In summarising his opinion of using requests during the fifth QLC, Peter stated how he was “pleasantly surprised with how effective the *would you be willing to* statement works”, as opposed to making demands, reporting that the students often complied with his requests. In the same QLC, Sarah also agreed with Peter on the importance of providing choice to students, especially in situations that involve conflict. Furthermore, Jake also told the group during the fourth QLC how he had addressed a student who kept on walking out of class without telling him. Jake brought this issue up with the student and made a request using this same phrase, in which the student complied with his request. These findings align with a meta-analysis by Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008) who outlined how choice increases intrinsic motivation, task efficiency and proficiency, as well as the guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education (2014e) for addressing challenging student behaviours, whereby teachers are encouraged to co-create solutions with their students and use requests instead of demands.

6.5 Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, several important findings have been linked to sources in the literature. In the first theme, *identifying behaviours objectively*, I have examined teachers’ perceptions of challenging student behaviours and highlighted how subjective interpretation can sometimes interfere with an accurate analysis of a situation. I found that when the teachers intentionally focused on using observations instead of evaluations they were better able to describe the behaviours that were problematic in a non-judgemental way. This process often utilised critical self-reflection on the part of the teacher in order to understand how their own perceptions influenced their views on behaviour. In the second theme, *empathy*, I discovered that the teachers used emotional self-regulation techniques as a way of changing their appraisal and reaction to challenging student behaviours. Primarily, the teachers used perspective-taking as a way of focussing on their students’ needs in order to facilitate more emotional awareness, as well as create deeper and more positive relationships inside the classroom based on emotional sharing. In the third theme, *providing choice*, the teachers

noted how choice, which was often in the form of requests, created situations that emphasised student autonomy and self-management. Additionally, this helped the teachers foster attitudes that involved “power with, rather than power over”, their students (Moran, 2014, p. 251).

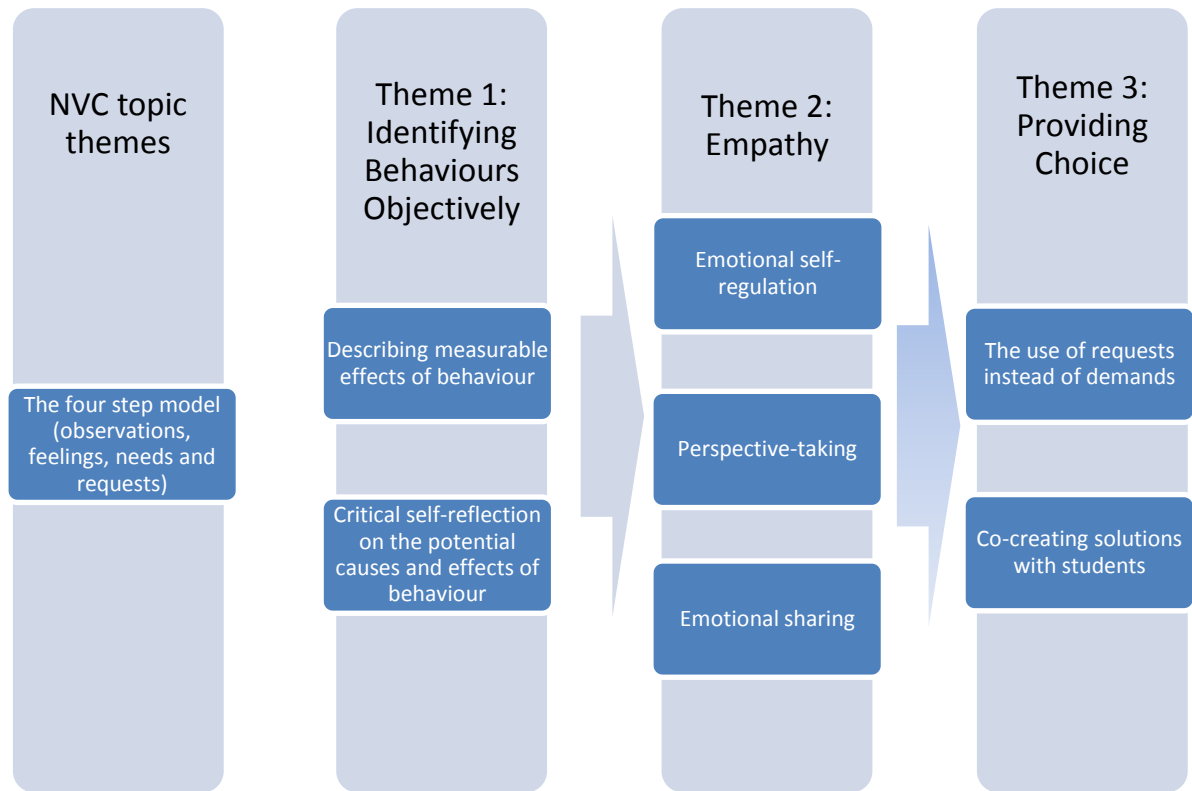


Figure 9: NVC themes presented as part of the four-step sequential process

While these three themes, which are reflected in Figure 9, are presented in a sequential process, the teachers also used each approach independently as well. Overall, these three themes demonstrate that NVC positively contributed to the teachers’ professional practice, as the teachers were more likely to seek out and establish positive interpersonal relationships with their colleagues and students. This highlights how NVC can be applied in practice to create more cohesive educational environments.

Chapter Seven: Discussion – Learning in a QLC

7.1 Introduction

The second part of my discussion foregrounds the teachers' participation in the QLC. These findings relate to the teachers' experiences of learning in a QLC and address the second research question: *What is the potential of a QLC for helping teachers to practice NVC?* Three conceptual themes highlight how the QLC contributed and challenged the teachers as individuals, as well as collectively. The first theme investigates the way that the QLC was structured, with emphasis on active participation, experiential, and ongoing learning processes, as well as the role of facilitation in a QLC. The second theme is centred on creating a collaborative learning culture and the role of collaborative mentoring, as well the idea of distributed cognition in group learning. The third theme examines the role of supportive environments that encourage learning conversations and the construction of knowledge. Each theme is depicted below as forming an integral part of a QLC (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Major conceptual themes relating to the potential of a QLC for teacher professional learning and development

7.2 Theme 1 – The QLC Structure

In structuring the QLC, I had recognised in the adult learning literature that the transfer of theory to practice was a key notion in teachers' PLD, which involves timeliness and active engagement. Thus, in accordance with Lovett and Gilmore (2003), I had set up the QLC to give the teachers ownership and responsibility for structuring learning that was relevant to their practice. My involvement in setting up the protocols of the QLC resonated with the same experience that Lovett and Verstappen (2004) had when setting up a QLC; namely, being explicit in the first meeting about the nature of a QLC and what was included in this process. This was introduced immediately to give the teachers security about the expectations of meeting, sharing, and trialling NVC together. In addition, classroom observations, which were a major part of Stewart and Prebble's (1993) model, were omitted from my study as the teachers chose to focus on the meetings instead. Considering the short duration of the QLC (one school term) and the findings reported by Lovett and Gilmore (2003) that this component was "one of the hardest feature[s] to introduce ... [and that] classroom visits were considered useful, but not essential", I believe the teachers' choice was prudent and worked well within the given limits of the study (pp. 202-205). As my findings show, structuring the QLC was centred on three pertinent aspects: active participation, experiential learning, and ongoing learning. I now turn to outline these three aspects of the QLC and, in addition, examine my own role as a facilitator in the group as I explore the first theme relating to the working of the QLC.

7.2.1 Active Participation in Creating Learning Agendas

Timperley et al., (2007) contend that there is discordance between who decides learning agendas and how they are structured. In system-initiated learning processes, where teachers are often told what to learn, their involvement in structuring their own learning is limited. This type of approach, which is exemplified in a 'top-down' and passive approach to learning, can neglect the role of teachers' attitudes and prior learning experiences (Bubb & Earley, 2011). Beavers (2011) argues that it is important for "teachers to see the application for their practice in order to be active participants ... [as] ... adult learners tend to resist learning that is in conflict with the direction they believe their learning should go" (p. 27). In recognition that passive learning may not meet the actual needs of the teachers, I chose to structure the QLC so that the teachers were responsible for creating the conditions they

needed to learn, and in turn, would be motivated to trial NVC in the way that suited them best. This structure was discussed early on in the group (QLC 2) to encourage active participation. This way of organising learning aligns with Trotter (2006), who states that when teachers structure their own PLD it “will greatly increase the success of the teachers in their journey to be lifelong learners” (p. 11), as well as Lovett, Dempster, and Flückiger (2015) who emphasise the “role and responsibility of individuals for the planning of their own leadership learning” (p. 129).

Building on the idea of teachers structuring their own learning experiences, opportunities for creating personal agency were also promoted throughout the QLC. Personal agency refers to teachers deliberately shaping their own actions in response to problematic situations (Fallon & Barnett, 2009). According to Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust (2015), there is a “lack of agency” amongst teachers, which contributes to problems in relation to pedagogical responsibilities and student learning (p. 616). They argue that teachers need to be given opportunities to develop personal agency in ways that involve increasing the teachers’ abilities to actively determine what they need to grow in a way that is significant to them. Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust purport that this occurs in “environments that promote active participation and belonging, [where knowledge is] constructed situationally in relation to the current context and [the teachers’] past personal experiences” (p. 616). During the QLC, this type of environment was encouraged, as the teachers actively applied NVC to contextually relevant situations within their pedagogical practice and adapted their use of NVC during the conversations and role-plays in the QLC meetings. For instance, while Sarah focused her attention on using empathy as a tool to understand her students’ feelings and needs, Peter used NVC to primarily understand his own processes, which in turn, also allowed him to empathise with his students to a greater degree. In addition, Sarah chose more reflexive means within the group work to achieve this purpose, while Peter practiced inside of the classroom with his students. This highlights how each of these teachers actively chose the way they incorporated NVC in their practice, based on their preferred learning style and the problems they faced in their practice. Overall, the teachers’ active participation in creating their learning agendas led them to be able to explore the issues that were relevant to them and take responsibility for improving their pedagogical practices. As much of the exploration in the QLC was based on experiential learning, I now turn to outline this concept in more detail.

7.2.2 Experiential Learning

As adult learners acquire knowledge in different ways and at varying speeds, there is no single process that will meet the needs of every learner (Hickcox, 2002). Incorporating experiential learning is one method to address any discrepancies that may arise due to different learning needs by allowing those directly involved to dictate the content and direction of learning. Ewing, Clark, and Threton (2014) state that experiential learning involves constructing knowledge through purposeful engagement in action, whereby the process of learning is emphasised over the result of learning. As previously outlined in Chapter three, Kolb (1984) asserts that four processes are involved in experiential learning. These are *concrete experience*, which involves the feelings and kinaesthetic responses of the learner; *reflective observation*, which includes watching and analysing; *abstract conceptualisation*, which entails critical thinking; and *active experimentation*, which is the doing part of the process. Kolb asserts that different approaches will appeal to different people.

In my findings I observed the teachers moving between all of these learning strategies as new concrete experiences were formed when they shared their stories and participated in different ways, which prompted different feelings and experiences in each QLC. For instance, the teachers used reflective practices heavily throughout the QLCs and would reflect on encounters with students they had earlier in the week, as well as each other's shared experiences during the group meetings. This often led to the teachers using abstract conceptualisation as a means to understand situations, which were often problem-based, and exploring solutions in the moment. For example, in the sixth QLC, Jake reflected on a negative encounter he had with a student who had been absent from several of his classes in a row. Based on the feedback and suggestions from the group conversation that ensued after this comment, Jake thought more about how he could facilitate an empathetic and positive encounter with this student. As a result, these types of learning processes contributed towards the active experimentation of NVC techniques both inside of the QLC (i.e., role-playing exercises) and in the teachers' respective educational environments (i.e., trialling NVC with their students or colleagues).

My findings show that the emphasis on critical reflection and experimentation on NVC primarily involved the construction of contextually relevant knowledge that was job-embedded. This supports researchers such as Hunzicker (2012), who state that job-embedded

learning provides teachers with relevant ways to be creative in their approaches to changing their pedagogy, as well as Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) who argue that when recently gained learning is reinforced in the classroom, it is more likely to have a lasting impact.

Furthermore, my findings align with Super, Jacobson, Bell, and Limberg (2014) who contend that “creative play-based activities” (e.g., role-playing) within an experiential learning environment can help “enhance self-awareness” (p. 400). Till and Ferkins (2014) state that when teachers see an approach modelled and try it out for themselves they are more likely to develop “a deep enough understanding of ... [the approach] ... to be able to implement ... [it] ... with their students” (p. 50). Throughout the QLC the teachers experimented with various ways of exploring NVC and role-playing was a particular feature that they decided to put in their toolkit as one of the acceptable methods of practicing NVC. During these creative encounters the teachers were able to explore different ways of interacting with each other from either a participant or observer point of view, which promoted an awareness of their needs, as well as their students’ needs (i.e., perspective-taking as outlined in the previous chapter). This highlights that the inclusion of *empathy-based role-playing* in QLCs can be an effective way for teachers to explore issues relating to practice from the perspective of their students, as well as their colleagues.

7.2.3 Ongoing Learning

The advantage of ongoing or spaced learning for teachers has been discussed by multiple authors (e.g., Seabrook, Brown, & Solity, 2005; Son & Simon, 2012) and includes benefits such as increased long-term memory retention, and the opportunity for practice and feedback between learning. A key finding from my study highlights how the ongoing nature of the QLC provided the teachers with multiple opportunities to engage in discussion surrounding the theory of NVC, as well as practice the concepts in their school environments. As the QLC meetings were spaced over one school term, with meetings occurring weekly, all of the teachers reported how this was useful in developing their understanding of NVC. For example, over the course of the QLC meetings, Michael reported several negative encounters with a colleague named Stephanie. In the second QLC he informed the group how he had attempted to use NVC with her and that it did not work out well. However, through having the chance to reflect on different strategies to engage with Stephanie differently and trying several times throughout the term, Michael reported in the final QLC that he had succeeded in creating a more positive connection with Stephanie. In another illustration of ongoing

development, Peter began practicing using requests instead of demands at an individual level, which he reported during the fifth QLC. After applying this multiple times, he then reported in the sixth QLC how he had begun to use requests at the class level. Even though there was only a week between those meetings, this was enough time for Peter to practice this technique and feel confident enough to try it out with his whole class. This demonstrates that when teachers engage in sustained inquiry through multiple PLD sessions, they become more capable of integrating theory into practice, a point which is emphasised by researchers such as Timperley (2011) and Hunzicker (2011).

While the ongoing structure of the QLC provided the teachers with benefits, such as the opportunity to refine their skills in NVC, it also presented them with challenges. One challenge that was consistent across all the teachers' experiences related to time commitment, which manifested in two ways throughout the study. In the first case, the teachers' attendance at the meetings was not always consistent. As all of the teachers reported that they had busy lives, scheduling conflicts arose with one teacher absent from three out of the seven QLC meetings. In the second case, the teachers did not always find time to trial NVC between meetings. While this did not negatively impact on the learning conversations, since the teachers could reflect on missed opportunities or role-play trialling NVC with each other, it does highlight a tension between the teachers' desire to trial NVC in the classroom and their ability to actually create the space in their school environment to find the time to practice. Tensions surrounding time commitment have also been noted in other studies (Cameron, Mulholland, & Branson, 2013; MacPhail, Sinelnikov, Hastie, & Calderón, 2015), which emphasise a need to take into account the time and space already occupied by teachers' personal and professional lives when structuring PLD.

7.2.4 Role of Facilitation

The findings of my study revealed that the teachers found the presence of a facilitator in the QLCs as an important factor in establishing boundaries within the group and providing support in their development of learning NVC ideology. In outlining this, Jake and Peter commented:

I liked how the facilitator took control in managing the group process ... Each person had a chance to speak and the people who didn't contribute so much, you challenged them to speak.

I really liked that there was an expert that can validate it [practicing NVC] for me ...
It really helped me feel more confident.

In taking on a facilitative role within the QLC, my overall intention was to take a non-directive stance and let the teachers guide their own learning process. This is similar to the position espoused by Poekert (2011) who argues that the “facilitation of teachers’ learning is little more than establishing the conditions for teachers to direct their own learning” (p. 32). While this proved a harder task than I had originally anticipated during the introductory QLCs, as I spent a considerable amount of time instructing the teachers on the basic foundations of NVC, I was able to shift towards this type of interaction with the teachers from the third QLC onwards. In keeping with Wurdinger and Carlson’s (2010) guidelines for facilitating an experiential learning group, I shared my own feelings and thoughts (where appropriate) in order to demonstrate that I was also a learner in the QLC and model the techniques used within NVC. Furthermore, I also provided the teachers with “relevant and meaningful resources” in the form of hand-outs and allowed the teachers to “experiment and discover solutions on their own”, rather than constantly give them my input in regards to implementing NVC (p. 13).

In addition, I also employed a person-centred approach to facilitating in order to help create an environment conducive to learning. Cornelius-White (2007) outlines that a person-centred approach to facilitating involves “at least an initial genuine trust in learners by the facilitator, followed by the creation of an acceptant and empathic climate” (p. 114). In addition, interpersonal relationships within the group are fostered and the methods employed by the facilitator are transparent, flexible, and are centred on the needs of the learners. Throughout the QLC I was aware of how important it was to create these conditions and the methods I used aligned with Cornelius-White’s description of person-centred facilitation. Overall, facilitation of the QLC provided the teachers with a way to begin exploring NVC in a safe and comfortable environment, while at the same time provided them with expertise knowledge when it was required. Having outlined the structure of the QLC, I now turn to explore the collaborative nature of this approach in greater detail and highlight how it presented the teachers with an opportunity to create collective knowledge together.

7.3 Theme 2 – Collaborative Learning

In keeping with adult learning theory, where Hunzicker (2011) has shown that learning alongside your colleagues is helpful in creating a learner to learner culture, all of the teachers in the study commented how working together in a professional learning group (called a QLC) had supported them to trial NVC strategies within a QLC learning approach. The QLC pattern of one teacher sharing an experience with the group, such as challenging student behaviour, and then problem-solving with the other teachers on how to approach the student in a positive and empathetic way, was appreciated and created an environment where each teacher was a leader and a learner. As NVC was a relatively new approach to the teachers, they were able to contribute in a fairly equal way towards the group discussions surrounding its implementation, which meant that leadership was evenly distributed within the group. This type of approach emphasises a fluid and organic approach to learning that involves engaging teachers in making decisions on the how, why, and when of learning, aligns with Timperley's (2011) notion of effective PLD.

As Zepeda (2012) states, when there is an expectation to problem-solve together and teachers respond in non-judgemental ways, understandings of theory and practice are deepened. This occurred throughout my study with several teachers choosing to examine their own beliefs and actions when interacting with students. For example, in the third QLC, Peter and Michael role-played a scenario that involved a student in Peter's class who was not doing the class work. During this role-play, Peter was able to examine his own beliefs and how they contributed to the way he communicated with his students. In another example, Sarah commented during the fourth QLC that she realised through talking with the group how her own expectations and emotions affected the way she would approach students whom she perceived as disinterested in the class work. In these examples, the teachers collaborated together to explore alternative ways of reflecting on their own emotions and perceptions of student behaviours, as well as ways of communicating with their students in a more effective manner. As Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) point out, these types of collegial interactions help engage teachers in the learning process. One method that the teachers often utilised as an approach to explore situations and create new ideas together in the group was collaborative mentoring, which formed an important part of the shared talk about practice that the teachers engaged in during the QLCs.

7.3.1 Shared Talk about Practice

Within a professional learning community there are ample opportunities for teachers to engage in collegial interactions based on professional talk. Taking on a mentoring role represents one method that allows teachers to co-construct ideas together, particularly when used in a QLC model, which already has an emphasis on collaboration. According to Crow (2012), mentoring relationships based on collaboration are not unidirectional, but rather multidirectional, so that learning and knowledge are reciprocal. In this type of relationship everyone is a leader and a learner as expertise is recognised. This involves continual examination and development of ideas that can inform teachers on how to best practice their profession.

Achinstein and Athanases (2006) offer three approaches to categorise mentoring: Instructive, collaborative and facilitative.

In the instructive approach, choices are offered, but are more limited, focused, and possibly attached to expectations and time lines. The collaborative approach is characterized by collegial reflection, problem-solving, and enquiry, each participant contributing ideas and resources. In the facilitative approach, power shifts to the new teacher, and the mentor is an active prober, using language of listening, paraphrasing, and clarifying (pp.113-114).

While the authors state that mentors may use all three approaches, they recommend a facilitative approach, as this creates more autonomy. This direction between the approaches is outlined in the table below. It shows through a continuum how support from a mentor can move from close direction and dependency to increasing responsibility for learning from the mentee.

<i>Instructive</i>	<i>Collaborative</i>	<i>Facilitative</i> →
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor controls interaction • information flows from mentor to new teacher • locus of control is external—resides with mentor or other influencing factors outside of the new teacher • mentor offers suggestions and solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor guides interaction without controlling it • mentor and new teacher co-construct solutions and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new teacher actively directs flow of information • mentor facilitates new teacher's thinking and problem-solving • new teacher self-assesses and self-prescribes • locus of control resides in new teacher

Figure 11: Three forms of mentoring as outlined by Achinstein and Athanases (2006)

While the figure by Achinstein and Athanases (2006) refers to two individuals working together and emphasises a shift in power from the mentor to the mentee, this concept can also be applied to a QLC setting where mentoring occurs collectively throughout group meetings. In adapting this to a group scenario, I argue that it is more useful to replace the term ‘facilitative’ with the term *personal agency*, as I noted that the group’s shift along the continuum is best explained through creating more autonomy amongst the teachers and less reliance on an expert. For instance, in my findings, the first and second QLCs represented an instructional approach to learning. As the teachers were relatively new to the NVC approach, I used my role as a facilitator to help develop understanding of the basic theoretical elements of NVC and in doing so, heavily guided the content and direction of the first two QLCs. As Freeman, Wright, and Lindqvist (2010) outline, having strong facilitation at the beginning of a group is necessary in establishing a solid foundation for learning.

At the end of the second QLC, Sarah brought up several ideas within the group on how to potentially structure the future meetings and from this, the teachers began to adopt a more collaborative approach towards structuring their learning. Additionally, this also signified a moment where I ‘stepped back’ and began to limit my participation in the conversations so that my presence and expertise in the area of NVC did not dominate the group direction. This intention is reiterated in several other studies that used a facilitator in a QLC (e.g., Aman, 2014; Lovett, 2002). Specifically, this meant that while I still answered questions and

elaborated on the theoretical and practical aspects of NVC, I did not direct the conversation in the same way as I had done before. For instance, in each meeting the teachers started by sharing what was relevant to them, in the form of narrative stories on their NVC experiences, and problem solved together on common issues that they faced (i.e., challenging student behaviours), with only my occasional guidance when required. This emphasised a shift away from relying on my expertise and direction in the QLCs, towards the teachers actively directing the content and flow of the meetings, which created a heightened sense of personal agency in the group.

The approach of using collaborative and facilitative mentoring to promote personal agency in a professional learning community also aligns with Feiman-Nemser's (1998) concept of educative mentoring (as mentioned in Chapter 3) and similarities are seen in the emphasis on equal power distribution and valuing each member's contributions to group learning. However, as Bradbury (2010) outlines, the concept of educative mentoring also asserts that while mentoring needs to provide teachers with knowledge that can be used in an immediate and pragmatic way, it must also create conditions that support sustained inquiry in the long-term. This occurred during the QLCs with the teachers coming to the meetings with their immediate needs they wished to address and going away with flexible strategies that they could use in the long term. For instance, Peter stated how using a particular sentence stem (i.e., would you be willing to?) helped him to initiate requests with students on multiple occasions. In addition, Sarah outlined how the second QLC, which focused on observations and evaluations, helped her to establish more awareness of not using judgements with students throughout the length on the QLC meetings. These examples help to highlight how the shared talk about practice that occurred in the QLC fits within an educative mentoring framework.

In terms of specific mentoring techniques, Megginson and Clutterbuck (2006) describe various ways that mentors can use to help elicit and direct helping conversations, such as questioning, challenging, and providing support. The specific techniques that the teachers used whilst mentoring stemmed from the stories and shared experiences told during the QLC. For instance, questioning featured prominently as a mentoring method in the QLCs and occurred naturally without my prompts. This took the form of open and closed questions that were used to probe, check, and pose hypothetical situations. For example, in the fifth QLC Jake discussed with the group how his perception of a student being defiant influenced how

he communicated with that student. After mentioning this, the other teachers asked questions about the situation which helped highlight how Jake's evaluation of the student created a barrier and this subsequently helped Jake to clarify what his own needs were in the situation. A part of this process also involved the use of modelling, whereby the teachers modelled an empathetic response (e.g., "perhaps the student needed more help during the lessons?"), which helped Jake to shift his thinking towards the student's needs. Ormrod (2012), argues that having an individual demonstrate an action or skill, as well as discuss the thought processes behind how the decision was made, is a powerful way of learning.

In another example of mentoring, the teachers also challenged each other, which led to the formation of new ideas. For instance, expanding on the role-play that was mentioned earlier in this section, Peter expressed his frustration when interacting with a student whom he perceived as disengaged from the learning process. He and Michael role-played a scenario where Michael acted as the student. After the dialogue had finished, Michael challenged the approach Peter had used during the conversation, which he believed was judgemental, and suggested that Peter empathise with the student. This led Peter to focus his attention more on the student's needs, rather than his own. Furthermore, the teachers also offered support and feedback to each other during the QLCs. An example of support was illustrated by the group members offering Michael empathy (e.g., "how do you feel about that?") when he spoke about his interactions with a colleague named Stephanie, whom they all knew. During these conversations, and because the other group members knew her, they were able to give feedback on the way he chose to communicate with her and propose alternative ways that might be more effective in establishing a positive relationship.

In addition to the use of mentoring techniques within the QLC, Peter, who also took on a mentoring role within his own school, noted how he had changed the way he approached those encounters. In recalling this change in the final interview, Peter outlined how he used empathy more with his colleagues and asked them "what are you needing", in order to stimulate more reflective thoughts. Furthermore, Peter also changed the way he described what he noticed to his colleagues. His intention was to draw his colleague's attention to possible strategies or options. In stating this he said:

My job as an SCT [specialist classroom teacher] is to go in and gather data for teachers, rather than to judge them, so it's [NVC] changed my practice with that too ... I can see a lot of teachers that are mentors who are just judging people, and the teachers who are being judged then try to rationalise what they're doing, rather than

just accepting the data and realising there is an opportunity ... [For example,] I had this teacher who had been told she had a really loud noise environment and she has just rationalised it in her head and is quite defensive because of a teacher who had critiqued her on it. So I go in and say, I've observed this, and have this data, without judging her ... Instead of saying your class is quite noisy, I say I noticed that Henry called out 5 times in a 15 minute slot How do you think that contributed to the class environment? And from there we can figure out some strategies for her to manage the classroom that meets her needs, as well as the students'.

This example demonstrates how several of the techniques that Peter practiced within the QLC were adopted outside of the group and translated into his own teaching environment. In conjunction with the examples already mentioned, these findings support the formation of a collaborative culture of inquiry with shared responsibility of learning between colleagues. This idea is further elaborated in the next section, which deals with the way that cognition is distributed within a group.

7.3.2 Distributed Cognition

Education by its very nature is a socially situated learning experience that must include personal and shared cognition (Garrison & Akyol, 2013, p. 87)

Distributed Cognition is used as a theoretical lens to explore the collaborative aspect of the QLC and how the teachers interacted and responded to each other. This concept is taken from the psychological literature, which was an area I chose to incorporate in this aspect of the research as it seemed to offer an opportunity to interrogate the notion of what works for teachers PLD from another perspective. Building on the concept that teamwork is a powerful force in adult learning, Distributed Cognition is a theory which outlines how information is shared between individuals, their technologies, and social organisations, as well as the way these aspects emerge and interact over time (Hazelhurst, 2015). In terms of focussing on teamwork within small groups, Distributed Cognition centres on how “information is represented, communicated, and transformed” between those within a group (Berndt, Furniss, & Blandford, 2014, p. 432). According to Rogers and Ellis (1994), this framework is useful in exploring collaborative teamwork and the way knowledge is created and transferred amongst individuals.

In contrast to a traditional model of cognition, whereby information processing and executive functions are placed solely within an individual's mind, Distributed Cognition conceptualises a flow of information between individuals that resides within the group as a whole (Belland,

2011). This is acknowledged by Hollan, Hutchins, and Kirsh (2000), who state that “a process is not cognitive simply because it happens in a brain, nor is a process non-cognitive simply because it happens in the interactions among many brains” (p. 175). When a cognitive task, such as problem-solving, is undertaken within a group, the workload is distributed between the members so that no individual carries out the complete cognitive task themselves. According to Belland (2011), this means that “interactions with other individuals can fundamentally alter the nature of cognition [as opposed to] if each individual thought independently” (p. 583).

My research findings illustrate this flow of information during the QLCs, where the teachers came to the group with an experience or problem, shared this within the group, and allowed the group processes to guide the conversation, which in turn, influenced ideas and created potential solutions. For example, in the third QLC, a conversation that began with trying to figure out how to motivate students to do the required work in the classroom, shifted towards discussing specific strategies to convince students of the work’s merit (through requests), and ended in acknowledging that it would be wiser to first “connect with what the students are doing in that moment”, before trying to convince them to do the classwork. In this example, Jake had initiated the conversation because he wanted to figure out how to keep his students ‘on-task’ in class. However, through the input of Michael and Peter, questioning, challenging, and providing support to Jake, the conversation shifted from an emphasis on Jake’s needs to an emphasis on the students’ needs. This demonstrates how ideas were collectively distributed within the group and how the teachers responded to each other’s input in order to find a solution.

Analysing the flow of information within a QLC through a theory of Distributed Cognition is useful for understanding the creation of ideas through the teachers’ stories which they shared in a collaborative context. This represents a new and alternative way of investigating how teachers come together within a QLC and create ideas together. Hollan, Hutchins, and Kirsh (2000), like this shaping of ideas by colleagues to “a reservoir of resources”, which impact on “learning, problem solving, and reasoning” (p. 178). In terms of teachers’ learning within a QLC environment, the collaborative nature helped to provide a platform where the teachers could share information, discuss ideas collectively, and draw upon each other’s knowledge and experiences, to help shape their individual and collective pedagogies. As Hutchins (2010) purports, when people come together in a group they form a “cognitive ecosystem”, in which

there is “a web of mutual dependence” as expertise is realised from within the group (p. 706). The formation of a QLC therefore represents one type of cognitive ecosystem where teachers create collegial relationships and co-construct ideas together.

7.4 Theme 3 – A Supportive Environment

According to both Tankersley (2010) and Hargreaves (1998), teaching is an emotionally demanding profession that necessitates a supportive environment if both teachers and students are to thrive. In order to ensure that teachers continue to remain in the profession and cultivate positive attitudes, support structures that involve the formation of positive relationships and rewarding practises must be in place to ensure continued teacher growth (Cameron & Lovett, 2015). Following on from the idea outlined by Zepeda (2012) in Chapter Three, I turn to examine two aspects of professional learning communities that are central in creating a supportive environment: creating a positive climate and inclusion.

7.4.1 Creating a Positive climate

From the outset of this research, the teachers were aware that participating in a QLC involved more than the discussion of theory; it required them to actively trial techniques in their classrooms and change their teaching habits which they felt were not useful to their practice. As a result, the teachers were liable to take risks and create the potential for failure, as well as success. However, as the teachers were striving towards common goals (i.e., decreasing judgements and increasing empathy), the QLC provided a space where trust, support, and guidance contributed to a positive climate and the teachers felt safe to take risks (Hargreaves, 1997; Zins & Elias, 2007). For instance, even though Michael said that he “felt clumsy using NVC”, he still trialled the approach and experienced ‘failure’, before ‘getting it right’ (e.g., interactions with his colleague Stephanie). Throughout the QLC, the group supported him by listening, providing advice, and connecting with Michael’s feelings and needs, which provided a platform to trial NVC with Stephanie again. As the consequences of repeated failure can produce avoidance towards learning in individuals (Michou, Vansteenkiste, Mouratidis, & Lens, 2014), the emphasis on creating a positive environment in the group was beneficial in helping Michael to focus on the constructive aspect of the encounters, which reinforced his motivation to approach his colleague again. This type of response, whereby the teachers focused on the social and emotional aspects of interpersonal communication, has also been noted in other studies (e.g., Kimber, Skoog, & Sandell, 2013).

Overall, multiple authors argue that teachers need a climate that supports them, both personally and professionally, so that they can re-examine and re-frame their pedagogical practices according to their students' needs, as well as their own (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Hunzicker, 2011; Zepeda, 2012).

7.4.2 Inclusion

An inclusive environment takes into consideration the needs of all the members within the QLC group, and in the case of teachers, expands out into the classroom as well (Zepeda, 2012). Florian and Graham (2014) contend that “inclusive pedagogy” takes teachers away from the judgemental conceptions of challenging student behaviours, towards more understanding and empathetic viewpoints, which emphasise “the *ways* that teachers respond to individual differences, the *choices* they make about group work and *how* they utilise specialist knowledge that differentiates inclusive practice from other pedagogical approaches” (p. 466). This type of inclusive attitude could be observed during the QLCs on multiple occasions. For instance, the dialogues between the teachers in the QLCs were often centred on fostering empathy, and as such, the teachers supported each other by intentionally using perspective-taking to put themselves in the position of another. In addition, the teachers also fostered more inclusive attitudes towards their students. For example, Peter stated in the final interview that, “rather than thinking this student is being bad and annoying, and is trying to wreck my class, I now think they probably need some empathy because something is not going right for them”. This highlights a shift towards a more inclusive attitude and may represent an extension of the supportive processes that were happening inside of the QLC.

However, in presenting the positive shifts towards inclusion, it must also be noted that at one point, Michael stated that a child with autism was “not going to understand what ... [empathy] is”, which led him to not attempt NVC with that student. While research shows that children with autism do have difficulty in interpreting social cues, they do not lack the ability to feel empathy (Markram, Rinaldi, & Markram, 2007), as many adults often assume based on a child's ability to verbally express themselves (Bevan-Brown, Carroll-Lind, Kearney, Sperl, & Sutherland, 2008). Michael's statement is in accordance with a recent New Zealand study by Lyons (2013) who interviewed ten participants (teachers and owners) from different early childhood education care centres and found that while most communicated in inclusive terms, they still put the disability before the child, which led to exclusionary

processes based on double-standards. This demonstrates that greater discussion surrounding inclusionary practices is needed and perhaps if the QLC would have continued for a longer period, the teachers would have had a chance to explore this issue further.

7.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the key themes of the QLC part of the study. In the first theme, *QLC structure*, emphasis is placed on the importance of setting up a group that is run by teachers, for teachers. Specifically, this involves members actively participating in learning that is both, experiential and ongoing, in order to establish practises that are job-embedded and enduring. Additionally, the role of facilitation in a QLC was examined and found to provide several benefits, including setting boundaries and providing expertise when required. In the second theme, *collaborative learning culture*, collegial learning provided the teachers with opportunities to engage in shared talk about practice and distributed leadership within the group. In the third theme, *a supportive environment*, a positive environment that promoted inclusive attitudes was highlighted as a necessary pre-requisite for establishing conditions where teachers felt safe to take risk. Overall, these three themes were found to form an integral part of what constitutes a successful PLD experience for teachers in the QLC.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In my final chapter I link key findings from the Non-violent Communication (NVC) and Quality Learning Circle (QLC) elements of the study back to the main research questions, focussing on the potential of both approaches. The implications of the research are then examined, followed by an outline of its limitations and suggestions for future research.

8.2 Learning NVC within a QLC Model

Throughout this thesis, I have taken turns foregrounding both the content (NVC) and process (QLC) of my research. Whilst continually acknowledging how each approach was inter-connected, I purposely chose to illustrate and examine both the literature and findings in a way that focused on either one aspect or the other, mainly due to the scale of information pertaining to each field. However, in practice, what teachers learn and the way they learn it cannot be categorised as independent of each other. This idea is highlighted within my research as the QLC element represented a vehicle for the teachers to come together and learn a new strategy that was embedded in practice, as well as within a culture of support and risk-taking amongst colleagues. Overlaid onto this collaborative learning process was NVC – a strategy for working with challenging student behaviours. Therefore, in summarising the findings of my research I turn towards emphasising how the QLC model of Professional Learning and Development (PLD) played an integral role in way that the teachers learnt and applied NVC in practice.

8.3 Key Findings of the Study

The findings from this research support the use of a QLC, and in accordance with the literature on adult learning and teachers' PLD (e.g., Hunzicker, 2011; Zepeda, 2012), demonstrate the necessity of two elements which are presented as the key findings in this section. The first pertains to the way the teachers used *deliberate talk about practice* in order to facilitate experiential and reflective inquiry into their pedagogy. The second centres on how the teachers created *a supportive and collaborative culture* that promoted a positive climate. Both of these points will now be discussed in turn.

8.3.1 Deliberate Talk about Practice

This research highlighted how an intentional focus on sharing and discussing practice with colleagues contributed towards the teachers' inquiry into their own belief systems and how these affected their pedagogical practices. Factors that supported this process within the QLC involved experiential and reflective methods that were used to explore ideas in a creative way, and the ongoing nature of the learning process, which provided opportunities to learn, practice, and refine NVC. Throughout this process, active participation was a fundamental characteristic that underpinned many of the transactions between the teachers. For instance, the teachers actively trialled NVC in their classrooms, chose areas of interest to share and discuss with the other group members, as well as tailored NVC to their own practice.

Subsequently, personal agency was encouraged as the teachers selected their own examples of problematic situations to share with each other knowing that the others in the QLC would listen and pose questions rather than provide solutions. This process was used as a catalyst for action in a direction that empowered the teachers, rather than making them dependent on advice from others who could tell them what to do. Furthermore, it was the groups reflection on their own language of interacting with students and their trialling of the NVC patterned response (observations, feelings, needs, and requests) that had been helpful for the teachers. As the entry interviews showed, these teachers had limited opportunities to come together to discuss behavioural management techniques; therefore, the QLC afforded them a space to direct their own learning process in this area in a way that resonated with the principles of adult learning theory (Zepeda, 2012).

8.3.2 Creating a Collaborative and Supportive Culture

Another point that was illustrated throughout this research was that when the teachers came together and formed collegial relationships they were more likely to feel supported in their teaching practices. This involved more than merely making time to meet as colleagues. A trusting relationship was needed for the teachers to feel comfortable sharing their concerns and challenges of working with students. This idea aligns with the notion that shifting away from isolated learning and towards collaborative teacher alliances helps to promote a learner to learner culture where teachers feel safe to take risks and trial new approaches with their colleagues (Hattie, 2009; Zins & Elias, 2007). As a result, the teachers problem-solved

together and examined their pedagogy as a group. This meant that they were able to support each other in sharing strategies that were both successful and unsuccessful, whilst increasing their knowledge-of-practice, as well as in practice.

Moreover, as the teachers began to explore their own feelings, needs and attitudes through engaging in collaborative dialogues within the QLC, they developed more emotional self-regulation, self-awareness, and perspective-taking skills. Furthermore, as a result of trialling new strategies and sharing these experiences with each other, the teachers' empathetic attitudes towards their students increased as the QLC provided them with regular opportunities to engage in emotional sharing. These experiences afforded the teachers with greater clarity when viewing challenging behaviours, as they were better able to understand their own role in the formation of these types of behaviours, as well as thinking about the students' perspectives. This was seen most clearly in the teachers' reactions to challenging behaviours, which were prompted by the researcher through information sheets and modelling during the first five QLCs, and then intentionally cultivated by the teachers in each subsequent meeting. Instead of reacting to challenging behaviours in an authoritarian and retributive way, which was likely to exacerbate and possibly provoke further unwanted behaviours, the teachers focused on stating observable behaviours in their own practice, as well as discussing these observed behaviours in the group as they brought up examples. In addition, the teachers also reported establishing empathy, as well as having provided choice to students also facilitated more positive interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the findings from this research also endorse the current literature showing that teachers' attitudes towards challenging student behaviours are influenced by their perception of the student and the context in which the behaviour occurs (Emerson, 2001; Prochnow, Macfarlane, & Glynn, 2011).

In summary, the teachers' opinions of the QLC were positive, stating that they found it useful for exploring NVC. In relation to their perceived limitations of the QLC experience, these centred on finding time within their busy teaching schedules to prepare and attend for the meetings, as well as ensuring that there was equal space for everyone in the group to speak and be heard. Whilst the teachers stated that these limitations were of a minor nature, they still are important to note as they represent potential barriers to learning, as being a member of the QLC required a commitment and adherence to an agreed way of operating. In relation to the types of behaviours that the teachers felt most comfortable using NVC, these centred

on students whom the teachers perceived as being disengaged or off-task and noisy, as well as students who were absent from class and those involved in conflict situations. In terms of the situations where the teachers felt uncomfortable applying NVC, these related to knowing how and when to use empathy, vulnerability in expressing emotions in front of a whole class and colleagues, as well as hesitancy at the beginning of the process. Overall, the combination of both approaches helped support teachers in creating change in the way they related to each other and their students. The significance of these findings and their potential for teachers are discussed below.

8.4 Implications

The implications of this research are twofold: firstly, methods within the QLC can help to structure teachers' PLD so that the learning is owned by the participants and immediately related to their worlds of teaching practice and; secondly, concepts within NVC can help to inform teachers' practises at the classroom level, particularly in relation to how they enter and establish relationships with their students. Each implication will now be discussed.

8.4.1 QLC: Structuring Teachers' PLD

As Timperley (2011) states, there is a divide between system-initiated PLD that is passively directed at teachers and self-directed PLD that emphasises active participation. Whilst Timperley does not argue for one approach over the other, she does state that teachers need to engage in "active inquiry, learning, and experimenting" in order to improve their practice and for the learning to be anchored in real life concerns (p. xviii). Based on the positive experiences of the teachers involved in the QLC, and alongside the literature that supports adult learning principles (e.g., collaborative learning), I contend that incorporating a QLC into teachers' PLD would be beneficial for those teachers who prefer being able to design their own professional learning alongside colleagues in groups of their choice. In terms of implementing a QLC, the small size of the group, its adaptability to be used for multiple areas of interest (i.e., curriculum-based, mentoring, and behavioural management), as well as its collaborative nature make it ideal for teachers wishing to investigate aspects of their pedagogical practice in an ongoing way. As several of the elements that comprise a QLC are already present in teachers' practices, such as reflective thinking about job-embedded problems, informal collegial discussions, and the construction of knowledge based

on practice, coming together in a QLC is likely to present itself as a fluid and organic transition for those teachers who are interested structuring their PLD around issues which they feel are important. Having outlined the implications related to the QLC aspect of the research, I now turn to explore the implications associated with the NVC aspect.

8.4.2 NVC: Informing Teachers' Practice

In terms of applying NVC within a New Zealand context, I purport that the programme or elements within the programme, could be applied at both the classroom and school-wide level. For instance, at the classroom level, teachers could apply any or all of the main concepts (non-judgemental observations, empathy, and choice) within their classroom practice to varying degrees based on their personal preference and their current working conditions (i.e., limitations within school policy). For example, NVC has the potential to help teachers in their conversations with students by providing an alternative lens to interpret challenging behaviours and then apply objective descriptors when communicating with their students. Furthermore, this particular use of language is a way to raise the students' awareness of their classroom behaviour. As the examples that were exemplified in the findings chapter showed, NVC helped the teachers communicate with their students in a more empathetic and egalitarian way, and represents one of many methods of applying NVC at the individual level.

In relation to applying NVC principles at the school-wide level, this can be done in several ways. As already highlighted in the literature review, there are commonalities between elements within the PB4L programme (i.e., applied behavioural analysis and restorative justice principles) and NVC, such as a focus on creating positive relationships, emphasis on problem-behaviour as opposed to problem-students, and addressing the purpose or function of behaviours. Based on Prochnow and MacFarlane's (2011) suggestion that students displaying mild to moderate behaviours can be "addressed by the classroom teacher with class- and school-wide primary interventions", I argue that NVC principles could be incorporated as an adjunct to already existing initiatives at the school-wide level (p. 152). This also fits within the Ministry of Education's Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) initiative that recommends school-wide preventative and proactive strategies for 80-90% of students (MOE, 2014a). Furthermore, as the PB4L programme places a high emphasis on the antecedents, descriptions, and consequences of behaviours, some teachers may be averse to

focussing on their students in this manner, instead preferring approaches that are based in more emotional-laden dialogue. NVC techniques may offer those teachers an emotionally sensitive way of looking at behaviours based on the social and emotional needs of their students, which at the same time, still acknowledging the importance of specifically identifying the problematic aspects of challenging student behaviours (MOE, 2015a). Nonetheless, even for those teachers comfortable with applying PB4L, the addition of empathy-based techniques may provide added benefit, as multiple researchers have highlighted the need for applying empathy in education-based settings (e.g., de Oliveira, 2011; Pollack, 2013).

8.5 Limitations

This section discusses the limitations of the study, including issues relating to sample size, group dynamics, time pressures, researcher positionality, and not being a trained teacher. One of the main limitations in this research was that the participants represented a small group of four teachers in a localised context and therefore their findings cannot be generalised to other contexts. My aim was to explore the potential of the QLC approach by offering the teachers an opportunity to form a QLC, set their own agreed ways of operating and then for me to follow the journey of the QLC knowing that how its members interacted would be unique to this particular QLC. In addition to the sample size, another limitation was that as the teachers did not have a choice in deciding who would be in the group. Therefore, there was the possibility that the group dynamics would not work, due to personality or ideological clashes. However, while I did notice a few times where there was a clash of ideas, this actually helped the group to work through a challenging scenario because by this time they had come to value the opportunity to share insights, questions and strategies with one another.

Additionally, one of the main requirements of the QLC was that the teachers would trial NVC in their classrooms between each QLC meeting. As these typically occurred on a weekly basis, this meant that sometimes the teachers struggled to find time or a suitable situation to practice NVC in their respective schools. In setting up the QLC structure, the teachers thought that weekly meetings would provide them with constant opportunities to talk about and implement NVC. However, due to scheduling conflicts, which centred on the teachers' busy timetables, the intention to trial NVC did not always correspond with practice.

Another possible limitation is that I had dual roles in the QLC as both a facilitator and a researcher, which meant that I needed to find a balance between my involvement in initiating the group and the teachers' roles in structuring its content. I could not research the potential of the QLC as a technique without first of all giving the teachers the opportunity to participate in a collaborative learning opportunity. As an initial facilitator of the group, I introduced the focus of NVC and led the teachers through its main features. When it came to applying the NVC principles to teachers' practices it was the teachers' turn to shape the conversations with their examples and responses to one another. However, while the teachers had the freedom in the study to approach NVC and trial it in any way that they wished, there were constraints on this aspect, given that the teachers needed to go through and learn, step-by-step, the various components of NVC first, before being able to apply it in different ways. While I deemed this progression as a necessary requirement for the teachers to gain a solid understanding of the basics of NVC, it does represent an artificial constraint of my behalf, which dictated part of the structure of the first two QLCs. Tying in with the previous limitation surrounding scheduling conflicts, the timeframes I imposed for my research study also may have taken them through the NVC components in too much of a rush and not allowed time for the ideas to permeate.

Finally, my not being a trained teacher could also be seen as a possible limitation of the study. My supervisors were initially concerned about my ability to access participants given that I was not a teacher and had no experience in working with groups of teachers. However, while not being a trained teacher may have limited my understanding of some of the issues that arose in the QLCs, since the meetings were directed by the teachers, this point did not impact on my ability to empathise with the teachers and discuss issues of practice with them.

8.6 Future Research

In undertaking research into the field of education, particularly involving NVC, I soon discovered that NVC as a research field was new and under-researched. The field as a whole needs a critical mass of researchers' trialling and publishing their work for it to make a presence in the literature. I believe my contribution has begun this process by connecting elements within NVC into already well-established concepts. For instance, I have provided more clarity in the meaning of empathy by defining three distinct elements (emotional self-

regulation, perspective-taking, and emotional-sharing). While my exploration into the specifics of empathy in NVC is neither complete nor beyond alteration, it does provide a springboard for other researchers to investigate the constructs of empathy that form NVC ideology. Furthermore, for those researchers who have the opportunity to implement NVC into schools, determining its effectiveness and efficiency on different demographics would provide useful information. For instance, examining NVC with principals, teachers (i.e., beginning or experienced), students (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, social economic status,), alongside types of behaviours (i.e., academic, emotional or behavioural), school level (i.e., preschool, primary or secondary), as well as both classroom and school climate. While I have attempted to explore some of these issues, the scope of this research did not allow for a more comprehensive investigation.

In terms of future research into how forming a QLC can contribute towards teachers' PLD, I recommend several possible avenues. Firstly, considering the benefits of ongoing learning, I believe that conducting longitudinal research into how a QLC can create a sustained development in teachers' PLD would be worthwhile, as seven short sessions within a limited timeframe was but a taster of the QLC experience. Secondly, based on the positive literature surrounding collaborative learning, as well as the Ministry of Education's (2015b) current '*Investing in Educational Success*' initiative, which supports learning communities based on teacher-led inquiry, I suggest further research to determine how teachers from different schools and different levels within one school would work together in a QLC. Having diversity in the group may provide opportunities for growth and development as multiple positions and contexts can be taken into account. However, as I noted in my research, travel time and schedule conflicts may become problematic when teachers have to travel from different locations. Finally, research into whether a QLC needs to be facilitated is another area of potential research. In groups that are exploring a new topic, having an expert present may be of some benefit to clarify issues and answer questions, however, I question whether this would detract from the 'aha' or eureka moment of figuring a problem out for oneself. Overall, both NVC and the QLC present the researcher with a multitude of viable options in terms of future research.

8.7 Postscript

The journey I embarked on at the start of this thesis has led me to develop a deeper understanding, alongside a greater appreciation, of the complexities of teaching and finding practices that simultaneously could meet both teacher and student needs. Several months after the QLC cycle of meetings I had two chance encounters with participants from the QLC. The first was with Peter. During our discussion he told me how he was still using NVC in his classroom and even gave me an example of how he used it the previous day. The second encounter was approximately nine months later when Sarah told me that she, alongside the deputy principal, had just started an NVC professional development group, in which eight teachers had joined. These examples highlight to me how important and relevant the process of both NVC and QLC can be in the professional lives of teachers and validate the choice of topic that I presented in this thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix One: NVC Feelings List (<https://www.cnvc.org/Training/feelings-inventory>)

Feelings Inventory



The following are words we use when we want to express a combination of emotional states and physical sensations. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met and feelings we may have when our needs are not being met.

Feelings when your needs are satisfied

AFFECTIONATE

compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

ENGAGED

absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

HOPEFUL

expectant
encouraged
optimistic

CONFIDENT

empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

EXCITED

amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

GRATEFUL

appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

INSPIRED

amazed
awed
wonder

JOYFUL

amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

EXHILARATED

blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

PEACEFUL

calm
clear headed
comfortable
centered
content
equanimous
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

REFRESHED

enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID

apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED

aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

ANGRY

enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED

ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

DISCONNECTED

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed

uninterested
withdrawn

DISQUIET

agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED

ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE

beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

PAIN

agony
anguished
bereaved

devastated
grief
heartbroken

hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD

depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

TENSE

anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING

envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

Appendix Two: NVC Needs List
 (https://www.cnvc.org/sites/default/files/needs_inventory_0.pdf)

Needs Inventory



The following list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

CONNECTION

acceptance
 affection
 appreciation
 belonging
 cooperation
 communication
 closeness
 community
 companionship
 compassion
 consideration
 consistency
 empathy
 inclusion
 intimacy
love
 mutuality
 nurturing
respect/self-respect

CONNECTION continued

safety
 security
 stability
 support
 to know and be known
 to see and be seen
 to understand and
 be understood
 trust
warmth

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

air
 food
movement/exercise
 rest/sleep
sexual expression
 safety
shelter
 touch
 water

HONESTY

authenticity
 integrity
 presence

PLAY

joy
 humor

PEACE

beauty
 communion
 ease
 equality
 harmony
 inspiration
 order

AUTONOMY

choice
 freedom
 independence
 space
 spontaneity

MEANING

awareness
 celebration of
 life
challenge
 clarity
 competence
 consciousness
 contribution
 creativity
 discovery
 efficacy
 effectiveness
 growth
hope
 learning
 mourning
 participation
 purpose
self-
 expression
 stimulation
 to matter
understanding

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Appendix Three: Entry and Exit Interview Schedules

Semi-structured interviews questions – Entry

1. Background Information

How many years have you been a teacher?

What do you find satisfying about teaching?

What are your frustrations about teaching?

2. Challenging Behaviour

Tell me about a recent challenging student you have had to work with.

What did you do about it?

What worked?

What support would you have liked, but didn't get at the time?

Can you tell me how you felt when interacting with this student?

Please tell me how managing students with challenging behaviour affects your classroom environment?

3. NVC

What attracts you to NVC?

If you have used NVC in your teaching practice, please tell me about your experiences of it?

Which areas might you see possibilities for NVC?

4. QLC & Professional Learning

What kind of professional development have you done in the area of behavioural management?

Tell me about a particular time when you felt successful in managing challenging behaviour?

Tell me about the support available to teachers in your school for dealing with challenging behaviours?

In regards to your professional development, how do you prefer to learn?

Semi-structured interviews questions – Exit

1. NVC

In what ways have you incorporated NVC in to your teaching practice?

What types of behaviours or situations have you found NVC to be useful for?

Which, if any, features of NVC were challenging to translate to your practice?

How has NVC affected your emotional awareness of yourself and others?

How have students in your classes reacted to your use of NVC?

On what basis would you recommend NVC to other teachers?

2. QLC

What do you feel were the main successes in the QLC for you personally and for the group?

Tell me about any barriers or frustrations for you during the QLC?

What guidance would you offer other teachers considering this approach?

In what ways did the quality learning circle align with your preferred learning style?

3. General

Do you have any other comments in relation to your experiences over this last term?

Appendix Four: QLC 1 Exercises

Exercises

Spend some time this week focussing on feelings and needs so that you can share these with the group in the next meeting. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, just personal experiences.

Exercise 1: Reflecting Inwardly

Please reflect on your feelings and needs inside of the classroom or school environment. Write down some examples (the situation, what you were feeling and what you think your needs were). Were your needs met or unmet in each instance?

Exercise 2: Reflecting Outwardly

During this week, please pay attention to how others in your classroom or school environment may be feeling and needing. If you feel comfortable to do so, create a connection with someone based on feelings and needs. Often, a simple way to do this is to just guess what the other person is feeling and needing and then check with them to see if you are right. For instance, “are you feeling frustrated because you would like more support right now?” or “are you feeling engaged/interested in the work you are doing right now?... (if they answer no)... what would you need to feel more engaged/interested in this work?”... (if they answer yes)... so does this meet your need for (creativity/excitement/playfulness)?

If you feel uncomfortable doing this exercise, then please instead of ask them, just imagine or guess what the other person may have been feeling and needing at that moment. Please write your guess down.

Appendix Five: QLC 2 Exercises

Exercises

Spend some time this week focussing on observations vs evaluations so that you can share these with the group in the next meeting. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, just personal experiences.

Exercise 1: Reflecting Inwardly

Notice times when you use evaluations in your teaching practice. These could be positive or negative. For example, praise and compliments could reflect positive evaluation, whereas, moralistic judgements (right/wrong and good/bad) and blame could reflect negative evaluation. Please record your experiences.

Exercise 2: Reflecting Outwardly

After reflecting on the difference between observations and evaluations, please have a go at incorporating observations into your teaching practice. For example, if you would like to address a student's behaviour in class, please use a specific observation to describe it to them (i.e., "I notice that you are drawing pictures in your book instead of working on the problem I gave out").

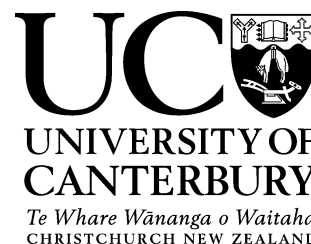
You could also use this as part of the NVC 4 step process of (observations/feelings/needs/requests).

"I notice that you are drawing pictures in your book instead of working on the problem I gave out. I'm feeling confused because I have a need to contribute to your learning experience and I'm not sure how to do this. Would you be willing to tell me how I could do that?" - (The last sentence is step 4 - request)

Please record your experiences to share with the group.

Appendix Six: Information Sheet for Teachers

Education Department, University of Canterbury
Lee Hooper – (lee.hooper@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)
30/06/2014



An exploratory study: Non-violent communication strategies for secondary teachers using a Quality Learning Circle approach

Information for Prospective Participants

My name is Lee Hooper and I am a Master's student at the College of Education, Canterbury University. I am conducting research on Marshall Rosenberg's Non-violent communication (NVC). This is an approach to interpersonal communication that offers practical techniques to develop self-awareness, empathy and communication skills. In an educational setting, NVC has been used to increase empathetic connection among students and teachers, initiate self-directed learning processes and decrease conflict in classrooms. NVC is a useful tool to employ in classrooms as it can facilitate clearer and more reflective communication as well as foster self-directed learning processes

I am currently interested in researching the role NVC can play in creating cohesive classrooms, particularly the way that teachers incorporate NVC into their professional practice. The main way I will do this is through creating a Quality Learning Circle (QLC). This is a group where teachers interested in NVC will meet on a regular basis to share their experiences and learn from each other in order to develop teaching strategies that are relevant to their own personal practices. An introduction to the structure and format of the QLC will be outlined in the first session by the researcher. Sessions will typically involve teachers sharing their experiences and knowledge with each other to develop practical approaches that can be trialled in their classrooms. The researcher's role in the QLC will be that of a facilitator and observer. This role will entail introductions and conclusions of each QLC session and answering any questions or concerns that are raised. However, as this group is primarily designed to be run by teachers, I will limit my participation to as little as possible.

I would like to invite you to participate in my present study. If you agree to take part you will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a short interview (15-30 minutes) before the start of the QLC.
- Take part in a QLC during term three of the school year. This will involve meeting approximately every two weeks and will total seven times throughout the study. Meetings will last for approximately 30-45 minutes and will be scheduled at a time that is mutually convenient.
- As the QLC is centred in practice, it will involve you sharing issues and challenging of practice, trialling some NVC approaches in the classroom and reporting back to each other so that your collective experiences can help guide your individual practice.
- Complete a short interview (15-30 minutes) at the end of the QLC.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

The results of this research will be used to understand the role that NVC can have in an educational setting. If you wish to receive a summary of the results of the research then please provide an email address in the consent form. The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation (Your identity will not be made public). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and/or in password protected electronic form and will be destroyed after 5 years. All interviews will be audio-taped, and then subsequently transcribed, with information from your interviews being used for illustrative purposes only (Pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality).

In the performance of the tasks and application of the procedures there are risks involving confidentiality when sharing information within a group setting. While I will do my utmost to ensure that every participant is aware of their duty to preserve confidentiality, there is the possibility that those in the group may breach this confidentiality. While this is unlikely, it is one aspect of which you need to be aware.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master degree by Lee Hooper under the supervision of Dr Susan Lovett, who can be contacted at (susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz) and Dr Veronica O'Toole (veronica.otoole@canterbury.ac.nz). They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library. This application has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

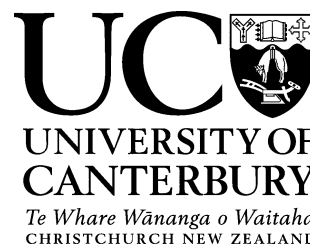
If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and hand it in to your school's reception. I will collect these within a week and arrange a suitable time/ place to conduct the interview. Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any particular questions or would like to discuss your involvement in more depth. My email address is at the top of this letter.

Thank you for considering participating in this project.

Lee Hooper

Appendix Seven: Consent Form for Teachers

Education Department, University of Canterbury
Lee Hooper – (lee.hooper@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)
01/05/2014



An exploratory study: Non-violent communication strategies for secondary teachers using a Quality Learning Circle approach

Consent Form

I _____ consent to participate in the research project conducted by Lee Hooper: *An investigation into Non-violent communication as part of a quality learning circle approach with school teachers.*

- ✓ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.
- ✓ I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this project.
- ✓ I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and I can discontinue at any time without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information, provided this is practically achievable.
- ✓ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me or the school I work at.
- ✓ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after 5 years.
- ✓ I understand that I am able to receive a report on the findings of the study. I have provided my email details below for this.
- ✓ I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz), Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, New Zealand.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

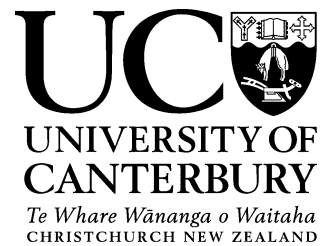
Email address: _____

Please return this completed consent form to your school reception office.

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. www.canterbury.ac.nz

Appendix Eight: Information Sheet for Principal

Education Department, University of Canterbury
Lee Hooper – (lee.hooper@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)
01/05/2014



Project Information Statement/Letter of Invitation to School Principals

An exploratory study: Non-violent communication strategies for secondary teachers using a Quality Learning Circle approach

Dear

My name is Lee Hooper, and I am a Master's student at the College of Education, Canterbury University. I am conducting research on Non-violent communication (NVC), an approach to interpersonal communication that offers practical techniques to develop self-awareness, empathy and communication skills. In an educational setting, NVC has been used to increase empathetic connection among students and teachers, initiate self-directed learning processes and decrease conflict in classrooms. NVC is a useful tool to employ in classrooms as it can facilitate clearer and more reflective communication as well as foster self-directed learning processes. In particular, the fundamental principles of NVC are in line with several of [insert appropriate information, linking school policies to NVC].

This research will use a Quality Learning Circle (QLC) model to understand how teachers use NVC and to facilitate their professional development of the approach. A QLC is essentially a group where teachers come together to explore a common theme through reflective methods and to learn from each other's experiences. During the QLC teachers will share their knowledge and experience of NVC and have the opportunity for regular dialogue and discussion. This will allow them to formulate new strategies to implement NVC into their practice and honestly reflect on the usefulness of this approach inside of the classroom. In addition, the QLC will function as a support group for teachers who wish to develop their skills in NVC.

With your approval, I would like to find out if there are other teachers within [school name] who have experience or interest in NVC and would like to approach them to find out if they are interested in participating in this research. I am seeking your help and ask that you share the information sheets with teachers in your school. I will contact you within a week to see if there has been any interest. A brief outline of the research structure is outlined on the next page.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for a Master degree by Lee Hooper under the supervision of Dr Susan Lovett, who can be contacted at (susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz) and Dr Veronica O'Toole (veronica.otoole@canterbury.ac.nz). They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library. This application has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and any complaints should be addressed to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary and teachers' have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. If they withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to them, provided this is practically achievable. The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured that any information relating to teacher or school identity will be kept confidential. Data collected for the study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Aims of the Research

This research aims to:

- Investigate how NVC can contribute to building more cohesive classrooms.
- Investigate the effectiveness of the QLC in relation to professional learning.

School Involvement

Teachers that participate in this study will be asked to:

- Complete a short interview (15-30 minutes) before the start of the QLC.
- Take part in a QLC during term three of the school year. This will involve meeting approximately every two weeks and will total seven times throughout the study. Meetings will be 30-45 minutes each.
- Trial NVC approaches and share experiences with other teachers in the QLC.
- Complete a short interview (15-30 minutes) at the end of the QLC.

Benefits of the Research to Schools

- It will provide information on how teachers incorporate NVC into their teaching practice, alongside providing greater clarity on more effective ways to do this.
- It will provide teachers an opportunity to engage in professional learning in a way that encourages personal responsibility, collaboration and reflection.
- It will provide those who inform and create educational policies at with additional information on whether NVC is a suitable approach inside of their school.

Invitation to Participate

If you would like to discuss the possibility of teachers within your school participating in this research, please contact me on my email address below. Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Researcher

Lee Hooper (lee.hooper@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

Supervisors

Dr Susan Lovett (susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz)

Dr Veronica O'Toole (veronica.otoole@canterbury.ac.nz)

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. www.canterbury.ac.nz