

MENTORING:  
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN A QUALITY LEARNING CIRCLE

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## Abstract

There is a wealth of literature on the induction and support of provisionally registered teachers (Boreen, 2009; Bubb, 2007; Cameron, Lovett, & Garvey Berger, 2007) and the key skills of mentoring (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Glickman, 2002). However literature on how to meet the professional learning needs of curriculum leaders developing their mentoring skill set has largely been ignored in leadership literature. This study, informed by MacBeath and Dempster's (2009) concept of 'leadership for learning', upholds the need for leadership work to focus on the improvement of student outcomes (Barber & Fullan, 2005) rather than traditional approaches to education which focussed on making resources available to students. In an outcomes-focussed model of education, the needs of the students are at the forefront of all learning. By focussing on teachers' professional learning through mentoring and the use of a teacher inquiry model, the students' learning needs are prioritised.

The focus for my study is the skillset of curriculum leaders for their work with teachers within their learning areas. The participants for this study were five curriculum leaders, all from the same secondary school. This intervention study investigated the factors which contributed to the professional learning of the mentors, their views of their leadership role and the kinds of learning about mentoring which were beneficial to understandings about mentoring. By focussing on key adult learning principles, structures that support learning, and attention to a mentoring skill set, the participants were supported to develop their mentoring skills. The mentors participated in a professional learning experience, referred to as a Quality Learning Circle (QLC), over one and a half school terms, to co-construct their understanding of mentoring practice. In a QLC the focus is on the learners seeking and making changes to their practice in a collaborative, supportive environment (Lovett & Verstappen, 2003).

The mentors collaboratively developed new understandings through deliberate talk in the QLC about their shared interest in mentoring. They also had opportunities for immediate and practical application of their new knowledge. While they participated in the QLC they co-currently developed their mentoring skills by working with a mentee who taught in the same subject area as themselves.

This study features a qualitative methodology with an interpretive case study of experienced curriculum leaders. Data collection tools included a gap analysis survey which explored their understandings of their school's current professional learning opportunities. A second data source was a career questionnaire which explored their teaching history and experiences of professional learning. This was followed by initial interviews which focussed on how they interpreted their role of

a curriculum leader and the extent they could connect leadership with students' learning. I also analysed transcripts of QLC meetings, and the teachers' reflective journals. Four of the mentors worked with a provisionally registered teacher (PRT), while one mentor chose to work with a more experienced colleague.

This study offered a new type of collegial interaction for the teachers. The mentors chose their own goals, a mentee to work alongside and the direction of their learning about mentoring. The QLC met five times during the study and the mentors and participant researcher (PR) also kept a reflective journal. In between the QLC sessions the mentors met with their mentees to practise their mentoring skills, such as questioning skills, and the use of observational tools for classroom observations. A typical QLC session focussed on each of the mentors talking about the mentoring practice they had undertaken. The group provided support and guidance on possible next steps of practice. Readings and practical resources were also discussed and there was an expectation that the mentors would practice an aspect of mentoring and report back to the group at the next meeting. At the close of the study the mentors were re-interviewed to compare their views of their leadership role and learning from their initial interviews. An iterative process was used so that emerging understandings of the data could arise. The data is presented according to the three broad themes of '*effective professional learning*', '*leadership role*' and '*professional learning about mentoring*'.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of collaborative learning opportunities for teachers where they can state and resolve practical issues in a supportive group (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, & Association of Teacher Educators., 2008). Among all of the findings there were four major findings about the development of curriculum leaders' mentoring skills: the value of opportunities for deliberate talk, the importance of teacher agency, the need for specific tools in developing mentoring practice, and the necessity of understanding the curriculum leaders' leadership role.

My detailed account of the experiences of the five curriculum leaders offers a practical example of what the development of curriculum leaders' understandings of mentoring might look like. This study serves to highlight the challenges for schools to provide support for teachers wanting to take responsibility for their own professional learning. In the absence of any formalised leadership professional learning about mentoring for curriculum leaders, this study proved to be a useful study to demonstrate the potential of the QLC approach to support curriculum leaders in their understandings and practice of mentoring. The key findings of this study validate the need for further research on what is needed for effective mentoring to be an integral part of every school.

## **Glossary Terms**

PRT – provisionally registered teacher. A PRT is a teacher who is working towards full registration in their first two years of teaching.

OT- observational tools

PR- participant researcher

SMT – senior management team at the school where the research took place consisted of a principal, deputy principal (DP) and two assistant principals (AP)

DP- deputy principal

AP- assistant principal

SCT- specialist classroom teacher.

HOLA – head of learning area

HOD- head of department

Asst HOLA/HOD – assistant head of learning area or department

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Leadership in secondary schools is a complex and multifaceted activity. At present, the leadership research is dominated by building leadership capacity for principals rather than middle leaders or teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Notman, 2010; Slater, 2008). Middle leadership in secondary schools encompasses many roles, such as pedagogical or curriculum leadership, pastoral care (by deans and counsellors and careers advisors), teachers with specific or designated responsibilities (such as for sport, Information Communication Technology -ICT) and coaches and mentors who help lead professional learning (Ministry of Education, 2012). This thesis focuses on 'curriculum leaders', as this term characterises teachers who hold curriculum-related positions of responsibility, such as Head of Departments or Learning Areas (HODs/HOLAs). The role of a curriculum leader is a multidimensional position which comprises of pedagogical and professional leadership, administrative tasks (such as budget and resources), relationship building with other staff (such as the principal, other departments, pastoral care team) and mentoring of colleagues.

Curriculum leaders are often expert teachers whose success in the classroom has been recognised in the form of a promotion into a leadership position (Danielson, 2007). Curriculum leaders may partake in professional development opportunities in how to manage a learning area, however, they often do not receive support in how to develop their own leadership potential (Chetty, 2007). Curriculum leaders need opportunities to learn how to lead other teachers. While some professional development in building leadership capabilities exists to develop teachers' leadership potential, these are often ad hoc and therefore it does not necessarily change practice long-term (Knapp, 2003). There are some provisions for national leadership programmes but teachers need to take responsibility (agency) for developing their own leadership skills. However, a supportive school culture is needed to promote collaborative learning amongst teachers. Absolum (2006) likewise endorses the value of collaborative reflection saying it revitalises their interest in their practice.

There is a pressing need to address the professional learning needs of secondary school teachers due to an ageing population and concerns about morale. Two recent reports capture this need. The Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) review of teacher professional learning carried out in 2013, highlighted teacher frustration with whole school professional development programmes as these experiences did not always meet their varied learning needs (Association, 2013). Teachers indicated that they would prefer multiple professional learning opportunities which can serve different purposes. In the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) survey (Wylie, 2012), half of the teachers who responded are aged 50 years or over and 13 percent intend to retire

within the next five years. Cameron argues that the attrition rate for New Zealand teachers is no better than other countries despite having the best funding for teacher induction anywhere in the world (Cameron, 2009). Given that only 57 percent of teachers reported “good or very good morale” (p. 21) (which was a decrease from 70 percent in 2009), it is important to find ways of retaining and engaging teachers in their careers because teacher morale levels are “related to perceptions of workload and support” (p. 21). Teachers who move into leadership roles need to be supported with new knowledge and skills to lead others. One potential way of providing support for teachers who wish to develop their leadership capabilities, is to use a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and/or Quality Learning Circle (QLC) to address personal needs where learning agendas are set by the teachers themselves. These structures focus on communities of teachers who come together to learn. In PLCs, teachers collaboratively focus on how to improve student learning (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2008; Martin, 2011) by engaging in reflective professional inquiry (Timperley & Robertson, 2011). In a QLC, small groups of teachers co-construct their learning as equal partners through an agreed focus on professional inquiry (Absolum, 2006).

One possible activity for developing the leadership capacity of curriculum leaders is through the act of mentoring others. Mentoring requires a particular skill set so that teachers know how to have deliberate learning conversations about practice with their mentees.

As most of the research on mentoring focuses on the mentoring of provisionally registered teachers (PRTs) (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Boreen, 2009; Bubb, 2007; Cameron et al., 2007; Johnson & Kardos, 2003) there is a need to extend mentoring knowledge to include more experienced teachers mentoring each other. There is very little research that focuses on curriculum leaders as mentors of other colleagues in their department.

Cameron (2007) offers advice for those working with teachers to gain registration. Her review of induction programmes identifies particular activities which support provisionally registered teachers. These are “joint planning, observation of other teachers, feedback on teaching and opportunities to work with other teachers” (p. 73). Cameron also argues that mentors needs “a wide range of personal, interpersonal, and professional skills to focus new teachers on their classroom practice, and move it forward” (p. 73) and discusses the necessity for mentors to be trained and supported in how to do this effectively.

Cameron’s findings provide the impetus for further research and investigation into how curriculum leaders can deepen their own and others practices through mentoring. My study focuses on curriculum leaders’ learning about mentoring. This requires an understanding of the mentoring role

and strategies which can promote reflective practice. I now provide a programme overview of leadership learning to indicate that others have realised the need to better prepare and support emerging and new leaders.

### ***Global Programmes***

Opportunities for professional learning are varied throughout the world. Some countries offer specific courses aimed at developing the leadership and management skills for those in positions of responsibility, such as in the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML) in the United Kingdom and the International Leadership and Management Program ILMP-ML offered in both Melbourne and London. Both of these programmes focus on leading teaching. The ILMP-ML also provides opportunities for leaders to develop leadership skills collaboratively and partake in active discussions. However, neither programme specifically identifies or focuses on the mentoring of colleagues as a leadership activity.

One programme in Missouri, USA, specifically focuses on professional learning for teachers as mentors. Missouri, the state-level National Education Association affiliate, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and a number of education-related associations conjoined to establish a mentor training programme through the agency of Missouri's regional professional development centres. Their six-day training programme, for prospective mentors focuses on: facilitating reflective practice; establishing collaborative relationships; developing classroom observation skills; creating long-term professional development plans for new teachers. While this programme only runs for six days, the developers of the programme recognise that training for mentors needs to be on-going. These are just three examples to illustrate interest in supporting the preparation and development of school leaders.

### ***New Zealand Programmes***

Programmes exist in New Zealand for new principals but as seen internationally, there are fewer opportunities for middle or curriculum leaders. Specialist programmes exist for principals, such as The First-time Principals Programme, a national induction programme which was introduced in 2002. A new initiative for 2011, the National Aspiring Principals Programme, is a 12 month programme of professional learning, blending professional learning groups, mentoring, residential hui, and a school leadership inquiry related to the school's strategic plan.

Some resources are emerging which do provide support for middle leadership, such as the Ministry of Education publication '*Leading from the Middle: educational leadership for middle and senior*

*leaders'* (Ministry of Education, 2012). This resource focuses on the qualities, practices and activities needed by middle and senior leaders to lead in ways that enhance learner outcomes.

Another New Zealand initiative to build the capacity of teachers as leaders is the role of the 'Specialist Classroom Teacher' (SCT). This was introduced in 2006 for the purpose of providing professional support and learning in schools and giving teachers different career opportunities rather than positions which would take them outside of the classroom (Ward, 2007). In the first instance, the role of the SCT was designed with a particular focus on mentoring and support of provisionally registered teachers (PRTs). Ward (2007) argues that this has been a very positive, nationwide step in developing teachers' practices. While these three initiatives are promising first steps to develop leadership capacity, at present there is no named leadership programme for curriculum leaders.

The New Zealand Teachers' Council (NZTC) has realised the need to support teachers' professional learning to be mentors. *'The Induction and mentoring Pilot Programme'* was a pilot study in 2009 and 2010 in six North Island rural and provincial schools (in the Taranaki, Wanganui / Manawatu and Hawke's Bay regions). The pilot was created to examine whether the practice of induction programmes for PRTs, introduced since 1985, aligned with the policy's intent. The pilot was a promising start towards exploring the role of mentoring in schools. It focused on ways of supporting PRTs within a school using a structured mentoring programme. The strength of this pilot scheme was the focus on mentor teachers, SCTs and PRT co-ordinators and it "aimed to equip them with the skills to effectively fulfil their roles" (Butler & Douglas, 2011, p. 2). Likewise Cheliotis and Reilly (2010) claim the importance of teachers being able to hold deliberate learning conversations with their colleagues and reflect on their practices. Butler and Douglas (2011) also indicate that schools value staff training for mentors. They argue a robust staff development programme has multiple benefits including opportunities for teachers to share that practice and display leadership of learning.

However, the NZTC pilot is only a first step in addressing the need to develop teachers' understandings about mentoring. Their secondary mentoring pilot was only trialled in a small number of North Island schools and since secondary schools only have one SCT teacher per school the impact was limited. There appears to be an urgent need for further research into the building of mentoring capacity and capability of curriculum leaders who work with a range of career-stage teachers. I argue that a preferred approach for such research is within schools. It is there that curriculum leaders can best be supported with relevant on-the-job learning and reflection on their mentoring knowledge and skills. By enabling curriculum leaders to become active inquirers into their

own and others' roles and practice, leaders can collaboratively lead their own development and influence the learning culture of their schools (Shields, 2011; Smyth, 1989). This reflection which when made visible to colleagues is useful modelling of what it means to be a reflective practitioner.

### ***Research Focus***

The thesis title 'Mentoring: Professional learning through a Quality Learning Circle' refers to the opportunity extended to the mentors to develop their leadership capacity through one leadership activity, mentoring (refer to Chapter 2: Literature Review, *Teachers as leaders*). By focusing on a collaborative approach to curriculum leaders' professional learning about mentoring, this project aims to investigate how leadership can connect with teacher and ultimately student learning. My study focuses on the factors which contribute to the professional learning of the curriculum leaders, their perceptions of their leadership roles, and their views on the value of learning about mentoring as experienced in an on-site intervention.

### ***Professional Experiences of the Researcher***

I am Head of Learning Area (HOLA) of a large English department in a New Zealand state secondary school. At the time of conducting this case study, I had been teaching for 17 years in the secondary sector as a teacher, Assistant Head of Learning Area (Ass HOD) and for the last seven years, a HOLA. My involvement with school-based professional development during my career has been characterised by listening to ad hoc speakers. While these passive experiences have been inspiring at times, they have seldom resulted in long-term changes to my practice as they have not been immediately linked to issues of my practice. Instead I have relied on my own solutions to leadership issues of practice. Moreover I have not participated in any formalised collaborative learning experiences, such as within a PLC or QLC but my interest in them was sparked by my postgraduate studies in educational leadership.

As a PRT, I enjoyed strong role models in the first school where I taught and was supported by two different mentors. Once fully registered, I enjoyed opportunities to work with student teachers and I became the student teacher liaison for a few years, but I never felt I was adequately prepared for this role. When I was appointed a HOLA, I found myself in a mentoring role with many PRTs in my department. In my aforementioned postgraduate study I carried out some small-scale research projects around mentoring and teacher professional learning. These experiences of learning about mentoring, and opportunities to put this learning into practice, were pivotal in my career. They generated a passion for the professional learning of all teachers, in particular curriculum leaders, so

that they could support the learning of other teachers. I began to see new possibilities in my professional roles.

## ***Research questions***

Learning how to mentor is an important aspect of leadership work. The goal of professional inquiry is to give individual teachers support in understanding effective practices through a developing sense of criticality about their own work in the classroom and the wider context in which they operate (Carroll, 2011; Schön, 1983). Such awareness can be progressed through interactions with colleagues.

The research questions for this project focus on the mentoring role of curriculum leaders.

### ***Main question:***

What are curriculum leaders' conceptions of mentoring as a leadership activity?

### ***Related sub-questions:***

1. What factors can contribute to the effective professional learning of curriculum leaders?
2. How can curriculum leaders' understandings of their leadership role affect their own learning?
3. What kind of learning about mentoring is beneficial for curriculum leaders?

This study is carried out in one state secondary school and involves an intervention of a QLC for a group of five curriculum leaders who have recognised the need to deepen their understandings of mentoring. It is a responsive study, as alterations to the design of the intervention were made during the study, in response to the learning needs of the mentors.

## ***Thesis Overview***

In order to outline the structure of this thesis, I provide a summary of each of the following five chapters.

### ***Chapter 2: Literature Review***

I discuss the literature research concerning the main issues of this thesis. I focus on two key ideas: 'shared professional learning' and 'teachers as leaders'.

### ***Chapter 3: Methodology***

I describe my choices of methodology used in this research project, the data collection methods, ethical considerations and the process of data analysis.

#### **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

I report the analysis of the data set. This data analysis is organised under three themes: *Effective professional learning*, *leadership role* and *professional learning about mentoring*.

#### **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter discusses the findings which arise out of the data and place this research project within the context of wider research literature. I address the main research question and three related sub-questions by exploring *effective professional learning*, *learning about mentoring* and *understandings of leadership*. I also look at the strengths and limitations of this research project and the tensions and challenges which were experienced.

#### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

I conclude this research project with a summary of the key findings of this study, implications, limitations of the research design and suggestions for future research for curriculum leaders and mentoring.

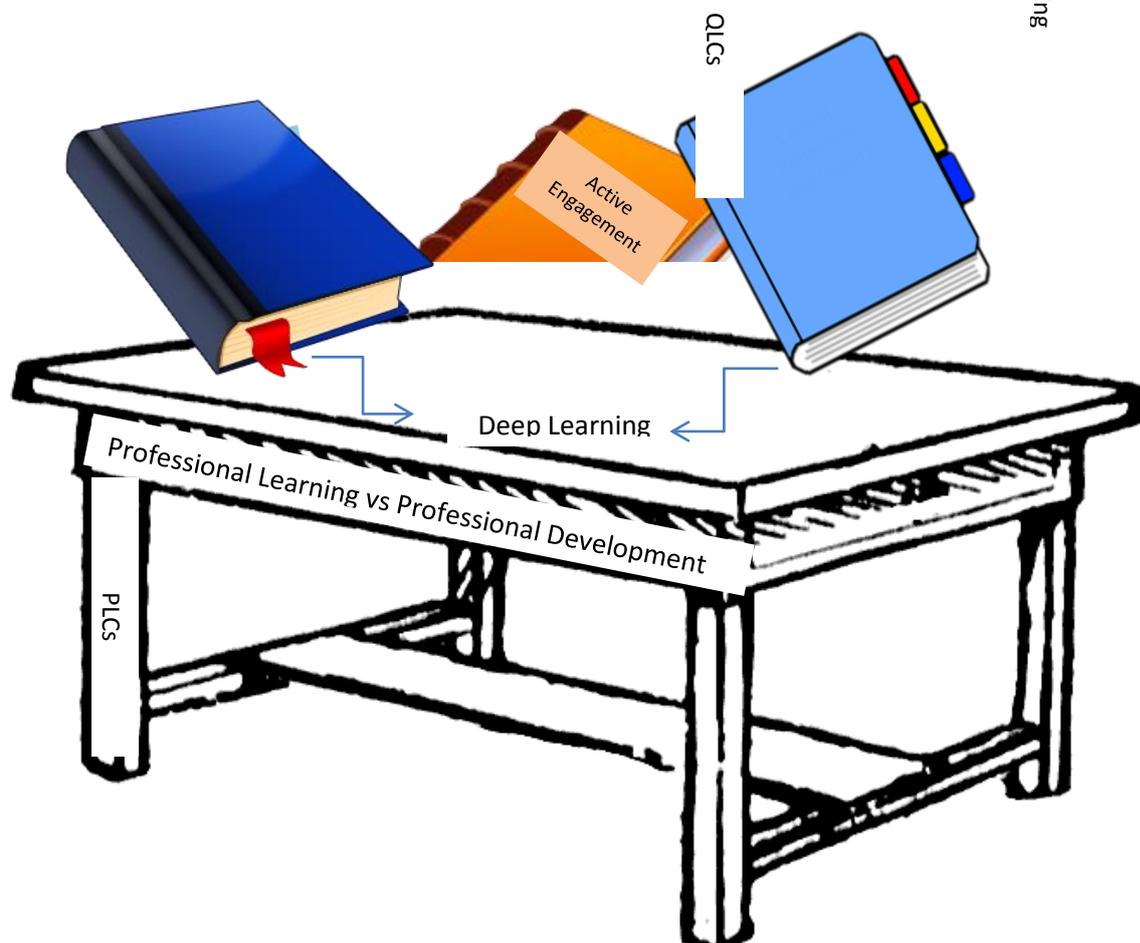
## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Chapter overview

This literature review is organised into two main sections: 'shared professional learning' and 'teachers as leaders'. These section themes endorse the need for strong connections between leadership and learning.

### Shared Professional Learning

This first section of this literature review, 'shared professional learning', explores the potential and debates about how teachers learn alongside their colleagues. The nature of effective professional learning is examined including its relationship to adult learning principles (refer to Figure 1). These are represented in diagrammatic form.



**Figure 1: Adult learning principles**

In this figure there are three key adult learning principles which have resonated with numerous authors, namely; 'collaborative learning', 'active engagement' and 'critical reflection and inquiry'

(Absolum, 2006; Burley & Pomphrey, 2011; Carroll, 2011) . These are depicted as three large books in Figure 1. Three further adult learning principles are recognised as components of ‘critical reflection and inquiry’ and are depicted as tabs on the ‘critical reflection and inquiry’ book. That close connection is portrayed as tabs on the ‘critical reflection and inquiry’ book. These additional adult learning principles include ‘teachers’ autobiographies (red tab), ‘using evidence based data’ (yellow tab) and ‘turning theory into praxis’ (blue tab). They were mentioned by single authors whereas the portrayal of the three large books signifies mention by several authors. ‘Deep learning’ is placed underneath the books, because it signifies the depth of learning possible when adult learning principles are applied to teachers’ learning. The ‘professional learning versus professional development’ label around the perimeter of the table is recognition that teachers experience two types of learning in schools. The named legs of the table denote three options for structural support labelled as Professional Learning Communities, Quality Learning Circles and collegial mentoring.

### ***Collaborative Learning***

There is compelling evidence from two decades of research in teacher community and teacher collaboration that a school is most likely to experience improvements in teaching where teachers work together (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008). As learning is socially and culturally constructed it is important that it happens in contact with other teachers rather than in isolation behind the closed door of the classroom as the knowledge generated through teacher collaboration is greater than the sum of individual teachers’ learning (Lovett, 2002a; McLaughlin, 2002). Blasé and Blasé’s (2003) assumption that “we are all learners ... we are all lifelong learners ... we are all colleagues and collaborators ... we openly discuss our views”(p. 13) is a further illustration of this ideal.

Collaboration is featured as one of many principles underpinning adult learning (refer to Figure 1) by a range of authors and is the first to be addressed in this thesis (Hunzicher, 2010). The challenge is how to achieve this aspirational intent.

Collaborative learning gives teachers the opportunity to get feedback from others, such as colleagues and students. Feedback has the potential to make sense of teacher practice. Ministry of Education (2005), Blase and Blase (2003) and Lovett (2002a) all refer to the importance of “specific and contextualised” feedback as part of active reflection as this allows for teacher learning to occur. Likewise Huber (2011) purports that in order for adult learners to develop new competencies, it is necessary to practise new approaches, receive feedback and reflect on the experience. Colleagues can provide new perspectives and alternative strategies which a teacher may not have considered. Joyce and Showers (2002) argue that peer-coaching is a valuable strategy for teacher learning especially when “structured and open-ended feedback” are utilised (p. 118). The value of peer

feedback is that it gives teachers an opportunity to transfer learning to their own classroom, especially as “teachers learn best from other teachers, and take criticism most easily from this source” (p. 119). Learning environments which offer on-going collaborative structures, rather than a one-off learning opportunity, are they say, more effective. However, the ultimate goal is for teachers to show in personal agency about their professional learning needs (Frost, 2006).

This was also a finding of the Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration: Teacher Professional Learning and Development (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). These authors claim that it does not matter whether teachers participate in professional learning as a group of individuals or alongside department/school colleagues as long as teachers can find some form of collegial support from within or outside of their school. Timperley et al., found in their Literacy Leadership Project, that “the opportunity to work in professional learning communities with others who shared the same goals and faced the same challenges” (p. 154) was a key factor in teachers’ abilities to implement new approaches. Deep learning can be achieved through teachers learning together. As Figure 1 indicates, deep learning can be achieved through teachers’ exploration of the six adult learning principles illustrated in the diagram. The literature on adult learning indicates a need for a deep, systematic and structured approach to learning if the teacher practice and the underlying beliefs are going to be changed (Blase & Blase, 2003).

Collaborative learning is guided by an orientation towards constructivism as a way of understanding how individuals make sense of the world. Constructivism has its origins in Dewey (1926) and Vygotsky (1978) who were concerned about learners constructing their own meaning and understanding in the professional field in which they were employed. Dewey’s model of cognitive constructivism depicts learners as autonomous agents who have individual objectives and priorities. Likewise Vygotsky’s theory of knowledge acquisition views knowledge as a socially constructed product (Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2008). Thus collaborative structures of learning encourage socially constructed understandings of leadership learning.

### ***Active engagement***

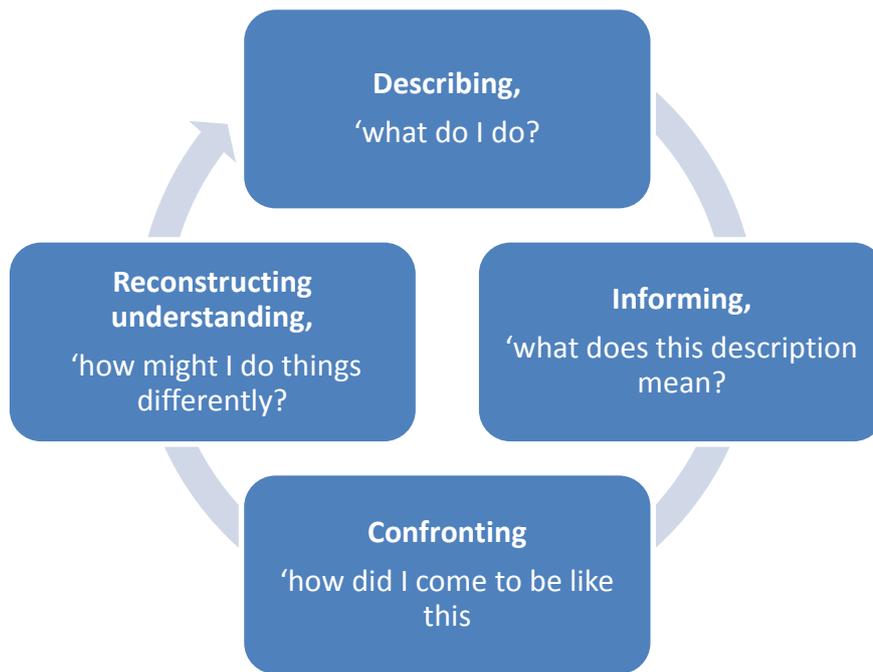
A second adult learning principle is active engagement. Teachers need to be actively engaged in their own learning in order to create new understandings about practice. Active engagement of teachers is particularly valuable when links are made to teachers’ own experiences so that they take ownership of their learning (Carroll, 2011; Johnson & Kardos, 2003; Roberts & Pruitt, 2009). If learners are encouraged to be active members in their learning and make links to their own experiences, they are able to actively interpret new information through the lens of prior understandings (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2010; Timperley, 2011a). By acknowledging and

building on teachers' previous experiences through a constructivist approach, teachers are able to challenge the underpinning assumptions and beliefs they hold so that new knowledge can emerge. Interestingly the authors of the BES: Teacher Professional Learning and Teaching (Timperley et al., 2008) found that it was necessary for teachers to cue existing knowledge in order to understand new information so practice could be changed. While cueing existing knowledge was a necessary part of the learning process, they argued it was insufficient on its own to create new understandings. They argue teachers also need to be involved in an on-going inquiry process to create change.

Continuing the focus on teachers' learning, Timperley (2011a), in a recent background paper for Australian Institute for the Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) stated the need for negotiation of new understandings to affect student outcomes. Lovett (2002a) has also argued that teachers need to be involved in decisions about their learning so that learning can be more productive, meaningful and relevant, as adult learners bring their own history of experience to a learning relationship. The literature suggests that an optimum environment for learning is created when teachers are able to be active partners in their learning by co-constructing their knowledge (Jonson, 2008; Timperley, 2011a). Therefore there is strength in the notion that collaborative learning is contingent on active engagement of teachers in their learning. Deep learning (refer to Figure 1) which changes teachers' underlying beliefs can be achieved through teachers' active engagement in their learning.

### ***Critical Reflection and Inquiry***

Critical reflection and professional inquiry are related terms which appear in the literature. They are combined in Figure 1 to recognise their alignment. Several authors (Absolum, 2006; McGee & Fraser, 1994; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) acknowledge the importance of critical reflection for teachers' professional learning. Watson and Wilcox (2000) endorse the value of critical reflection saying it is "particularly valued in the context of a professional life, because of its potential to change learning while we are in the midst of professional practice" (p. 57). Carroll (2011) claims it is through reflection that teachers are able to review their experiences and consider multiple possibilities. Garavuso (2010) highlights the need to challenge current beliefs and practices, whereas Smyth (1991, p. 106) provides a suggested set of phases accompanied a series of questions for teachers to examine their practice (refer to Figure 2):



**Figure 2: Smyth's four forms of reflection model**

Smyth argues that the act of writing a narrative of what is occurring in situations which teachers find confusing or perplexing assists them in organising their teaching. He claims this is an essential step in teachers finding and speaking “their own voices” (p. 114) and in doing so maintains they are more likely to engage in dialogue with others so they can discover the meaning of what has occurred and how they may make changes. Forde (2011) endorses the notion that reflection can build ‘self-efficacy’ (p. 140) as teachers have the belief that they can achieve desired outcomes and the confidence that their abilities are based on evidence rather than supposition. Similarly, Parsloe and Leedham (2009) suggest a GROW technique. This model uses a simple set of questions to establish a goal, examine the reality, consider the options and confirm the will to act. This view of reflection which interrogates previously taken-for-granted assumptions is often called reflexivity or critical reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Moon, 2006; Taylor & White, 2000). It is this definition of the deepest level of reflection which is referred to in this literature review. While Schon portrays a single loop of reflection “as largely a solitary process”(p. 41), this thesis refers to critical reflection as a central part of collaborative learning conversations involving a double loop with other people (Argyris & Schon, 1978) .

Carroll (2011) argues that the development of reflective practice enables teachers to learn during all stages of their teaching careers so that it “becomes a lived experience or way of being”(p. 83). The goal of critical reflection is to deepen our understanding of what we do and why, so that we can justify our actions. Deep learning (refer to Figure 1) which changes teachers’ underlying beliefs can be achieved through critical reflection on practice.

## **Critical Reflection through Learning Conversations**

Learning conversations offer teachers a way of reflecting about practice with their colleagues (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Learning conversations are occasions when teachers can collaboratively unpack what they are doing and why through dialogue. Brookfield (1995) purports that these critical conversations have the potential to unravel “the shroud of silence in which ... practice is wrapped” (p. 35) and address the isolation experienced in the classroom through collaborative reflection.

Cheliotis and Reilly (2010) concur that learning conversations are “an essential tool for the 21st century leader” as they are based on the assumption that through careful use of language a teacher can be empowered to reflect on and change their own practice (p. 9). Learning conversations are planned and address specific purposes. They involve the exchange of ideas and a search for shared meanings and common understandings. However, authors vary in their choice of terminology when referring to the importance of teacher talk about practice, for example: teacher dialogue (Carroll, 2011), teacher talk (Lovett, 2002b), disciplined dialogue (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009), coaching conversations (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Cheliotis & Reilly, 2010), conferencing (Blase & Blase, 2003), constructive problem talk (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) and critical conversations (Brookfield, 1995). This thesis will refer to this concept as learning conversations as this term encompasses the deliberate conversations teachers can have together as well as the one-on-one conversations held between a mentor and mentee.

MacBeath and Dempster (2009) highlight the need for ‘A learning dialogue’ to enhance teachers’ work in leadership roles. Language is considered fundamental in creating and sustaining a school culture as well as to the development of connections between people. Teachers need to develop shared understandings through collaboration so that they can achieve a common purpose. This requires teachers to network with others, including teachers outside of their circle, and for those who hold recognised leadership positions to connect with teachers so that all can become leaders of learning. Learning conversations can become a tool for rich or deep learning (refer to Figure 1) where understanding is developed and community knowledge is built. Learnings are grounded in honesty and trust but nevertheless take time to nurture and become fully embedded within a school’s culture. That dialogue becomes disciplined according to MacBeath and Dempster (2009) when “discussions about leadership, learning and the relationship between them are not trivial, trite, piecemeal or sporadic” (p. 107). Instead they are constructive conversations positively focused on learning.

The findings of the Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration: School Leadership and Student Outcomes (Robinson et al., 2009) also support the focus on learning conversations but the authors refer to them as “constructive problem talk”. The authors of that BES promote the value of constructive problem talk as necessary for leaders to inquire into the “theory that underpins the practice that needs changing” in order for them to understand the context and affect meaningful change. The fourth adult learning principle subsumed within the ‘critical reflection and inquiry book’ (Figure 1) as a blue tab, ‘turning theory into praxis’, is described by Carroll (2011) as also having importance. This is because knowledge gained from one context cannot necessarily be transferred to another context without “the active participation of the teacher-as-learner in the process of making sense of that knowledge” (p. 88). Theory can provide foundations on which to change practice (Brookfield, 1995; Huber, 2011; Lovett, 2002a). It can move reflection on practice beyond the well-worn subjective everyday life theories that are created from teacher experiences (Huber, 2011). In addition Timperley’s work (2011a), has linked professional learning to a moderate improvement in student outcomes. One of the characteristics for improvement noted by Timperley (2011a) was that “teaching practice was informed by theory and theory informed by practice” (p. 12). An understanding of how theory links to practice ensures that teachers can apply their new knowledge not only to a specific issue but to other similar issues which arrive subsequently.

The constructive problem talk highlighted by Robinson, et al., (2009) also supports the notion of ‘deep learning’ (refer to Figure 1) by recognizing that “ successful theory engagement requires a deep understanding of the factors that sustain current practice and, therefore, of the challenges involved in changing it” (p. 44). In addition, the authors of the BES found that involvement of teachers and leaders in dialogue about teaching and learning is important for improving the quality of teaching. Moreover the third BES leadership dimension ‘Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum’ revealed a moderate and educationally significant impact on student outcomes. Leaders in high-performing schools were found to promote collegial discussions of teaching and its impacts on student achievement whilst planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum. A structured deliberate approach to unpacking practice can provide teachers with a framework from which they can reflect on their own learning and address immediate issues of concern. Deep learning (refer to Figure 1) which changes teachers’ underlying beliefs can be achieved through a connection between theory and praxis.

### **Professional/teacher inquiry**

Some authors use the term ‘inquiry’ rather than ‘reflection’. The teacher inquiry approach is an example of a structured approach to reflecting on practice. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009) define

professional or teacher inquiry as a “systematic, intentional study of one’s own professional practice” (p. 6). It allows a focus on the concerns of teachers and “engages teachers in the design, data collection and interpretation of data around a question” (p. 4). It requires an understanding of learning theory which is then translated into practice. Based on a specified outcome, it focuses on an aspect of a teacher’s practice so that student achievement can be enhanced (Carroll, 2011; Dewey, 1998; Moon, 2006; Schön, 1983).

The fifth adult learning principle ‘understanding teachers’ autobiographies’ is also subsumed within the ‘critical reflection and inquiry’ book in Figure 1, but with a red tab. This is also a lens used by Brookfield (1995), who sees an autobiographical lens as the foundation of critical reflection. He considers an analysis of our own autobiographies as essential because it encourages teachers to explain how and why they have reacted to certain situations as a teacher. It is important to consider the varying perspectives from which teachers approach teacher learning as this will impact on how they will view change of their practice. Given that teacher inquiry aims to examine and change practice, Brookfield (1995) sees this exploration of autobiographies as the “first step on the critical path” as teachers “become aware of the paradigmatic assumptions and instinctive reasonings that frame how [they] work” (p. 29). This view is supported by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2012) who explore how the achievement of agency is informed by past experiences. Likewise Msila’s (2012) study also reinforces this idea noting the importance of teachers’ own positive and negative experiences of their childhoods enhancing their teaching. Furthermore teachers’ existing knowledge also informs how new knowledge is integrated. Deep learning (refer to Figure 1) which changes teachers’ underlying beliefs can be achieved through an understanding of autobiographies and their impact on practice.

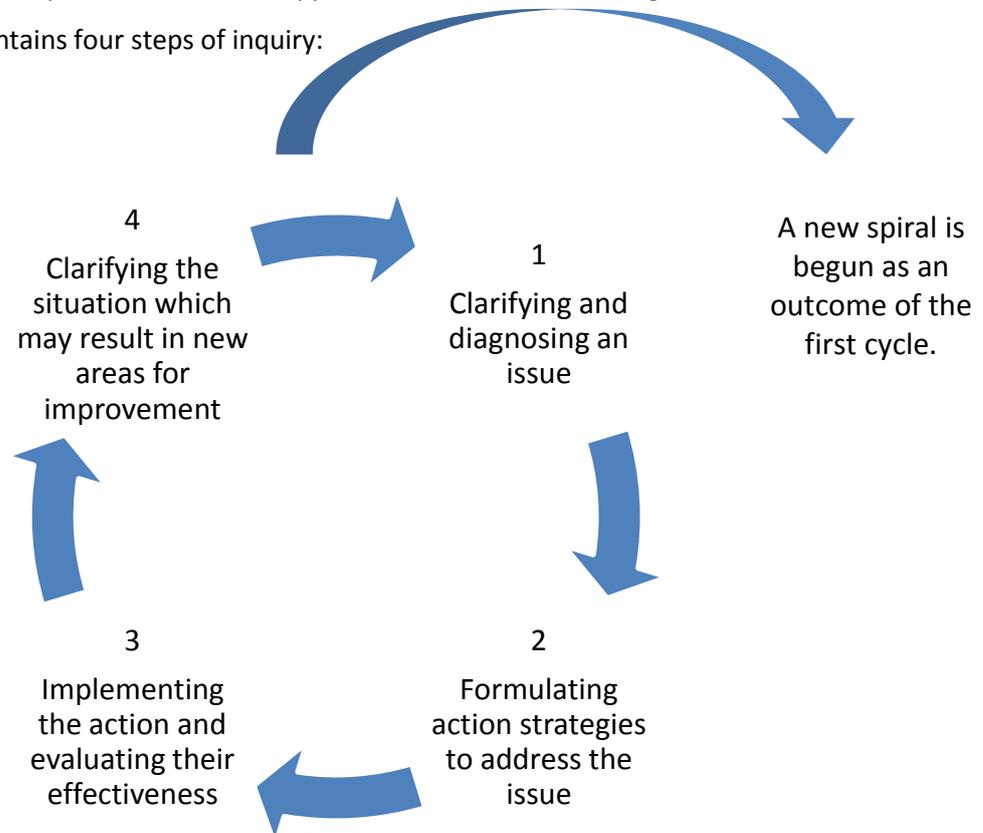
Further evidence of this can be seen in another Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration: Teacher Professional Learning and Development (Timperley et al., 2008). This study found that teachers needed to be aware of their existing pedagogical knowledge (especially when it was limited) in order for them to be motivated enough to actively seek new knowledge and skills. Teachers were found to be more likely to learn when they made links between the new learning and their existing practice, such as the practice of questioning. For example, if they currently used questioning and could see the benefits of asking more open-ended questions, they were more likely to integrate new question forms into their existing frameworks. Teachers’ personal and professional experiences shaped how they viewed teaching and helped them to create their own theories of practice. By understanding where beliefs and assumptions came from, teachers were able to take the first step in challenging those understandings to form new knowledge.

Timperley et al., (2008) have also reported the need for learning processes which create changes in practice. In their metasynthesis they found that substantive change in teacher practice which impacted on student outcomes was difficult to create. Effective professional learning occurred when teachers could ground learning in “the immediate problems of practice’, deepen “relevant pedagogical content” and engage “existing theories of practice” in an “on-going inquiry process’ (p. xli). In later writing Timperley (2011a) has continued advocating the need for professional inquiry to use new theoretical frameworks, otherwise suggesting inquiry is limited to existing knowledge. She has claimed if a substantive difference is to be made to student outcomes, then teachers “usually need to enlist new conceptual frameworks using a range of evidence and accessing different kinds of knowledge that will challenge their thinking and practice” (p. 19). Furthermore an inquiry model is also validated by the first leadership dimension of Robinson’s (2009) BES metasynthesis. These inquiry models include a problem, issue or goal a teacher is addressing. This leadership dimension supports the establishment and expectation of goals and was found to have the second-equal highest mean effect size on improving student outcomes. Leaders are instrumental in establishing the importance and clarity of goals and the development of teachers’ commitment to goals. An inquiry model assists teachers in working towards their own relevant goals in order to develop a mindset of asking questions in, on and about practice (Schön, 1983) in order to address the issues arising in a teacher’s own context.

### ***Action Research Models***

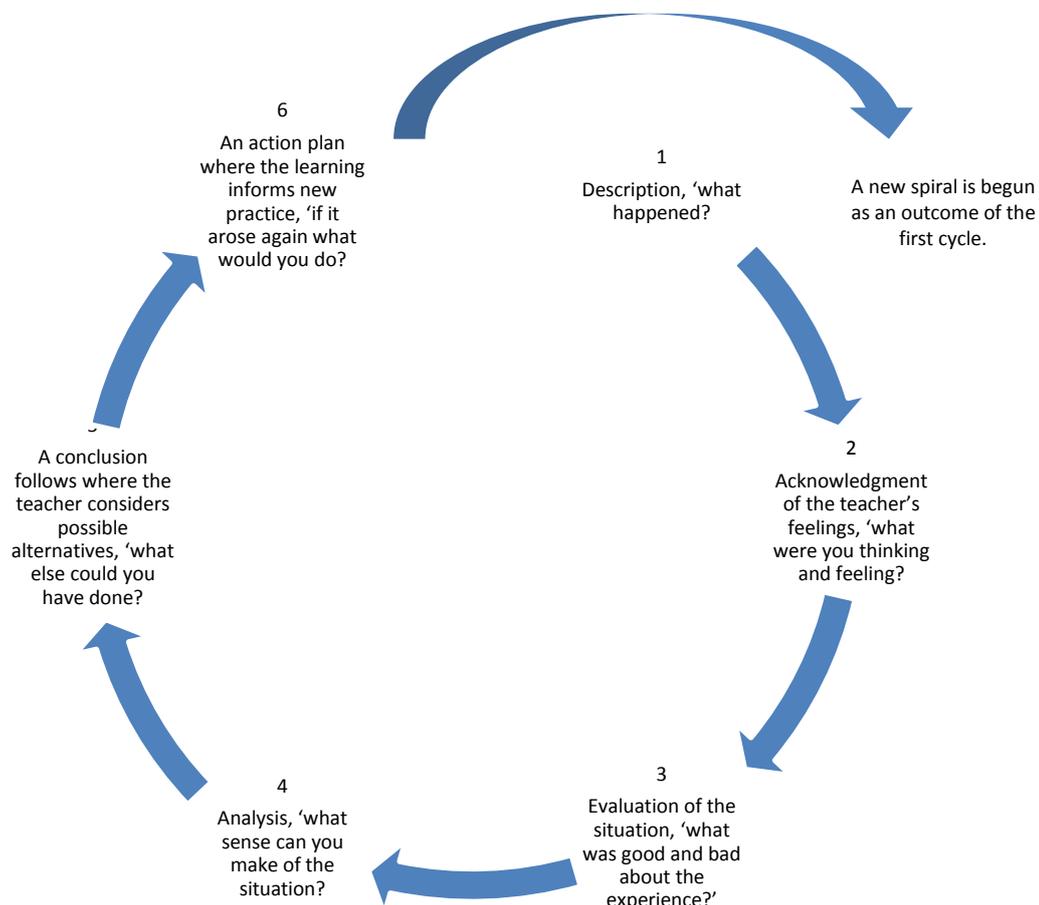
Rather than leaving the learning process to chance, action research authors have helped teachers by introducing a process whereby explicit attention is given to classroom practice so that student learning can be enhanced (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011; Elliot, 1988; Gibbs, 1988; Smyth, 1991). A challenge for schools is to choose or design a teacher inquiry model which suits their purpose and context. Various models exist to support effective teacher inquiry and they offer a way of organising learning into a series of steps. New learning is enhanced when attention is given to the ways teachers learn as is highlighted in the following action research models.

Some authors of traditional action research suggest the use of a continual set of spirals which consist of reflection and action such as Elliot (1988). These models encourage teachers to critically reflect on their current practice, experiment with new approaches and evaluate changes made. Elliot offers a spiral cycle which contains four steps of inquiry:



**Figure 3: Elliot’s model of the action research process**

Similarly, Timperley (2011a) supports cycles of action research models which build on one another so that coherence and deep knowledge are built. While Elliot gives more attention to clarifying what the focus is by having an evaluation loop, another model of reflection advocated by Gibbs (1988) gives more credence to teachers’ emotions by suggesting six steps of action research:



**Figure 4: Gibbs' experiential learning cycle**

Both Elliot's and Gibbs' models involve teachers directing their own learning by identifying the issue and proposing possible strategies to address the concerns. The resulting outcomes are also examined so that new knowledge and skills are understood.

While Elliot and Gibbs encourage teachers to critically reflect on their current practice, test alternative approaches and evaluate changes made, Smyth takes this further by examining the underlying assumptions and beliefs which underpin practice so that new understanding can be reached. As already discussed in the 'reflection' section, Smyth's (1991) four forms reflection model (refer to Figure 2) like Gibbs' model, also asks a series of questions through which teachers can examine their practice. The strength of this model lies in its emphasis on critical reflection which challenges teachers to understand their own histories in order to examine the theories which influence their practice.

Burley and Pomphrey's (2011) model focuses on teachers at the centre of their learning, collaboratively inquiring into their practice within their authentic context. They argue the importance of using research and classroom evidence to inform decisions about change in practice (refer to Figure 1).

Research on the sixth adult learning principle, 'using evidence-based data' subsumed within the 'critical reflection and inquiry' book as a yellow tab in Figure 1, suggests that reflection should be guided, in part, by data, to inform practice. As expressed by Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1994), "there needs to be a commitment to scrutinize such data, to make sense of it, and to plan and act differently as a result" (p. 143).

Burley and Pomphrey's (2011) model offers eight elements of the collaborative learning process: collaboration, inquiry, context, criticality, evidence, interpretation, potential for change/transformation and dissemination. Like other action research models, it requires teachers to take a critical approach to their inquiry by considering the issue from a number of alternative perspectives through questioning and evaluation. They argue the scrutiny of the evidence collected is the basis of the interpretation step so that themes and patterns related to the original question can be investigated. Evidence may take many forms, such as the reading of theoretical texts, observations, interviews and quantitative data collection. Deep learning (refer to Figure 1) which changes teachers' underlying beliefs can be achieved through the use of evidence-based data from practice. By focussing on collaborative inquiry through the use of reflective, critical dialogue, this model encompasses the cyclical nature of action research and the desire to affect real change as seen in Smyth's model.

This sub-section has highlighted the benefits of collaborative learning. In doing so it has been demonstrated that schools can grow leaders from within their existing staff by supporting teachers to take ownership of their learning. The act of talking about practice is considered central to critical reflection and the creation of new knowledge.

### ***Structures which support professional learning***

This subsection will present the structures which support the adult learning principles already discussed (refer to Figure 1). These are depicted on Figure 1 as the perimeter edge of the top and legs to signify the methods or actions which support structures adult learning. Definitions of professional development and professional learning are explored to show how these relate to teacher learning. Structures which support teacher learning, such as teacher Professional Learning Communities and Quality Learning Circles will be examined to show how these can assist professional learning. The third leg in Figure 1, 'collegial mentoring' will be expanded on within the professional learning versus professional development section.

## **Professional Learning versus professional development**

Learning cultures and organisational structures also matter for teachers' learning to prosper. Here it is useful to distinguish between professional development and professional learning. Teacher learning has a greater impact when it embodies the aforementioned adult learning principles. Professional development is often discussed in terms of the activities undertaken rather than focussing on the development of teacher knowledge and expertise (Bubb & Earley, 2011). It is often focussed on teachers being 'talked at', rather than 'talked with' as found in professional learning. It is the changes in teacher thinking and practice which can improve learning for students. Bubb and Earley (2011) describe the pitfalls of traditional professional development saying:

Exposure to, and participation in, staff development activities may or may not bring about change to individual staff's beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours. These changes to individuals may or may not lead to changes in the classroom and school practice. And these changes may or may not lead to improvement in pupil outcomes (p. 806).

The measure of effectiveness of teacher learning is a change in learning, attitudes or beliefs which lead to a change in practice which results in an improvement in student learning or wellbeing. Timperley (2011b) argues that students must be "the basis for understanding what needs to change and evaluating whether those changes have been effective" (p. 6).

As a result, the term, 'professional learning', is increasingly replacing 'professional development' as the preferred term in adult learning literature. Professional learning signals teachers' active involvement in their learning rather than as passive participants of professional development. Fullan (2007) has argued strongly that "professional development as a term and as a strategy has run its course" (p. 35). This shift in terminology away from professional development reflects a dissatisfaction with disjointed, ad hoc, 'in-service workshops' to professional learning which refers to "changes in the thinking, knowledge, skills, and approaches to instruction that form practicing teachers' or administrators' repertoire" (Knapp, 2003, pp. 112-113). The authors of the Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration: Teacher Professional Learning and Development (Timperley et al., 2007) contend that attendance of one-off workshops or listening to inspiring speakers rarely results in changes to teacher practice sufficiently to impact on student outcomes. Those authors report that there is little evidence that "these kinds of events result in the changes to thinking or practice" (Timperley, 2011a, p. 8). This being said, the findings of their study showed that in the core studies the use of external expertise was a necessary feature. However, the use of an expert on its own was not sufficient. The key point made by Timperley (2011a) is that teachers must be engaged in decisions regarding the content of their learning. The type of activity, such as expert involvement,

she argues is not the recipe for success. Rather it is important to clarify that “professional learning is not a process of learning new things and then learning how to implement them” (Timperley, 2011a, p. 8). It is through the identification of how things work in practice that learning is fostered. Timperley (2011a) suggests it is by focussing on the process of learning, rather than the attendance of workshops and courses run by ‘experts’ that an understanding of practice can be deepened.

The challenge is finding ways to put teachers at the centre of their learning and focus on professional learning which improves learning for students. This implies an internal process where teachers “create professional knowledge through interaction with this information” so that previous assumptions are able to be challenged and new meanings are formed (Timperley, 2011b, p. 5). This belief is supported by Lovett and Andrews (2011) who argue that schools which uphold traditional forms of professional development, where teacher ownership is limited, stifle teachers’ ability to revitalize their teaching and respond to student learning needs .

Timperley (2011a) has identified four key principles so that professional learning can become a planned part of the development of every professional in every school:

- professional learning becomes core school business;
- improving outcomes for students forms the reason to engage in professional learning opportunities and the basis for evaluating its effectiveness;
- professional learning opportunities build deep pedagogical content and assessment knowledge focused on what is needed to improve outcomes for students; and
- professional learning environments are consistent with how people learn (pp. 14-18).

## **Professional Learning Community**

A possible structure to support teachers’ collaborative professional learning is a Professional Learning Community. A PLC moves beyond mere congeniality between teachers by offering a structured and purposeful environment where discussions grounded in evidence can occur. The professional learning literature focuses on the central role of professional learning communities as a mediating variable in the effectiveness of professional learning programs (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). Dietz (2008) argues that a PLC can provide an environment which invites “conversations, feedback and risk taking [which is] necessary for individual transformation and systematic changes” (p. 4).

The introduction of a PLC is not without its challenges. Six key challenges dominate the literature in the implementation of a PLC: the examination of a school’s culture; the time it takes to cultivate a collaborative culture; the conflict which arises during the change process; the competition teachers

experience between theories of practice; how schools can provide the necessary resources; and how schools can sustain the improvement of student outcomes and professional practice. These challenges are balanced by the benefits which a formalised structure provides for collaborative teacher learning.

The first challenge for schools is that a PLC requires an examination of a school's culture, views on leadership and provision of resourcing and structures to support learning. A PLC is a shift in power relationships within a school. Therefore, Martin (2011) suggests a PLC supports a distributed leadership approach where equity and genuine participation in decision making are encouraged. PLCs give schools the opportunity to develop the leadership capacity of their teachers by encouraging collaborative learning which has a common purpose and function. Martin (2011) argues that PLCs offer all teachers an opportunity for developing their leadership skills as responsibility and accountability for learning is shared. Cochran-Smith, et al., (2008) support this sentiment. They argue that each member of the PLC is regarded as a learner and a researcher rather than there being a division between 'experts', who have all of the knowledge, and others, who are seen to require the knowledge.

A major challenge in the implementation of a PLC is that the cultivation of a collaborative culture takes time. A strong PLC is based on trusting relationships and the creation of a trusting environment requires careful consideration (Stoll, 2011). DuFour (2010) argues that leaders can take steps to ensure the creation of a PLC is successful, such as, conducting a gap analysis survey to ascertain the school's professional learning needs, providing staff with research and readings on PLCs, sending key staff to conferences on PLCs, encouragement of interested staff to visit schools where PLCs are established, and by providing opportunities for staff to air concerns and have questions answered. Timperley (2011b) concurs that the cultivation of a collaborative culture is difficult to achieve but argues the key point here is that facilitators of a PLC must 'work with' teachers rather than on teachers.

The third key challenge is that those leading the PLC process must recognise that conflict is an inevitable by-product of this substantive change process (DuFour, 2010; Evans, 2001; Newmann, 1996). DuFour (2010) cautions that when conflict turns into resistance to the implementation of a PLC, it is important to focus on the behaviour of teachers who resist the change, instead of their attitudes. If staff are required to "act in new ways" leaders create the possibility of new experiences which can, in turn, lead to new attitudes over time (p. 237). He suggests that hard-core resisters do need to be addressed and brought to account for what is required of them. By ignoring such resisters, it is likely they will affect the experiences of other teachers and the success of the PLC. It is

also important to assure staff that the PLC will have longevity in the school to avoid staff questioning whether the implementation of a PLC is 'just another PD fad' to which they are being subjected. Blankstein, Houston and Cole (2008) develop this idea further by suggesting that through frequent monitoring and assessing of the progress of a PLC, the success of the professional learning model can be achieved. Timperley (2011b) adds that it is important to remember that whether teachers volunteer or not to be part of a PLC it is not likely to affect the effectiveness for students. It is noted that in the Best Evidence Synthesis on Professional Learning and Development "outcomes for students were no better or worse if teachers volunteered or faced pressure to participate" (p. 153).

Timperley (2011b) contends that it is likely that some teachers will experience competition between theories of practice during the implementation of a PLC. Competition between theories "means that what individual teachers value and how they construct their practice in relation to those values are not the same as the values and practice being promoted by the professional learning facilitator" (p. 154). This could occur, for example, when teachers are encouraged to employ an inquiry approach to their practice and the learning of their students as this may challenge a teacher's beliefs about what it is for a teacher to be an expert in their subject. A school's expectations of change in teachers' practice may well "impinge on a teacher's professional identity with more than just a changing practice at stake" (Timperley, 2011b, p. 155). This is especially the case for experienced teachers who have formed their personal theories of practice and about the role of a teacher over many years and may not had their beliefs challenged. Timperley (2011b) suggests that most experienced teachers would feel that they have reached a "mastery and fluency" phase in their teaching (p. 155) and could feel challenged when new approaches are advocated.

The benefits of a formalised learning community can be found in its structure which offers a way to support teachers learning alongside one another (Martin, 2011). This organisational structure provides members with a "glue that holds them together"(p. 46). A collaborative approach helps to build "certain norms, beliefs and assumptions and value systems that bind educators and students" (p. 46). Carroll (2009) concurs with this idea saying it acknowledges that "quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment"(2009, p. 13) but the result of a collaborative culture. Seashore, Anderson, and Riedel (2003) agree that a PLC culture "makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, on-going, and focussed on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes" (p. 3). These ideas are based on the premise that structures should "enable better and deeper communication between members of learning communities (Stoll, 2011, p. 111). The articulation of a school's culture, especially its values and shared beliefs can empower a PLC. This can occur through a celebration of school improvement and through established symbols, rituals and stories.

The fifth challenge for schools is in providing the necessary resources for a successful PLC, such as: time for collaboration, on-going leadership support, information, and ready access to colleagues (Senge, 1994). Roberts and Pruitt (2009) explain that schools choose various approaches to embed a professional learning time into their school timetables such as, early release days for students, coverage of classes by specialists, meetings before or after school and large group activities for students to release teachers so they can meet. Bubb and Earley (2011) endorse this sentiment by advocating schools find time during their regular timetable for professional learning meetings. They argue when this happens school leaders signal a clear message to the school community about the value of learning. Dietz (2008) argues that by providing structures and resources for teachers in PLCs, schools encourage their members to commit to continually refining their practices. Furthermore Stoll (2011) purports that a PLC can also have the added benefit of enhancing teacher morale and job satisfaction as collaborative professional learning provides teachers with support and a sense of community not necessarily found in the isolation of a classroom.

Lastly, the sustainability of a PLC also needs to be considered. Timperley (2011b) argues that sustainability is “about on-going improvement in student outcomes and professional practice” not just maintenance of the status quo (p. 163). The goal is to blur the lines between learning and sustaining. Rather than viewing the implementation of the PLC as the learning that gets sustained over time, learning should be continuous and involve iterative cycles of inquiry; “it is a case of on-going learning, being aware when a situation is so challenging that it means going back to basics or when all it requires is to refocus what is already known” (p. 164). In order to create a culture where members of a PLC feel that they are improving student learning, DuFour (2010) suggests that teachers should be encouraged to choose SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) which are linked to school goals. If each collaborative team in a school PLC chooses one or more of the schools goals, it will drive the work that the team does and provide a clear focus. These goals should be both attainable and stretch the members of the team. Attainable goals are intended to ‘document incremental progress and build momentum through self-efficacy” while stretch goals are intended “to inspire, to capture the imagination” and stimulate the creativity and innovation of individuals while serving as a “unifying focal point of effort” (p. 160). Blankstein, et al.,(2008) add that it is also important to celebrate the successes of the PLC, at a team or school wide level, so that teachers feel that they are part of something which is making a difference to student learning. The use of “symbolic celebrations of accomplishments large and small should occur on a regular basis” (p. 139) as it is a powerful tool for building a broad base of support with students, teachers and the parent community.

PLCs can provide the structure, a trusting environment, research evidence, collaborative expertise and support to develop teachers' practice so that meaningful improvements can be made to student achievement in a school. I now turn to a second form of collaborative teacher learning.

### **Quality Learning Circle (QLC)**

While a PLC culture provides a structured environment for teacher learning, a QLC offers an opportunity for small groups of teachers to co-construct their learning as equal partners through an agreed focus on professional inquiry. The QLC is a variant of a PLC where the focus is on the learner seeking and making changes to their practice in a collaborative, supportive environment (Lovett & Verstappen, 2003). Lovett and Andrews (2011) define a QLC as a framework where teachers lead their own learning, rather than learning agendas being imposed by others. The methods and structures through which teachers can learn are varied, yet they all focus on a collaborative approach which involves deep learning (refer to Figure 1) Deep learning is depicted in Figure 1 as a strong table top.

The participants of a QLC decide on the learning focus, how the group will function and all parties are seen as learners in the process of improving teaching for the purpose of improved student achievement (Absolum, 2006; Hopkins et al., 1994). Stoll, Fink, and Earl (2003) argue that this process allows teachers to arrive at a "shared sense of meaning" for the direction of the group and the goals that will be worked towards. Rowe (2003) argues that this notion involves teachers in a high level of professionalism and decision-making which engenders trust.

Stewart and Prebble (1993) state that as part of the QLC, teachers take opportunities to observe one another in the classroom as they demonstrate their interpretation of the agreed group focus. These predetermined classroom visits involve the observer as a learner who observes "something the teacher wants to share" (p. 136) rather than an imbalanced hierarchical relationship of supervisor and teacher.

A special component of a QLC is the opportunity for teachers to talk about their practice. Lovett and Verstappen (2003) suggest that classroom observations can be further discussed at subsequent meetings. Burley and Pomphrey (2011) argue that a QLC enables teachers who have a range of knowledge and experience 'to engage in dialogue and collaborative reflection' (p. 124). The verbalisation of what is occurring in the classroom puts teachers in the position of being change agents where they can learn from each other (2001). Carroll (2011) explains this idea further by stating that while development of practice may be challenging at an individual level, it may be more manageable through group knowledge and support.

Stoll (2003) believes that a facilitator is needed who can ‘hold the context’ of the dialogue so that discussions are kept focussed on the group’s goals. Lovett and Verstappen (2003) argue that these conversations can lead to reflection and the “construction of new meanings” (p. 32). In this way QLCs encourage reflexivity through collaborative practices which contextualise issues and strategise solutions (Garavuso, 2010; Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & Lopez-Torres, 2003). Therefore a QLC model can provide support and resources so that teachers can openly discuss theories and their impact upon practice.

### ***Key Messages***

In summary there are four key points to note when considering how teachers’ collaborative professional learning can be enhanced. These include:

- learning together and responding to teachers’ contexts
- growing leaders from within by teachers taking ownership of their own learning
- building relationships through the act of talking about practice as this promotes critical reflection and the building of new knowledge
- providing teachers with a supportive school culture which offers formalised structures, such as a PLC /QLC and a teacher inquiry framework

### **Teachers as Leaders**

The second section of this literature review, ‘teachers as leaders’, has two subsections. The first subsection explores key understandings around leadership including the debate surrounding teacher leaders. Depictions of how leadership and learning are connected are presented along with views on the culture of schools necessary to support leadership for learning. The second subsection examines how teachers can collaboratively assume responsibility for their own professional learning through the leadership activity of ‘educative’ mentoring. This subsection will examine the factors which support mentor growth along with tools to facilitate effective mentoring, such as learning conversations. Classroom observations and reflective journals will be discussed in Chapter 3.

### ***Conceptions of teacher leadership***

When teachers share their expertise with each other they are enacting leadership as they share issues and concerns of practice. The literature offers multiple views of teacher leadership (Barth, 1999; Hess, 2008). Lovett and Andrews (2011) contend that at one end of a continuum there is a belief that indeed all teachers can be leaders but at the other end there is a perception that only a select number see themselves as the ‘superstars’ and leaders of the profession. This latter group

serve as instructional coaches or professional developers, roles that allow teacher leaders to talk about teaching with colleagues in named roles. Harris and Mujis (2004) argue that a more inclusive view of teacher leadership is “teacher led improvement” because it has more relevance and appeal to teachers. This term is associated with collaboration, partnership and professional networking (p. 2). It is understood as “professional initiative and learning” within and between individuals schools which puts improvements in classroom practice at its centre (p. 964).

Andrews and Crowther’s (2006) term ‘parallel leadership’ supports school leaders and teachers working together through “mutual respect, shared sense of purpose, and encouragement of individual variations and difference” for school improvement (p. xii). They see sustainable educational improvement depending on powerful communities of teacher leadership rather than the capacities of a few individual leaders. Hallinger and Heck (2011) from their USA longitudinal study, also agree that in order to impact on school improvement, ‘collaborative’ leadership is required. In their definition of collaborative leadership they include actions shared among the principal, teachers, administrators and others. They see the need for organisational processes to empower staff and students, to encourage broad participation in decision-making, and foster shared accountability for student learning. Hallinger and Heck (2011) point out that leadership is highly contextualised. The leadership approach in a school needs to match the school’s profile of learning results and improvement capacity. They caution that historical and current conditions in a school must all be factored into leadership decisions.

Teachers who want to develop their teaching expertise tend to seek out new challenges. Leadership work is one career challenge which could potentially address the declining morale of secondary school teachers<sup>1</sup> (Wylie, 2012). Johnson and Donaldson (2007) argue that one problem is that teachers often only see opportunities outside of the classroom when wanting to advance their careers and that rather what is needed are leadership roles centered within classrooms. Morris and Patterson (2013) agree and contend that there is “little recognition for excellent teachers to stay in the classroom or mentor other teachers in their professional growth” (p. iii), and this needs to be addressed.

Likewise distance from the classroom is considered a barrier for leadership work by Lovett and Cameron (2010) who argue many teachers view leadership work as taking them away from teachers’ greatest source of satisfaction, teaching. Murphy (2005) acknowledges this difficulty and links effective teaching to a pathway for teachers as leaders by seeing it as a prelude rather than an

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<sup>1</sup> In a survey conducted by NZCER in 2012, only 57% of secondary school teachers reported having good or very good morale compared with 70% in 2009.

end point. He, like the findings of the Robinson et al. (2011) and Timperley et al. (2009) BES syntheses, sees teacher leadership as making a difference to student achievement and needing to link closely to classrooms. These authors support the notion that the profession needs teachers who see their colleagues as a source of influence and support as it is from within the profession where future leaders will emerge. Furthermore Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) suggest the current leadership crisis of recruitment, retention and attrition will be addressed only when schools create attractive career pathways for teachers as leaders. Their book 'Awakening the Sleeping Giant' signifies the unrecognised potential of excellent classroom teachers as the next generation of leaders (positional or as required).

Cameron and Lovett (2011) attribute lack of support for teachers transition into extended roles as the reason why teachers are reluctant to seek out these opportunities . This is echoed in Wylie's (2012) NZCER survey where she found that only half of secondary teachers reported that their schools focused on the on-going learning of teachers as adult professionals<sup>2</sup>. Teachers told her they wanted more time to "reflect, plan, and share ideas" (p. 23) and were more concerned in 2012 with getting good quality professional development than they were in the 2009<sup>3</sup> survey. These findings confirm concerns that opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership potential are limited when conceptions of leadership are only recognised in terms of formal positional roles.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) also see teacher leadership as focussing on student achievement at the classroom level and influencing a learning community as is seen in their definition of teacher leaders: " teachers are leaders who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (p. 5).

This concept of teacher leadership offers a different view of leadership than that which has dominated much of the leadership literature where leadership is focussed on a 'sole' leader. Townsend and MacBeath (2011) contend that this view of leadership carries with it assumptions about heroic individuals who have a particular role to play and who hold absolute authority. They note a move away from management to school leadership emerging from the leadership literature. Various profiles, trait theories and categories of competencies have been written as a result, however ,writers, such as Zaccaro and Klimoski (2001) cited by Townsend and MacBeath (2011) have argued the focus on a narrow set of characteristics ignores "cognitive abilities, motives, values, social

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, only 51 percent say their school leaders ensure they have useful blocks of time for their professional learning.

<sup>3</sup> 37 percent compared with 25 percent in 2009

skills and implicit expertise” (p. 3). In response to the focus on types of leaders in the leadership literature, MacBeath (2012) offers an alternative model in which he focuses on the connection between leadership and learning.

### ***Connecting leadership and learning***

If teachers are to be agents of change in their own practice they need support and an environment in which they can be leaders and learners. The challenge for schools is how to create and sustain an environment where leadership and learning have a close connection for this is now being promoted as the future pathway of school leadership (MacBeath, 2012; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; MacBeath & Swaffield, 2009). This is because the moral purpose of education, namely; improved student outcomes, (Barber & Fullan, 2005) is dependent on teachers having opportunities to share expertise and issues of concern with one another.

MacBeath and Swaffield 's (2009) conception of leadership for learning is one of activity or action. They maintain leadership for learning is a distinct form of educational practice that involves an explicit dialogue, maintaining a focus on learning, attending to the conditions that favour learning, and leadership that is both shared and accountable. It is not just the physical spaces which constitute an environment for learning but also the knowledge, attitudes and skills of the staff and students and the value the school places on learning (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009) which allows conversations about practice to be regular occurrences. It also includes the partnerships all members of the learning community make with each other and the ways in which teachers acquire, expand and use their professional knowledge.

MacBeath (2012) deepens understandings of the connection between leadership and learning. He likens leadership to an oxygen supply whereby professional learning is made possible through the sharing of expertise to improve student learning. A focus on learning can change a teacher's priorities and mind-set. If encouraged to ask different kinds of questions, teachers can question their leadership and that of their colleagues. MacBeath (2012) argues that opportunities for learning enhance leadership and in a cyclical motion, leadership enhances learning in return. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) concur that it is teachers who represent the largest group of prospective leaders and further work is needed for them to realise their potential in being leaders of learning affecting classroom and school-wide improvement.

Strength, resilience and capability of a school are found in its “distributed intelligence, its shared leadership and its communal learning” (MacBeath & Swaffield, 2009, p. 45). Coleman (1988) refers to this as ‘social capital’ to emphasise social networks and connections. Social capital involves

norms, such as trust and collaboration and changes depending on the frequency and quality of contact between people. Leadership for learning is concerned with keeping alive social capital as it is the weak links that provide the “scope and space for the exercise of agency in respect of both leadership and learning” (MacBeath & Swaffield, 2009, p. 46). Agency is defined as “the capacity to make a difference” (p. 46) and is seen by MacBeath and Swaffield (2009) as the missing link between leadership as activity and learning as activity, leadership as dispersed and learning as distributed. Their view is that learning is everyone’s responsibility, as is leadership by recognising that talent and expertise are fluid rather than fixed entities. Each is made visible through behaviour and actions and the environment created for the school community. In this way leadership for learning can be described as “principled influential interactions arising from and resulting in valued learning” (p. 49).

MacBeath and Dempster (2009) caution that because ‘heroic’ leadership is a deeply entrenched concept, it will take a long time to shift. They suggest schools require specific structures to support shared leadership but caution that time and effort are required to transform organisational and cultural structures, including giving students a voice. They advocate a commitment to a school culture which empowers everyone to take responsibility for learning and for expertise to be shared not just through formal leadership roles but a more fluid notion of leaders and followers. Murphy (2005) concurs that until traditional views of leadership are challenged, opportunities for teachers to see themselves as leaders beyond their own classrooms, will be limited. If teachers view leadership as connected to those in positions of power, their likelihood of learning alongside others will be inhibited.

### ***Mentoring as a Leadership Activity***

One potential leadership activity which offers teachers an opportunity to be teacher leaders is the act of mentoring. A focus on a mentoring or coaching role brings together the previous two sections in demonstrating how teachers can collaboratively assume responsibility for their own professional learning through the leadership activity of mentoring.

#### ***Purpose of mentoring***

A potential leadership activity for teacher leaders is the growth of their mentoring capabilities. A mentoring relationship supports collaborative learning, based on classroom practice, by connecting leadership and learning. It offers a mutually beneficial relationship for mentors and mentees as well as the students who are the focus of their learning conversations.

The terms mentoring or coaching are often used interchangeably by authors in mentoring literature to describe a collaborative relationship between teachers which focuses on reflection on teacher

practice. Cheliotis and Reilly (2010) argue that a coaching model requires mentors to operate in a manner which assumes that others are whole and capable, that they don't need to be 'fixed'. The underlying assumption is that advice-giving undermines the confidence and self-worth of others.

Webber and Robertson (1998) purport that mentoring moves leaders beyond self to a bigger, more critical perspective on their own practice in particular and educational leadership in general.

Robertson (2005) also states that mentoring allows participants and mentors to co-construct their understandings of pedagogy and subject specific knowledge to "transform their beliefs into actions that make a difference" (p. 56). It is also beneficial as it acts as professional learning in that it aims to "change behaviour and beliefs in a manner that leads to appropriate changes to behaviour and to those changes becoming institutionalised" (p. 58). Mentoring or coaching, "builds capable leaders by enabling them to bring critical reflection to their leadership practice" (p. 66). The process of mentoring allows leaders "to gain practical experience of and skills in utilising reflection in, on, and for practice" (p. 66). Wang and Odell (2002) support this sentiment arguing that being reflective is an essential quality of good leadership and therefore the experience of mentoring is of great benefit to both the mentor and mentee.

### ***Educative mentoring***

The challenge for schools is how to develop a mentoring culture which promotes an examination of practice so that new alternatives can be discovered and owned by teachers in a collaborative environment. This requires a school to choose a mentoring model which puts learning at its core. Mentoring can occur between an experienced teacher and a provisionally registered teacher or between two experienced teachers. Most of the literature on mentoring is concerned with the induction and support of provisionally registered teachers. The literature on mentoring for experienced teachers is not so visible.

Traditionally mentoring conjures up images of an older, expert teacher who passes on their experience and knowledge to a beginning teacher. Early understandings of mentoring focussed on a mentor providing emotional support to their mentee (Little, 1990; Wang, Odell, & Strong, 2006; Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). The premise was that a beginning teacher required emotional support as they transitioned to the role of a teacher. Mentors were seen as experts and role models, whereas mentees were apprentices who would learn how to teach through a sharing of practical advice and teaching strategies (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996; Koballa, Bradbury, Glynn, & Deaton, 2008; Wang & Odell, 2002). Achinstein and Villar (2004) note that this view of mentoring is especially associated with the induction of provisionally registered teachers. Such mentors typically

solved the mentee's day-to-day problems and helped mentees gain access to resources and socialisation to the culture of the school.

In order to address the need for an approach to mentoring which supports teachers co-constructing their learning, more recent research promotes mentoring as a relationship where teachers collaborate as equal partners to solve problems of practice (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996). Koballa, et al., (2008) contend that these relationships blur the boundaries of mentor and mentee and focus on jointly arriving at new understandings of practice. Given that the context of authentic classrooms experiences is where novices' most crucial learning experiences arise (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996; Wang & Odell, 2002), Feiman-Nemser (1998) argues for a type of mentoring which uses the classroom as a basis for professional learning with a mentor. This is called 'educative mentoring'.

Educative mentoring is based on a vision of good teaching and offers a framework through which schools can ensure current practice is examined and challenged. Whilst Feiman-Nemser focusses solely on novice teachers, her model provides a framework which can be used with provisionally registered teachers or as a starting platform for the more experienced teachers. Educative mentoring refers to a specific type of mentoring which encourages novices to use their own practice as a base for learning as they co-constructing new meanings with mentor teachers. An understanding of 'educative' mentoring provides teachers with knowledge and skills they can use as they work with others. Its core principles include "cultivating a disposition of inquiry, focusing attention on student thinking and understanding, and fostering disciplined talk about problems of practice" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 28). Bradbury (2010) argues that unlike more traditional forms of mentoring that focus on a beginning teacher's survival, 'educative' mentoring is based on a broader concept which prioritises reflection and continued growth. It seeks to meet the immediate needs of the teacher while also promoting goals for long-term growth. Feiman-Nemser (1998) describes mentoring as 'learning to teach' where a mentee is immersed in meaningful goal-directed activities which develop their practice. This kind of mentoring relationship aims to strike a balance between valuing the ideas of the novice while developing together shared visions of good practice

Feiman-Nemser (1998) reasons that if teaching is viewed as an intellectual practice, "a form of situated inquiry, an uncertain enterprise that depends on interpretation, judgement, decision-making" then teachers are required to think on their feet and respond to ever-changing situations (p. 69). Teachers could learn alongside one another, through the practice of experienced practitioners articulating their internal dialogue within a situation, such as Schon's (1987) 'reflection in and on' action model ; that is the reflection teachers do before and after an action and 'reflection-in-action'; where teachers adjust their instruction in accordance with students' reactions in the

classroom (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 39). A learner focussed approach was found to be an important success factor in the *Induction and Mentoring Pilot Programme* (Butler & Douglas, 2011): “The personalised inquiry approach of the pilot programme was contextualised, with induction and mentoring activities that tended to be responsive to the PRTs’ needs” (p. ix).

### ***Professional learning for Educative mentoring***

An important question arises for schools wanting to enable effective learning cultures. This question is how to ensure mentors have sufficient knowledge and skills to be effective. Athanases, Abrams, Jack, Johnson, Kwock, McCurdy et al (2008) state that professional learning for mentors must be flexible to meet the individual needs of mentors in their specific contexts.

Schneider (2008) believes that mentors need opportunities to articulate their understandings of mentoring (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Koballa et al., 2008) and that they need exposure to ‘educative’ mentoring models to develop their conception of the role (Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Furthermore they suggest the importance of provisionally registered teachers being asked to state their expectations of the mentoring relationship (Bradbury & Koballa, 2007; Koballa et al., 2008). Mentors also need to examine their own views on teaching and learning and compare them to current research (Wang & Odell, 2003).

A number of authors have paid attention to the skills and characteristics mentors need. Robertson (2005) contends that any mentoring situation requires the mentor to facilitate “trust, respect and confidentiality”(p. 95) in order for the partnership to be successful. As Scherer (1999) expresses, mentoring is a “partnership” which “calls for an explicit agreement on the part of the person being coached to be coached and on part of the person acting as coach to coach”(p. 160). The emphasis of mentoring and coaching literature is that trusting relationships take time to build but that this trust is essential in order for mentees to be able to share their experiences in a safe environment (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Bartell, 2005; Glickman, 2002; Robertson, 2005). Part of the trust between the mentor and mentee is a commitment to the mentoring experience. Robertson (2005) strongly supports dedication of time to the purpose of “building a professional partnership” (p. 96). She also advises that it is also necessary to set goals and action plan as “goal setting enables leaders to look ahead and determine desired outcomes” (p. 132).

Feiman-Nemser (1998) advocates for the employment of collaborative learning practices in a mentoring relationship. The mentors in her study employed collaborative activities such as co-planning and co-teaching. They ensured there was time for learning conversations prior to and following teaching as well as more extended interaction. Mentoring opportunities were positioned around the edges of their teaching. The tools of mentoring, observation, co-planning, co-teaching,

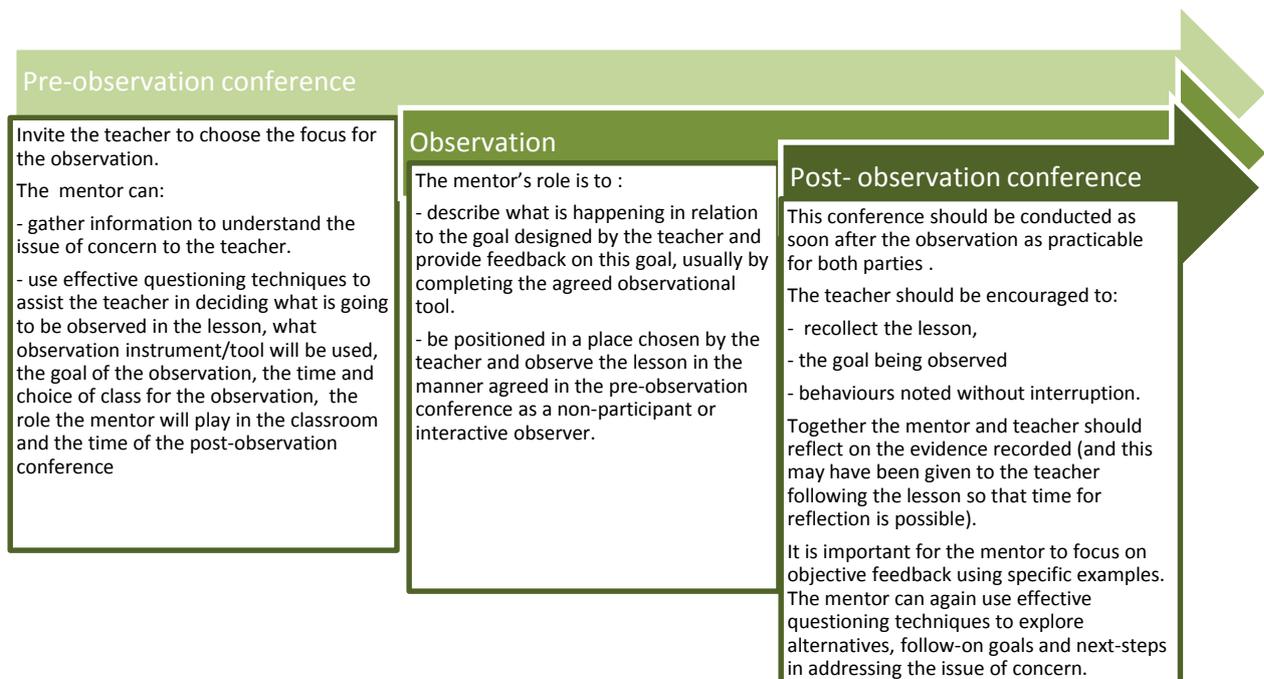
joint inquiry, critical conversation and reflection” (p. 73) were also seen to be the tools needed for continuous improvement in teaching. By supporting teachers to become effective mentors a ‘culture of mentoring’ was established which ensured a focus on dialogue about teaching and learning becomes commonplace.

Feiman-Nemser (1998) argues that the developmental level of the mentee needs to be respected so that the learning is specific and relevant. This argument is in line with adult learning principles (refer to Figure 1). Feiman-Nemser acknowledges the knowledge; beliefs, and autobiographies teachers bring to their practice and aims to assist mentees in the examination of their beliefs about teaching and learning. This is how their developmental needs are taken into account because they are encouraged to be actively engaged in their learning as they reframe problems of practice from a new perspective through questioning and brainstorming possible solutions to problems.

Many writers argue that mentoring should be based in the mentee’s own context with the classroom as the site of learning (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; McIntyre et al., 1996; Stanulis, 1995). In this way mentoring is considered a leadership activity as there is a focus on teachers talking deliberately about their practice (Southworth, 2011). It is the role of the ‘educative’ mentor to assist mentees to adopt an analytical stance by understanding that there are no ‘one way’ solutions to problems and one solution will not suit every context (Bradbury, 2010). Through modelling mentors can help teaching to be seen as a complex activity that requires a continuous inquiry stance which employs reasoning and decision-making (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Mentees can be encouraged to view learning and learning activities from a student perspective and to think aloud about how they think students would interpret the knowledge and work discussed in class. Observational data and student work can provide evidence for a mentee of issues which affect student learning (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Wang et al., 2008). Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues that mentors can support the learning of novices by providing current research to reinforce “theoretical ideas in context” (p. 24) which links to adult learning principles of connecting theory to practice. The nature of open dialogue in a ‘educative’ mentoring relationship means that both parties are exposed to new thoughts and solutions to questions of practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Mentors require professional learning around classroom observations and how these can be used effectively to give feedback on teacher practice (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009). In many New Zealand schools classroom observations are associated with the two provisional years of teaching and teacher appraisal, so it is understandable that many teachers may be nervous about others observing in their classrooms as receiving feedback on practice is often an infrequent event. The importance of a trusting mentoring relationship is crucial in addressing teacher reluctance and

disquiet. The process of a pre-observation conference, observation and post-observation conference can provide a teacher with a supportive structure from which to reflect on practice (Bubb, 2007; Chism, 2007; Jonson, 2008). Bubb (2007) and Jonson (2008) outline specific behaviours mentors can use to ensure the observations are used as a valuable reflection tool for learning conversations between teachers (refer to Figure 5 below):



**Figure 5: Conferencing for observations**

MacBeath and Dempster (2009) argue that by using data, such as the direct observation of children's learning, teachers can learn more about their own teaching and "how to achieve a greater degree of consonance between what is taught and what is learned" (p. 75). In the BES: Teacher Professional Learning and Development (Timperley et al., 2008) demonstrated that approximately half of the core studies included the collection of assessment data to identify professional learning needs, identify student learning needs, inquiry into the effectiveness of practice or provide a catalyst for initial and on-going engagement. This data provided valuable information for teacher professional learning. In addition, one of the findings of the New Zealand Induction and Mentoring Pilot Programme was that "observation is an important part of the culture of inquiry in a mentoring and coaching-focused school"(Butler & Douglas, 2011, p. 65).

A challenge here is the appropriate choice of data on which to base changes in classroom practice. Teachers need to have confidence in the chosen data if they are going to make changes to their practice on the data. Classroom observations can focus on teacher behaviours, teaching techniques,

teacher-student interactions, student behaviour, diagnoses of student achievement, and samples of student performance (Glickman, 2002).

Another challenge for mentors is striking a balance between responding to the immediate needs of the novice whilst also keeping to the fore the broader issues of “reform-based teaching” (Bradbury, 2010). Feiman-Nemser (2001) likewise endorses this view suggesting learning conversations may begin at the classroom level, skilled mentors are able to transition to larger issues such as assessment, student diversity and significant learning for all students. Mentees’ ideas are valued and mentors should not force their views on the novice, however mentors can provide guidance when brainstorming possible solutions to problems. However, Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt, and Van Driel (1998) purport that mentors can challenge the mentee to question their assumptions and develop more sophisticated ideas through questioning and probing. They may use modelling to exemplify teaching practice. Reflection is vital to changing practice but mentors may also complement it with demonstration and discussion of practice (Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Roehrig & Luft, 2006) so that mentees are able to visualise theoretical ideas in practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Mentors need support for professional learning around the interactive approaches they could employ in a mentoring relationship. Different mentoring situations require different mentoring approaches. A challenge for schools is that the development of new understandings of possible mentoring approaches and the practical application of these takes time and frequent practice.

Cheliotis and Reilly (2010) present a leadership practices continuum depicting zones of supervising, mentoring and coaching for 21<sup>st</sup> century schools. They characterise the supervision zone where teachers give advice and ‘the answer’ to teachers; the mentoring zone as offering solutions to problems; and a coaching zone as co-creating the relationship through a goal setting, monitoring process. Educative mentoring supports an approach to mentoring which is collaborative and/or facilitative.

According to Achinstein and Athanases (2006) the positional stance or interactive approach a mentor takes is central to the kind of mentoring relationship formed. Achinstein and Athanases (2006) explore a repertoire of interactive approaches. The first is ‘instructive’, where the mentor controls the interaction and flow of information and offers suggestions and solutions for the mentee to try. The second is ‘collaborative’, where the mentor guides the interaction without controlling it and the mentor and mentee co-construct solutions and materials. The third is ‘facilitative’, where the mentee is encouraged to actively direct the flow of information, self-assesses and self-prescribes new approaches and the mentor facilitates new thinking and problem-solving. The choice of

interactive approach requires different behaviours or skills of a mentor, such as whether open or closed questions are used in learning conversations.

Glickman (2002) also offers leadership approaches and behaviours of mentoring relationships which are similar to those described by Achinstein and Athanases (2006). Glickman (2002) suggests four approaches through which a mentor can support the development of their mentee:

- the directive-control approach;
- the directive-informational approach;
- the collaborative approach; and
- the non-directive approach (p. 44).

He describes a set of behaviours which the mentor should develop in order to suit the chosen approach, such as the behaviours of listening, clarifying, presenting, problem-solving and negotiating for a 'collaborative' approach and listening, clarifying, encouraging, presenting and problem-solving for a 'non-directive' approach. Glickman (2002) discusses the role of each approach but recommends a "move toward collaborative and, at times, nondirective approaches as quickly as possible" (p. 83) so that teachers are supported to become autonomous and competent. He explains that different approaches are necessary for different mentees and encourages mentors to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach so that an appropriate positional stance may be taken for the next cycle of inquiry.

## **Specific Tools of Mentoring**

Three tools of mentoring are important in creating effective mentoring relationships: learning conversations, classroom observations and reflective journals. The importance of learning conversations will now be explored and classroom observations and reflective journals will be discussed in Chapter 3.

### ***Learning conversations skill set***

The purpose of learning conversation has already been articulated, namely it is to stimulate growth and change teacher practice which leads to action. The role of deliberate learning conversations was discussed earlier in the 'critical reflection through learning conversations' section.

Firstly, mentors need to focus on the way they talk in learning conversations. The aim of coaching language used in learning conversations is to communicate deep trust and belief in others. This requires mentors to develop and use particular language skills (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006) so that they are able to support the deep learning of their mentees. Tolhurst (2006) argues that

mentors need to use language appropriate for the mentee by reflecting the linguistic style of the mentee, such as a visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learning preference. She also emphasises the importance of a mentor's body language when talking with a mentee as 55 per cent of the meaning conveyed in communication derives from a person's physiology.

In particular, a mentor's effective use of questioning is fundamental to a successful mentoring conversation. The type of questions a mentor asks reflects the positional stance taken in the relationship. This is because the way the mentor frames the questions shapes the nature of the possible learning. The questioning techniques used can determine whether learning is co-constructed or whether it is dependent on the advice of the mentor. Hartman (2010) asserts that the questions mentors ask can be "powerful teaching, thinking and learning tools" (p. 142). Parsloe and Leedham (2009) also concur that mentors need to be clear about the purpose of the questions they ask their mentee, as different types of questions can elicit differing responses.

Secondly, mentors need to focus on the way they listen actively in learning conversations. Cheliotis and Reilly (2010) argue that mentors are also required to be committed listeners as mentees need to feel valued and know that their mentor is open to their ideas and sincere in their desire to engage in a dialogue. Like Glickman, and Cheliotis and Reilly, Tolhurst believes that listening is one of the cornerstones on which coaching is built. She recommends that a mentor only speaks for 30 per cent of the time and employs listening for learning techniques to ensure the mentee feels heard. This requires a mentor to switch off their inner dialogue so that the mentee has the opportunity to describe their experience without a mentor relating it to their own experiences. The use of non-verbal signs such as active listening body language "give the learner positive messages that s/he is being listened to and valued" (p. 32). Listening for learning also requires mentors to summarise and reflect back what they think the mentee has been saying; a suspension of judgement with the mentor remaining neutral while the learner is speaking; and a demonstration of empathy so that the mentor understands the reality as the mentee sees it.

Skill development needed for effective learning conversations is necessary as mentors are made not born. They too need to be mentored into their role so that so that appropriate skills are modelled and articulated.

### ***Classroom observations***

Classroom observations provide a shared experience that give teachers a reason to talk about practice. Chism (2007) argues that peer classroom observation develops the observer as well as the teacher through "ideas obtained from watching a colleague" (p. 98).

### ***Reflective journals***

Reflective journals are a further compliment to mentoring. They provide an avenue through which mentors and mentees can interrogate their practice with notes and questions about their practice. Moon (2006) argues that the art of writing reflectively allows the learner to make sense of the learning, to clarify what they already know so that new understandings can emerge and transformation can occur. In mentoring, reflective journals can be used for a variety of purposes so that mentors can critically reflect on their learning. These will be further elaborated on in Chapter 3.

### ***Key Messages***

This second section has focused on opportunities for leadership and the structures which support teachers as leaders so that they are able learn and change. By examining the role of leadership within a school it can be seen that a shared model of leadership which celebrates leadership activity rather than positional leadership, can empower teachers to actively contribute to school improvement because there are ample opportunities to lead and learn. Mentoring has been discussed as a possible leadership activity which supports teacher leaders to take ownership of their professional learning through the model of 'educative' mentoring.

Growth of leadership capacity within schools is enhanced through:

- A view of all teachers as leaders;
- A connection of leadership and learning;
- A school culture which supports shared leadership;
- A high degree of professional trust of teachers;
- Co-construction of learning through an 'educative' mentoring model; and
- Professional learning for mentors which develops specific skills necessary for effective mentoring relationships.

Having created a platform of key literature to inform my study, I now introduce the research methodologies (in Chapter 3) which inform the basis of the case study.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### ***Introduction***

This research study aimed to explore teachers' conceptions of mentoring as a leadership activity and as such certain approaches were more appropriate to use than others. To investigate teachers' conceptions and the context, my research study required a qualitative, single case study in order to provide rich, useful data to explore understandings of teachers' perceptions of mentoring. The research aims were addressed through the methodology of participant research with five mentor cases and are set out in this chapter. I have reported the research design in some detail in order to provide a dependability audit of sufficient information for an aspect of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The methods used are outlined: gap analysis survey, career outlines, interviews, quality learning circle, goal-setting and individual meetings with me and reflective journals. A summary of the methods are described in an overview along with the timeline of the intervention study. Ethical issues are discussed which identify the risks of the study and measures taken to address them. Finally the processes for data analysis are outlined.

The research site for this case study is the school in which I am employed as a Head of Learning Area.

### ***Backgrounds of the mentors***

They had all taught at the same school for at least four years prior to participating in the intervention and their average time in a leadership role was nine years. They held positions of responsibility such as assistant heads of departments or learning areas, in large faculties (Asst HODs/HOLAs), heads of smaller learning areas (fewer than four members of staff), or heads of large departments (HOLAs ; greater than nine members of staff). Two mentors held dual roles as HODs of a subject and Asst HOLA of their learning areas.

In this study, mentoring is defined as a curriculum leader working one-on-one with a teacher from the same curriculum area. In most cases the mentee was a PRT. The participant mentors will not be labelled in the data analysis as a means of safeguarding their anonymity, so references will be made to 'a mentor' to denote mention of an individual mentor.

As curriculum leaders, the mentors were expected to mentor at least one other person in their learning area in the year of this study and were required to complete registration or attestation documents for this person. Four of the five curriculum leaders chose to work with a PRT during this study, one choose to work with a more experienced colleague. The curriculum leaders all held responsibility for the curriculum development, delivery and professional learning of teachers within

their subject area to some extent. The mentors ranged from being relatively new to mentoring (for example, the first year of it) to having had numerous years as a mentor. This difference in mentoring experience of the members of the QLC had the potential to ensure that the QLC was a fertile ground for sharing ideas and concerns about mentoring practice (Lovett & Verstappen, 2003) .

## ***Research Methodology***

### **Single Case Study**

A case study is the study of an instance in action (Adelman, Kemmis, & Jenkins, 1980); the study of a particular (Stake, 2010); a single instance of a bounded system (Creswell, 2013). Exploration of a 'bounded system' refers to a "group, individual, setting, event, phenomenon or process" (Gast & Ledford, 2014, p. 11), For this study, the 'bounded system' was a group of five curriculum leaders from one secondary school. In a case study the researcher is concerned with the process as well as the product achieved through the intervention study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The study aims to provide a unique example of curriculum leaders in a situation of learning about mentoring (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

There are a number of strengths of case studies in education. Cohen et al., (2011) and Adelman et al., (1980) offer justifications for a case study. They argue that the results from a case study are more easily understood by a wide audience because they are written in everyday language. It is possible to capture unique features which may otherwise be lost in larger scale data (for example, surveys). Also the insights from case studies are able to be directly interpreted and put to use (Adelman et al., 1980; Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 2012).

This case study recognises the importance of context. As previously described in the introductory chapter, this study uses a single case study of a small number of curriculum leaders at one secondary school, who for the purposes of the research, have been brought together as a professional learning group, called a QLC, in order to explore the understandings of teachers' conceptions of mentoring as a leadership activity. One intention of this study was to understand a particular case, and as a result it is suited to an intrinsic (no interest in generalising the findings) case study (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Given, 2008; Stake, 1994). A case study method suits my wish to understand the beliefs and actions of a group of people who share the same role of curriculum leader and who mentor colleagues. The mentoring is therefore able to be understood within the confines of the mentoring pair (mentor and mentee). Snape and Spencer (2003) purport that case studies generally use "samples that are small in scale and purposively selected" (p. 5) which offers rich detail generated from the data collected.

However, case studies are not without their weaknesses. Problems of generalisability from a small number, lack of cross checking, and researcher bias are issues mentioned frequently (Adelman et al., 1980; Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 2012). Another challenge of case studies is the need to create boundaries around a case; “how it might be constrained in terms of time, events and processes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 102). This is especially important when case studies do not have clear beginnings and endings. In my study there is no attempt to generalise the research findings. The sample of five participants only provided a specific case and did not provide the information needed to make assumptions about other case studies (Yin, 2014). Since this is an intrinsic case and I wanted to gain “better understanding of this particular case” (Stake, 2003, p. 136). I wanted to comprehend what the participants were thinking and the reasons behind their thought processes rather than a desire for other researchers to be able to generalise this case study.

The interactions of the participants during the QLC sessions, the kinds of questions asked in all forms of data collected and how these were translated into the mentors’ actions were of interest. The choice of a case study influenced the methods of data collection because the curriculum leaders were studied in their working environment of a school using observation and systematic interviewing to gather evidence about their thinking and practices. Since this study focussed on what influences curriculum leaders’ conceptions of mentoring and what helps them to improve their practice a case study approach enabled me to portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of individuals and situations through accessible accounts and “to catch the complexity and situatedness of [the teachers’] behaviour” (p. 85)

## **Participant research intervention**

This study has chosen a research method of participant observation because I was instrumental in creating a news learning group in the school. My study focuses on people and I wanted to understand the subjectively structured experiences of the participants. Participant observation is an “active form” of observation (Stake, 2010); I describe my role as an initiator, planner, facilitator and supporter of the mentors’ learning in the QLC. Fraenkel et al., describe an intervention study as a particular method which expects “to influence one or more outcomes” or “contribute to general knowledge by confirming theoretical predictions”(p. 16). This was an intervention study because I initiated the QLC group which did not meet prior to this study. I also planned a focus on mentoring for the QLC by providing readings and practical resources for the participants. My role in the QLC sessions was different from the other participants or from a general facilitator, since I had an understanding of the role of a mentor. This enabled me to support the participants’ learning during the study. I was also able to observe the participants’ behaviour as it occurred in the QLC sessions,

interviews and individual meetings. The role of participant observer has been used in other intervention studies such as Lovett's National Education Monitoring project which focused on eight teachers' professional learning within a QLC (2002a) and the Literacy Leadership Project (Timperley, Parr, & Higginson, 2003), an intervention core study which aimed to raise students' literacy achievement by focusing on teacher professional learning.

Participant observation involves the observer becoming a participant in the situation to be observed (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The role of a PR required me to become a part of the collaborative learning experience in order to understand the participants' world. The advantages of this approach were my involvement and participation in the QLC sessions because these allowed me to "register the experiences and behaviours at first hand from the inside" (p. 204). Bailey (1994) identifies some inherent advantages of using participant observation which are relevant to this study. He states that a participant observer is able to discern participants' behaviour as it occurs and can make notes about the important features as well as responding to issues as they arise. Fraenkel et al., (2012) claims another advantage of developing more intimate, informal relationships with those being observed as observations usually take place over an extended period of time. Cohen et al., (2011) on the other hand suggest observations are usually less reactive than other forms of data-gathering as again the observations occur over time, not just in a one-off event.

## **Qualitative Approach**

This study aimed to focus on curriculum leaders' conceptions of mentoring as a leadership activity, which is a particular aspect of human behaviour and experience, and is therefore suited to a qualitative study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In particular, the case as qualitative research methods aim "to gather 'rich' description and illuminate the phenomenon of interest in ways that educators could relate to" (Mutch, 2005, p. 20) or understand. In order to understand this phenomenon, a study of the participants' unique experiences in their naturalistic environments was chosen, as it is in such environments that "both the researcher and the participant can further their understanding of a particular phenomenon" (p. 19) by capturing the thinking of the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Qualitative research methods were also selected because they enable a greater focus on the quality of a particular activity, and attention to the process as well as the product (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This study aims to answer 'how' and 'why' questions, features of qualitative methods that enable researchers and participants to understand the phenomenon of study, especially how "people construct social order and make sense of their social world" through the perspective of the researcher (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 18). A particular strength of qualitative approaches is that the

researcher is able to construct a picture as it takes shape through the collection and examination of the parts (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

The subjective nature of qualitative research has been criticised for its lack of validity, particularly as it unfolds over time; whether the explanation of a set of data which a piece of research provides can actually be sustained by the data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Secondly, qualitative research is criticised for its lack of reliability; that is, the replicable nature of the research which demonstrates that it is able to produce consistent results (Cohen et al., 2011; Mutch, 2005). These criticisms are made of qualitative research by those who view it through a different paradigm, particularly when compared to quantitative research (Given, 2008). Nevertheless, qualitative research can provide illuminating understanding of the phenomenon through the use of descriptive data which is unique to its context as it offers a holistic impression of the phenomenon being studied.

This study adopts an interpretive orientation in order to disclose, discover and experience meaning (Given, 2008). An interpretive approach supports “the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings” (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 27) in order to understand what they think, how they act and why. Thus the study is interested in the “lived situations” (p. 20) of the participants and in particular, what sense they make of their roles as mentors of colleagues and how they can continue to improve and refine their mentoring abilities. A key reason for the selection of an interpretive approach for this study is that this paradigm allows immersion in the participants’ and researchers’ lives no matter whether the approach involves methods such as case studies, close observations of the participants (ethnography), action research, narrative research or historical research (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Given, 2008). The researcher is able to enter the world of the participants in order to understand it from the participants’ viewpoints. Interpretive research focuses on the meanings of human affairs and observes these from different views (Stake, 2010). The focus on action in an interpretive approach focusses on the participants sharing their experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). Thus an interpretive orientation allows the researcher to be as close as possible to the participants (Cohen et al., 2011) because the researcher endeavours to see the curriculum leaders’ situations through their perspectives.

## ***Methods***

The focus of the next section will examine the rationale for the data collection methods selected for this research project and the ethical considerations made in the research design. The methods which will be discussed are: gap analysis survey, career outlines, initial and final interviews, QLC sessions, goal-setting meetings and individual meetings with me and reflective journals. Discussion of each method is now provided and this is followed by an overview of the data methods used (Figure 3).

## Gap Analysis Survey

All curriculum leaders who attend the school's Teaching and Learning Committee were invited to complete the survey, in order to discover some baseline information about the curriculum leaders' understandings of their school's current professional learning opportunities in: mentoring, PRT induction, professional learning for all staff (including support to meet the registered teacher criteria) and use of classroom observations. Eleven curriculum leaders, out of a possible eighteen, chose to complete the gap analysis and their responses were collated to analyse for possible research themes and to identify possible participants. Members of the Teaching and Learning Committee were also invited to indicate interest in developing their mentoring skills. Two separate forms were provided for these purposes. One was for the gap analysis survey and expressions of interest in the study. In order to ensure anonymity in responses to the gap analysis survey a separate form included space for teacher codes so that possible participants could be identified and contacted. As a result five curriculum leaders indicated interest in partaking in the study.

Surveys provide researchers with data about the opinions of a particular topic or issue (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Surveys are widely used and are a useful instrument for collecting information. They provide structured, often numerical data, and they are able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and are often comparatively straightforward to analyse (Cohen et al., 2011; Wilson & McLean, 1994). A gap analysis survey can be used at the beginning of a study to identify gaps in knowledge/systems/understandings which the participants wish to address. The information gained can "describe some aspects of characteristics of the population of which that group is a part" (p. 393). The survey instrument asks pre-formulated questions so that opinions, attitudes and knowledge may be ascertained. The questions can be closed or open in nature. The advantages of using such an instrument need to be weighed against the time required to develop, pilot and refine the questionnaire and the possible limited opportunities for developed responses (Cohen et al., 2011; Wilson & McLean, 1994).

Pre-formulated questions, which were adapted from the 2009-2010 Teacher's Council Induction and Mentoring Pilot (Butler & Douglas, 2011) were used in the gap analysis survey. The gap analysis asked closed questions about what is currently offered in the school but also allowed for respondents to describe the situation in more detail so that the researcher was able to get an overview of the respondents' experiences and future needs (refer to Appendix 1).

The survey carried the risk of identification of the respondents and their opinions on the current provisions for professional learning in the school. The PR attended a Learning and teaching meeting and explained the purpose of the gap analysis survey and gave assurances of anonymity and the use

of the responses. The participants completed the surveys in their own time and returned the anonymous forms to my pigeonhole. The results of the survey were reported in a manner which avoided identification of participants, for example, through the avoidance of any identifying information, such as subject area.

## **Career outlines**

The career outlines followed the participants' agreement to partake in the study and completion of their initial interviews. Their purpose was to provide information on the mentors' teaching history and their experiences of professional learning prior to the intervention study (refer to Appendix 2); the curriculum leadership positions they had held previously; and the professional development the mentors had undertaken whilst they had been teaching and how useful they had been. There were also opportunities for the mentors to make further comments about their professional learning experiences.

## **Interviews**

A third data-gathering method, interviews, was used to record the five participants' views on leadership and its connection learning. An interview is critical source of evidence in a case study because "most case studies are about human affairs" which should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of the interviewees (Yin, 2014, p. 113). An interview aims to be exploratory and ask 'what', 'how many', 'how much', 'who' and 'where' questions. This data method is flexible and allows for verbal, non-verbal, spoken as well as multi-sensory channels to be heard (Cohen et al., 2011). Once possible participants had given consent and completed the career outlines, I conducted an initial interview which was recorded by a dictaphone and these audio files were kept securely by the researcher. Using interviews establishes a relationship between the PR and participants which was important during the study because I facilitated the QLC sessions and supported the participants' learning about mentoring. Interviews allow "rapport to be established", questions to be clarified and "unclear or incomplete answers can be followed up" (Fraenkel et al., 2012).

The last data-gathering method which was used was the final interview of all of the participants. The purpose of the final interview was evaluation. Initial and final interviews were chosen and similar questions were asked in each, so that the participants' views on leadership, learning and mentoring could be compared and evaluated at the beginning and end of the intervention study. Coleman and Briggs (2002) state interviews are a fruitful source of information especially when used in

conjunction with other forms of data such as surveys or questionnaires, setting up possible triangulation of data.

The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview (refer to Appendix 3) to explore their understandings of their leadership role. Open-ended questions, as Fraenkel, et al., (2012) describes, are designed to encourage “more individualized responses” from the participants so that they could demonstrate their personal understandings of their leadership role. Semi-structured interviews were chosen so that common predetermined questions could be asked of all the teachers but also allow for “some latitude in the breadth of relevance” (Freebody, 2003, p. 133). The flexible approach of a semi-structured interview allowed the establishment of “core issues to be covered, but at the same time leaving the sequence and the relevancies of the interviewee free to vary, around and out from that core” (p. 133). I asked questions, such as these from the initial interviews:

- Tell me about your role as a curriculum leader.
- What professional support do you currently offer members of your department to develop their practice? How did you arrive at this?
- What processes and strategies from this intervention assisted you in developing your leadership skills as a mentor?

These questions encouraged the participants to talk about their current experiences and articulate their understandings of leadership, learning and mentoring.

The initial interviews with the participants were designed to explore the participants’ understandings of their leadership role in the school and the ways in which they support the development of other teachers in the department. The initial interviews occurred in the first week of the intervention study. The participants were interviewed again at the end of the project to review their experiences of participating in the intervention study and to articulate any new understandings of their role as a mentor. Before the final interviews, the participants were given transcripts of their responses from the initial interviews (prior to the final interview) so that they were given an opportunity to offer changed or similar views in the final interview.

In order to address risks connected with a possible perceived power relationship between myself and the participants, particularly perceived professional identity or disclosure risks the interviews took place in a room elected by the curriculum leader, usually their own offices, to ensure that they felt at ease (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). In order to address issues of power imbalance and PR bias (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008), I took great care to clarify the my role of PR as observer of the participants’ professional learning about mentoring, as discussed below under ‘Risks of Power

Relations'. Care was also taken to assume an impartial stance in the interviews so that the participants felt comfortable in expressing their views of leadership, learning and mentoring.

## **Quality Learning Circle**

A QLC was a logical method to choose because this study focusses on participants learning collaboratively. QLC sessions have been discussed in the previous chapter. In this study they provide a forum for sharing the mentors' learning experiences. The QLC is depicted as a leg of the table in Figure 1 to denote the structural support it offers for the mentors' professional learning. The essence of this study was the process of reflecting together as a small group of teachers, and hearing various perspectives and approaches to specified problems. A QLC enables teachers to engage in dialogue, reflect collaboratively and set their own learning agendas and commit to experimentation (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011; Lovett, 2002a). The QLC was facilitated by me and I provided support and educational literature. O'Neill states that QLC sessions work well when the participants "represent a heterogeneous cross section of teachers within the school" and are at different stages of their careers (O'Neill, 1997, p. 55). Five QLC sessions held over eleven weeks. The first QLC was held following the initial interviews. Each QLC was recorded by dictaphone for later analysis. The QLC sessions provided data on how the participants developed understandings of mentoring, such as: skills of learning conversations; use of classroom observations, and forms and process of reflection.

While the mentors worked with their mentees, they were required to operate at two levels: focussing on both their mentees as teachers and the students they teach. This bifocal perspective required mentors to address the needs of the adult learner and the needs of the student. Through the use of educational literature and research evidence the mentors were able to consciously theorise their practice "by looping back and forth between theory and practice, with each informing the other" (Carroll, 2011, p. 81). The use of research allowed mentors to critically reflect on their own personal and professional values, past experiences and the understandings other mentors brought to the QLC. It provided a platform for developing the "co-construction of new professional knowledge" (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011, p. 124).

In order to address the risks of trust and a QLC environment conducive to learning, the number of participants who were part of this project needed careful consideration (Roberts & Pruitt, 2009). A QLC needs a small team to ensure that all trust was built within the group and that all participants had the opportunity to discuss their experiences within the one period allocation. O'Neill (1997) suggests that a QLC should not exceed five or six teachers. Five participants and one PR worked together in this project which was a manageable size. Sawyer (2007) states that members feel a greater sense of accountability when the team is smaller as there are fewer opportunities for

members to shirk their responsibilities. It was not always possible to give adequate time to each member to discuss and reflect on their experiences but as the participants also had the opportunity to meet individually with the researcher, they felt supported in this way. Ideally, however, a QLC would run for longer than one teaching period (such as into a staff meeting time) to ensure that deep learning and robust discussion could occur for each of the participant’s issues.

The PR provided the mentors with a variety of action research models as a framework for their professional inquiry, such as those described by Smyth (1991) , Elliot (1988), Gibbs (1988) and Burley and Pomphrey (2011). These professional inquiry models have been discussed in Chapter 2 and were designed to support the mentors in working towards meeting their mentoring goals. These reflection models were discussed in the QLC sessions and mentors were offered the option of using these to shape their own learning. The mentors also supported their mentee in using a professional inquiry approach in the learning conversations. There were five QLC sessions during this study.

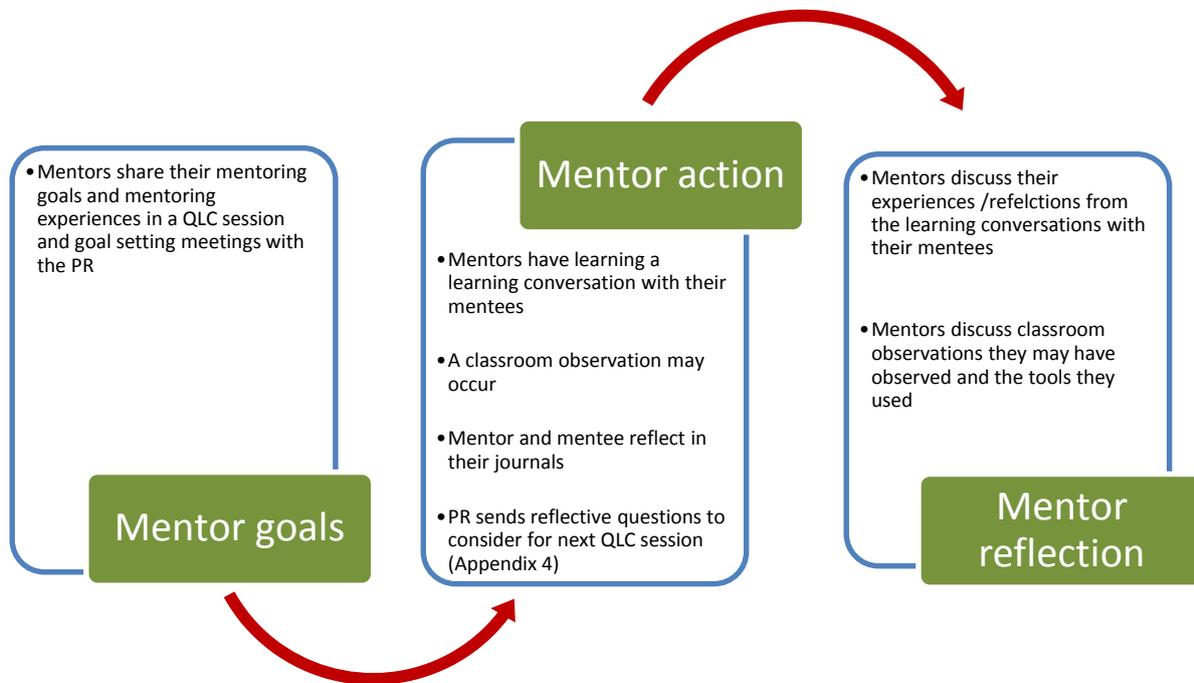
It was important to maintain good communication and to provide the right setting for each QLC session (Sawyer, 2007). The PR was careful to communicate clearly and give advance notice of all QLC sessions to ensure that members were clear about their commitments. In the business of a teacher’s day this was essential and appreciated by the mentors. It was also important for the researcher to monitor the speaking time of each mentor to ensure than all were given appropriate discussion time. By modelling questioning techniques, the scene was set for collaborative discussion between mentors (Roberts & Pruitt, 2009).

A detailed summary of the format of the QLCs can be found in Appendix 7. The format of the QLCs evolved in response to the learning needs of the mentors. In brief, the content of the QLCs was as follows:

First QLC	Second QLC	Third QLC	Fourth and Fifth QLCs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of protocols</li> <li>• Introduction of concepts of mentoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tension between the requirements of school policy to complete attestation and registration forms and the collaborative mentoring they were establishing with their mentee.</li> <li>• Specific questioning techniques and phrases they would use or had used in their learning conversation with their mentee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors’ experiences with questioning techniques in learning conversations with their mentee</li> <li>• Possible approaches to classrooms observations.</li> <li>• Tension between the requirements of school policy to complete attestation and registration forms and the collaborative mentoring they were establishing with their mentee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors’ experiences with questioning techniques in learning conversations with their mentee</li> <li>• Possible approaches to classrooms observations.</li> </ul>

**Figure 6: Format of 5 QLC meetings**

Therefore, in the QLC sessions the participants followed a pattern of individually reporting back from their learning conversations/classroom observations with their mentees and sharing their successes and concerns. This formed a cycle which started with the participants' mentoring goals, leading to the action they undertook to address their goals and the reflection which occurred as a result. The cycle of action from one QLC session to the next, is illustrated in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: QLC cycle of mentor action**

QLC 1 focussed on the establishment of protocols and an introduction of concepts of mentoring. QLC 2 concentrated on the tension between the requirements of school policy to complete attestation and registration forms and the collaborative mentoring model the mentors chose. The mentors also discussed specific questioning techniques and phrases they would/had used in their learning conversation with their mentee. In QLC 3 the mentors' discussed their experiences with questioning techniques in learning conversations with their mentee, possible approaches to classrooms observations and the tension between the requirements of school policy to complete attestation and registration forms and collaborative mentoring model. In the two remaining QLC sessions (QLC 4/5), the mentors discussed their experiences with questioning techniques and possible approaches to classrooms observations.

### **Goal-setting meetings and optional individual meetings with the PR**

Regular individual learning conversations occurred between myself and each participant in the form of five goal-setting and optional individual sessions to ensure that the participants were supported in developing their leadership skills while they worked with a colleague. Topics discussed included the

choosing of mentoring goals, possible interactive approaches/positional stance, and implementation of the mentors' mentoring skills. The mentoring learning conversations were 'educative', in that they moved beyond emotional support and brief technical advice to support the mentors' ability to reframe their thinking about the challenges they were facing, looking through new lenses and reconsidering their own practices and assumptions. The learning conversations were framed around the mentors' choice of reflection models, such as those discussed in the literature review in the 'shared professional learning' section. The frameworks described by Smyth (1991), Parsloe and Leedham (2009), Elliot (1988), Gibbs (1988) or Burley and Pomphrey's (2011) all put the learner at the centre of their learning and were useful models for the mentors. An inquiry, learner centred approach was essential for this intervention study, because it focussed around the needs of the mentors as learners.

## **Reflective journals**

Reflective journals are a tool for learners so they can make sense of their learning by writing notes and asking questions about their practice (Moon, 2006). They were kept by the participants (and PR) throughout the study from the QLC 1 until the end. They provided a vehicle of reflection for all parts of the study and record the participants' experiences. Reflection can occur in many forms; in isolation, collaboratively in a QLC or part of a professional learning community (PLC). In this study, the strength of reflective journals was how they provided an avenue for the participants to reflect on all stages of their leadership building journey: such as after QLC sessions, after individual learning conversations with me and while they worked closely with their mentee. Reflection can be defined as "the act of critically exploring what you are doing, why you decided to do it, and what its effects have been" (Mertler, 2006, p. 15) so a reflective journal gave the participants an opportunity to reflect and build on their learning journey. The purpose of the reflective journals kept by the participants, and PR were to give them time to make sense of the learning, to clarify what they already knew so that new understandings could emerge. The PR received copies of the participants' reflective journals but these were not shared with the other participants.

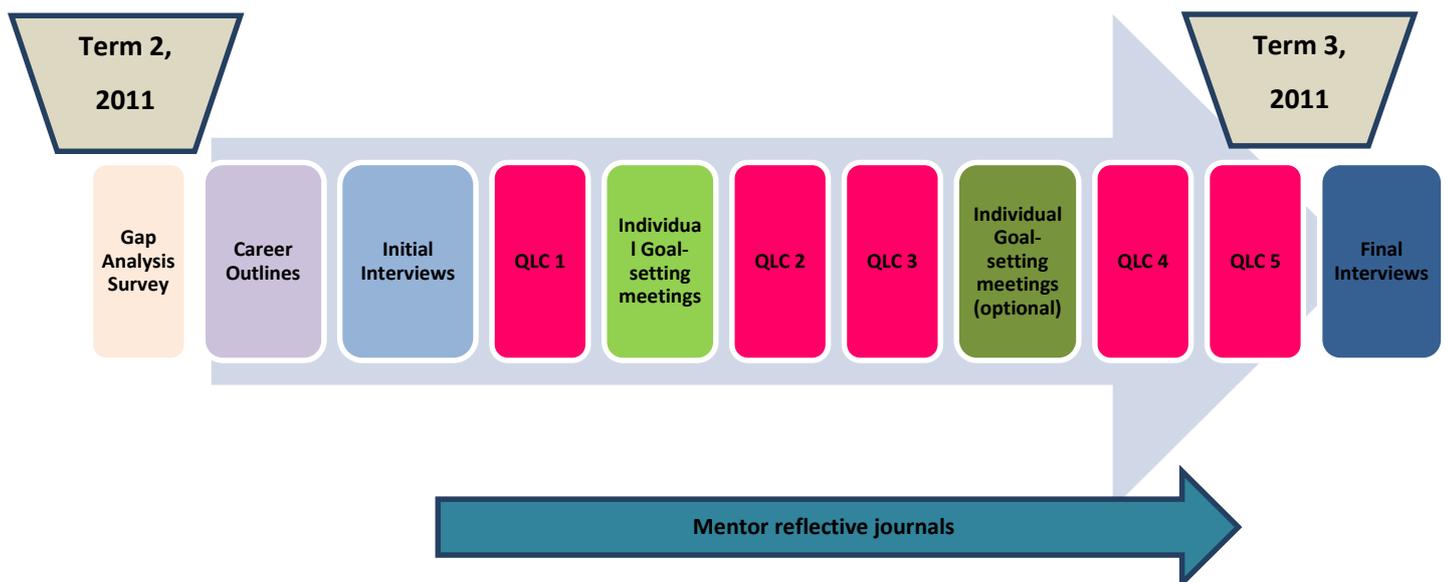
The PR also kept a reflective journal which contained reflections on the learning process and field notes. I used the same reflection models used by the mentors which have been described in Chapter 2. The reflection journals contained notes on each of the methods, including comments on typical or surprising data.

In order to safeguard against the possible risk of coercion, that the mentors shared the information they believed the researcher wished to receive, I took great care to remove myself from the role of 'expert', by making assurances of confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of any information

shared. In addition, the participants were encouraged to choose a form of reflective journal which suited their style in order to assist the mentors' feelings of ease in sharing their experiences of their learning. Again assurances of confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of any information shared were given to the participants. No content of the reflective journals was ever discussed by me with other mentors or in the QLC sessions.

## Timeline of data collection

This section presents an overall process of the study (refer to Figure 8 and Appendix 5). The collection of data methods occurred over Terms 2 and 3, 2011 (refer to Figure 8 below for the sequence of events). Specific dates for each data method are provided in Appendix 5. As this intervention study was facilitated and researched by me at the same time, an iterative approach was taken in order to respond to the needs of the participants. The scheduling of data methods and topics of discussion were determined by the learning needs of the curriculum leaders and their mentees.



**Figure 8: Timeline of methods**

My research design employed research methods and steps which help to study the subjective nature of the phenomenon. By the use of methods such as recording field notes in my reflective journal, such as “reflections on their own subjectivity” as a PR and having “field notes critiqued by a colleague”, the researcher of this project was able to limit “observers’ biases” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 34). Also persons outside of this research, thesis supervisors, were able to critique copies of the transcribed researcher’s data alongside the inductive analysis to ensure the objective nature of the analysis.

## Overview of Methods

Table 1 below summarises the data collected during the intervention study:

Data Methods Used In Data Analysis					
Methods of data	Early sources of data	Primary sources of data	Final sources of data	Data source for analysis	Frequency of data per method
Gap Analysis Survey	●			●	11 responses
Career Outlines	●			●	5 responses
Initial Interviews	●			●	5 recordings
Goal-Setting sessions	●			●	5 recordings
QLC sessions	●	●		●	5 recordings
Individual meetings with the PR		●		●	4 recordings
Mentor Reflective Journals	●	●	●	●	5 sets of 5 responses per mentor
PR Reflective Journal	●	●	●		7 entries
Final Interviews			●	●	5 recordings

Table 1: Data methods used in data analysis

## *Ethical Issues*

There are a number of ethical issues related to my intervention case study. These are mainly centred on:

- Risks of power relations; and
- Risks of identification (anonymity and confidentiality) within and outside of the QLC.

Each of these risks will now be discussed.

### *Risks of Power relations*

As the PR, and peer of the curriculum leaders, I anticipated a number of dilemmas because of my collegial relationships with these teachers. While I was not responsible for any teacher attestation as I did not have line management for them, I still had to take precautions to safeguard the relationships. Possible risks related to the perceived power relationship between me and the participants were the prevention of harm and confidentiality of participants in sharing their

mentoring experiences with the other participants and the PR, and the power imbalance between the mentors and mentees. These risks and my responses as a researcher are now discussed in more detail.

A risk existed that I would be seen as having power as a researcher in terms of influencing the participants' thinking and choices of behaviour. In order to address this risk, it was necessary for me to become part of the group I was observing (Wisker, 2008), where I too was seen as a learner rather than 'expert'. The existence of the "observer effect" (p. 35) of the researcher on the participants can be seen as a limitation of qualitative research. However, qualitative researchers "try to interact with their subjects in a natural, unobtrusive and non-threatening manner" but they "can never eliminate all of their effects on subjects" (p. 35). In order to reduce the observer effect, I maintained a neutral and relaxed manner with the participants throughout all of the QLC sessions (including the interviews and individual meetings) so that the participants felt comfortable with me and free to express their own views and opinions. The establishment of good relations between us was prioritised so that feelings of trust and confidence were built (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The 'participant-as-observer' (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993) becomes "part of the social life of the participants and documents and records what is happening for research purposes" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 465). This was achieved by participating in the QLC sessions and by keeping my own reflective journal (which also ensured credibility because I was able to check responses at a later date).

Another possible risk associated with the role of the PR was that the role could be perceived as having an existing power imbalance between the participants and PR. This risk may arise as we were colleagues at the same school prior to the study. Risks may arise around perceptions of coercion, where the participants may feel obliged to volunteer to participate in the study since we were colleagues. This also applied to professional identity or disclosure risks, as the participants were sharing their experiences of learning about mentoring with someone who was a colleague. In order to reduce these risks I deliberately only invited curriculum leaders from outside of my teaching subject or department to participate in the study (Drew et al., 2008). However Mutch (2005) recognises that all "researchers are in a position of power" as "they enter the lives of, or gather personal information from, their participants" (p. 76). Even though I held no line responsibility for any of the participants, as a fellow curriculum leader in the school, bias could have influenced responses to include 'untruths' or 'half-truths'. The participants may have only contributed responses according to what they felt I wished to hear. To ensure "honest and truthful" (Snook, 2003, p. 162) practice, I addressed the issue of confidentiality prior to starting the study saying that

no information would be passed onto any other teachers at the school or the principal. I also explained that I was not participating in the research as a fellow curriculum leader but in a different role, as a confidential facilitator of their learning.

It is possible that the participants may still have desired to produce outcomes to assist my research goals, despite the fact that no participant was in a conflicting power imbalance with me. Great care was taken to remove myself from the role of 'expert' who held the knowledge of mentoring. At the first QLC I made my role as a PR clear to the participants. It was a role of support, facilitation and observation of the mentors' learning experiences. My facilitative stance aimed to eliminate the 'delivery' of mentoring material to a collaborative learning approach where the participants discovered their own ways of working and learning, for example in the first QLC, in order to guard against me being seen as the 'expert' or provider of 'answers' optional readings were given to the curriculum leaders as a stimulus for their learning and to provide the theory behind their practice. Despite these efforts, it is still possible that the participants modified their approaches and responses according to the views expressed by me.

A further risk to the participants was that they were asked to share their personal experiences of mentoring whilst participating in the study. These issues required a trusting and confidential environment to ensure the participants felt comfortable in sharing information. This risk was addressed by me in the first QLC, through the use of open dialogue in order to build trust and confidence of the group so that the participants would share their experiences openly. It is possible that my presence affected the behaviour and experiences of the participants and it may be difficult to ascertain how much and what type of influence I had within the group. A PR needs to collect data not only from their participants but also record their own personal responses to the research process. My information letter also outlined the general focus of invention study to help the participants feel relaxed about the expected involvement. In order to "prevent harm" (Cullen, 2005, p. 257) care was taken so that the participants did not find discussions in the QLC, interviews and individual meetings with me, invasive. The specific risks for particular data methods have already been addressed above.

The mentees in this study are associated with non-participants but they are connected to this study. This is how I considered the position of the mentees from an ethical point of view. Since all of the participants held a position of leadership in their departments there was a power imbalance between the participants and their mentees, especially because the participants were directly responsible for signing the attestation and teacher registration documents for the teachers in their departments/learning areas. This risk of harm (Drew et al., 2008) was minimized by the voluntary

nature of the mentees' participation in the project (refer to Appendix 6 of which the letter for teachers being mentored was similar) and the assurances in the information letter, which was provided for the mentees, that the project was focussed on providing an authentic context for curriculum leaders to explore their mentoring actions and that this study would not report on the mentees' teaching performance. This risk to the mentees was discussed by the mentors in the second and third QLC sessions and the mentors decided that care could be taken to minimise this risk by separating the school attestation/registration process from the mentoring project so that the mentees had clarity in the nature of the mentoring relationship. All of the mentors worked towards a collaborative or non-directive mentoring relationship which may have assisted the mentees in feeling comfortable about sharing their classroom practice with their mentor. It is still possible, however, that the mentees may still have desired to produce outcomes to assist their mentor's experience in the project or my research goals by saying in their learning conversations what they believed their mentor wanted to hear. In addition It should be noted that whilst I was known to the mentees, I did not meet with the mentees in this research.

### ***Risks of identification***

The risk of possible identification of the participants outside of the study was given careful consideration in the research design. It is important that identities remain anonymous (Fraenkel et al., 2012) so in my information letter, I promised my participants that they would not be identified in the published work either as individuals and the school would not be named. I also realised that since I was a teacher at the same school of the participants, it is not possible to prevent completely the identification of the school and my position within it. Care has been taken in this thesis to remove any descriptions of the school beyond general terms so that the identity of the participants is protected as far as possible (Fraenkel et al., 2012). While the school is large in size, it is unlikely the participants would be identifiable given the small number of curriculum leaders who were involved in this project. In order to protect the identity of the participants care has also been taken in the descriptions of the research participants without mention of specific subject areas, curriculum leadership positions or specific career details. The participants are therefore described as a collective with details about the length of time they have taught in their current school, positions held, and any other and previous mentoring experiences. Likewise my PR role is also described in a non-identifying manner.

Risks surrounding "confidentiality" (Snook, 2003, p. 166), "anonymity and dissemination" of information (Mutch, 2005, p. 79) are also relevant to this study because the participants shared details of their learning journey with each other and with me. The participants were only known to

each other and me, and confidentiality and anonymity outside of the QLC was assured. My practice was guided by Mutch (2005) who advised that in order for the participants to feel 'safe' enough to share their experiences during the study, they should not be named at any time during or after the research and information obtained should not be used in the future for any other means. The participants were informed that any data would be securely stored at the home of the researcher and on a back -up file to which only the researcher has access. This was kept in a safe locked location.

Research access rights to the school were sought from the school's principal. While it is anticipated that the conclusions will be shared with the school's principal, no specific data which identifies any participant will be shared with the school's management team. The participants will be shown the conclusions in advance of the principal by distributing the concluding chapter of this thesis to the participants so that they are assured that it does not include any identifying data. This demonstrates that I am committed to ensuring the participants' anonymity.

The participants also required an understanding of the study so that 'informed consent' could be made. In order to address the ethical consideration for 'informed consent' I gave a letter to the participants to explain the purpose of the intervention study (Watt & Richardson, 2008) and show "respect for persons" (Cullen, 2005, p. 255). The letter stated that participation in the study is by choice and explained what it meant to be involved in terms of a time commitment (Drew et al., 2008). When the teachers agreed to participate, a consent form was provided that itemised all aspects of the study to which they have agreed. The participants were offered a period of relief from teaching their class for each of the collaborative learning sessions and another to complete the reflective journal, so that these requirements did not impinge on their non-contact time. The participants were aware that they could opt out from the study at any time and understood the timeframe of their commitment to the study.

### ***Data Analysis***

This section explains the methods used to analyse the data collected during the intervention study. A common technique for analysing qualitative data is the identification of key categories or themes which emerge from the data in relation to the research questions. Triangulation of data sources collected ensured that credibility was achieved because only themes which emerged out of several different sources were selected as key themes of this study.

The interviews, goal-setting meetings, QLC sessions, individual meetings between mentor and PR, were all recorded by an audio device and identified episodes were deliberately transcribed rather

than full transcripts of whole pieces of data. Episodes were selected on the basis that they were typical or atypical responses by the participants. Once these transcriptions were completed and transcribed, themes were inductively derived in a “posteriori” (Wellington, 2000, p. 142) manner, such as ‘themes, attitudes/values, behaviours’.

Mutch (2005), in stating that “the most common approach to analysing text is thematic analysis” (p. 176), suggests the following steps:

*Perceiving: What am I looking for? What are my first impressions?*

*Comparing: What can I see that is similar to something else? What things go together?*

*Contrasting: What can I see that is different to other things?*

*Aggregating: What groupings are evident? Why do they go together?*

It appeared at this point of ‘perceiving’ the data it could be grouped into three main draft themes, because these themes offered unifying ideas:



**Figure 9: Three draft themes**

These themes were coded accordingly by cutting and pasting data, using a word processor, so that the data was grouped under appropriate headings. This process allows more abstract concepts to be explored and interconnections can be made between categories. The grouping and coding of data into three key themes (refer to 9 above) inductively gave rise to categories and sub-categories within each theme. Other codes indicated elements which might be useful for analysis. Because “the language people use to talk about certain aspects of their lives” conveys their experiences, it was useful to note key words and phrases used by the participants (Davidson & Tolich, 2003, p. 285). The initial and developing definitions of words and phrases, such as ‘mentor’ and ‘curriculum leadership’ were identified from the data and these meanings informed the significances of each theme.

## Categories

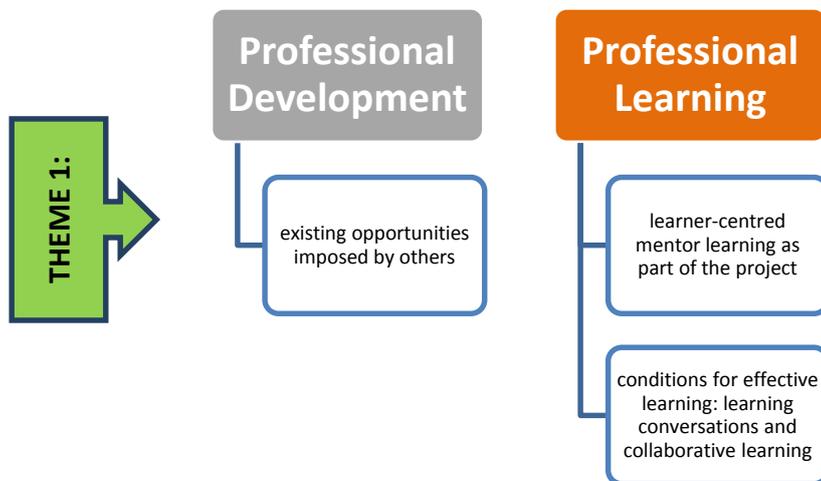
By ‘comparing’ the data, a number of sub-themes then became categories for further data analysis. These categories were my first attempt to group or classify more discrete aspects of the three

themes. An example of the grouping of the data for the ‘professional learning and professional development’ theme were the categories of:

- existing opportunities
- learning as part of the project
- conditions for effective learning

Some of these categories were then defined in order to develop clarity about what they represented and to see the ‘contrasts’ between them. During the attempt at defining these categories; I could see overlapping between categories and problems with clarity. It became necessary to return to the transcripts for elucidation.

I re-read my transcripts and other data and re-drafted my themes and categories in an attempt to ‘aggregate’ the data. It was clear that I could re-organise and collapse a number of categories into one category, for example the theme of ‘professional learning and professional development’ was reorganised into the following categories (refer to Figure 10). At this point I drew a visual diagram of the themes and resulting categories. The clarity of a visual diagram allowed me to see the clear links and differences between each theme.



**Figure 10: Sample of theme reorganisation**

Each theme was then coded (assigned a colour) for easy referencing, and each category was assigned a label. At this point precise definitions were created for each theme (refer to

Table 2) and key terms connected to each theme. The colour coded categories were assigned to the accompanying data.

## Checking

It was essential at this point to check the reliability of the categories by asking the supervisors of this research to critique copies of the transcribed data at this point alongside the inductive analysis to ensure the objective nature of the researcher's analysis. While it was not necessary to re-edit the definitions of the categories, it was necessary for me to re-read my transcripts at this point to check that I had not missed any other pieces of data which fitted the definitions. In the re-reading, a number of pieces of further pieces of data were identified. This process of triangulation indicated that the definitions I had written for my categories were satisfactory for analysing most categories for the transcripts. Triangulation is "an important part of the design process" (Janesick, 2003, p. 66) as a process of cross-checking analysis of data sources to elicit key themes. By analysing the gap analysis survey, career outlines, episodes of the QLC sessions, goal-setting meetings, individual meetings between a mentor and PR, reflective journals and interviews, credibility of data collection was achieved through an inductive approach of identifying themes common to several sources. Data from various sources corroborated the credibility of mentors' experiences as similar themes were repeated several times from different sources or several times by differing participants in the same piece of data.

At the conclusion of the first draft of Chapter 4, the theme and categories were re-organised once again to reflect the focus of the research questions. An example of this is the theme 'professional learning professional development' was relabelled 'effective professional learning' as the categories of this theme: 'collaborative learning/QLC', 'individual meetings with the PR', 'readings and practical mentoring resources' and 'reflective journals' linked to the intervention study and answered the research questions, while the theme 'professional development' was retained as an introduction to 'effective professional learning' only. This decision was based on the understanding that the categories under 'professional development' provided background information to the mentors' understandings of professional development and learning but did not reflect their experiences of the study. The reorganisation of the themes and categories required a reworking of the definitions of the three themes. The final definitions of themes are presented in Table 3.

## Definitions of the Three Themes:

### Theme 1: Effective professional learning

**Professional Development** - a traditional term used to describe activities undertaken rather than focussing on the development of teacher knowledge and expertise.

**Professional learning** – is characterised by teacher involvement in their learning rather than passive participants of professional development. It is by focussing on the process of learning, rather than the attendance of workshops and courses run by ‘experts’ that an understanding of practice can be deepened. This theme explores the mentors’ experiences of professional development prior to the intervention case study and the conditions of learning during the study which they perceived as conducive to learning about mentoring.

**Key term:**

**Professional or teacher inquiry** – active reflection which aims to transform a situation (Dewey, 1998) by applying theory to practice. It involves a conscious and stated purpose for the reflection with a specified outcome (Moon, 2006). In reflective inquiry the focus is on an individual teacher’s practice which is relevant to them (Carroll, 2011; Schön, 1983).

**Theme 2: Leadership role** – This theme explores the mentors’ understandings of leadership prior, during and at the close of the intervention case study. It focuses on the role of curriculum leadership; the mentors’ perceptions of their role as well as expectations from other influences within the school.

**Theme 3: Professional learning about mentoring**- This theme focuses on what mentoring skills or capabilities the curriculum leaders felt were significant to develop.

**Key terms:**

**Mentoring** –a curriculum leader working one-on-one with a mentee from the same curriculum area.

**Mentor** – agents of change (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). Their role is to support the professional learning of their mentee through and ‘educative’ mentoring model.

**Table 2: Theme definitions**

## Summary

This chapter has outlined and justified the research methodology and methods for this study. In order to trace the learning journeys of the participants. Ethical aspects have been carefully

considered in order to minimise risks to the participants of this study. The inductive approach to data analysis has also been described, including the identification of the three key themes. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the data collected.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

### Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the timeline of data collection and presents the analysis organised into three key themes. The timeline of data collection provides additional contextual detail of each data source. The participants will be referred to as mentors to recognise the role explored during the study.

#### Themes and data sources

The data analysis of this study is presented according to three key themes: *‘Effective professional Learning’*, *‘leadership role’* and *‘professional learning about mentoring’*. These themes trace the mentors’ initial and developing understandings of leadership, mentoring and effective conditions for professional learning. The data sources consisted of Gap Analysis survey (GA), initial (II) and final interviews (FI), goal-setting meetings (GSM), career outlines (CO), five Quality Learning Circles (QLC sessions), reflective journals (RJ), and individual meetings with the participant researcher (MTG). These data sources and associated themes are presented below in Table 3.

Category	Gap Analysis Survey - GA (11)	Career Outlines - CO (5)	Initial Interviews -II	Goal-Setting Meetings - GSM (5)	QLC sessions - QLC 1,2, 3, 4, and 5 (5)	Individual meetings with PR – MTG (4)	Reflective Journals -RJ (5mentor + 1 PR)	Final Interviews - FI (5)
<b>Theme 1: Effective professional learning</b>								
Collaborative learning/QLC sessions				●	●	●	●	●
Individual meetings with the PR (MTG)							●	●
Readings and other practical resources,							●	●
Reflective journals (RJs)					●		●	●
<b>Theme 2: Professional learning about mentoring</b>								
Interactive approach				●	●			
Learning Conversations				●	●	●	●	●
Classroom Observations			●		●	●	●	●

<b>Theme 3: Leadership role</b>								
Developing understandings of Leadership			●		●	●	●	●
Role of the mentor					●	●	●	●

**Table 3: Data sources and associated themes**

***Data sources***

In this study, QLC refers to the coming together of the five mentors and PR for the purposes of collaborative learning about mentoring. Each session of the QLC is labelled, such as QLC 1, to denote the first session and so on. The QLC session recordings provided the richest and most valuable data out of all the data methods collected as these offered information about the mentors’ individual experiences of their professional learning during the project, their understandings of mentoring and leadership but also the benefits of a collaborative learning experience. The themes which emerged out of the QLC sessions were echoed in other forms of data, namely the reflective journals. These journals provided an insight into the mentors’ process of learning and how the mentors put that reflection into practice as they talked about their practical experiences in the QLC sessions. The initial interviews (IIs) and final interviews (FIs), along with the optional individual meetings with the PR (MTGs), provided important information about the mentors’ understandings of leadership and the role of the mentor. The gap analysis survey (GA) and career outlines (Cos), provided an opportunity to source background information on the mentors’ previous experiences and current views of professional learning at their school. Further contextual detail about the timeline of individual data sources is reported on in Appendix 7. The analysis for the three main themes is now reported.

**Theme 1: Effective professional learning**

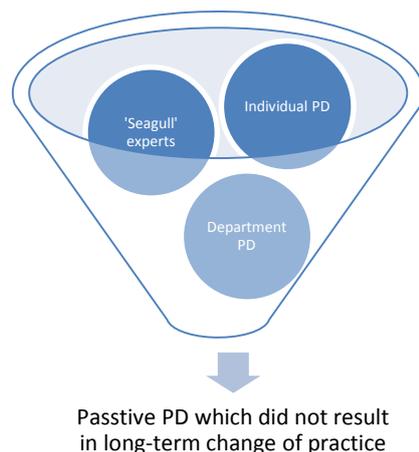
The theme of *‘effective professional learning’* refers to learner-led professional learning which focusses on the process of learning in order to improve student outcomes. The mentors’ prior professional development experiences are briefly described to provide a context for the mentors’ learning. This theme reports the analysis related to the mentors’ beliefs about conditions for effective mentor professional learning. The literature around learning conditions for effective mentor learning have been presented in Chapter 2. Five data sources were used, including the GSMs, MTGs, QLC sessions, RJs and FIs.

The data analysis of this theme is organised into the following four categories:

- Collaborative learning/QLC sessions,
- Individual meetings with the PR (MTG),
- Readings and other practical resources, and
- Reflective journals

## Context for Theme 1: Professional Development

In order to paint a backdrop for this study, the mentors' prior professional development experiences are described in Appendix 8: Context for Theme 1- Professional Development. This Appendix reports on mentors' prior professional development experiences and is termed professional development due to the passive nature of the mentors' learning experiences. Figure 11 summarises the mentors' professional development experiences prior to the intervention study and shows that there were three main types of professional development but these did not make long-term changes to practice:



**Figure 11: Mentors' professional development experiences**

### Category 1: Collaborative learning/QLC SESSIONS

This category explores collaborative learning in the QLC sessions. It explores the richness of the mentors' diverse experiences, the value of shared dialogue and of sharing resources. The building of rapport will be discussed along with accountability to each other, size of group and length of project.

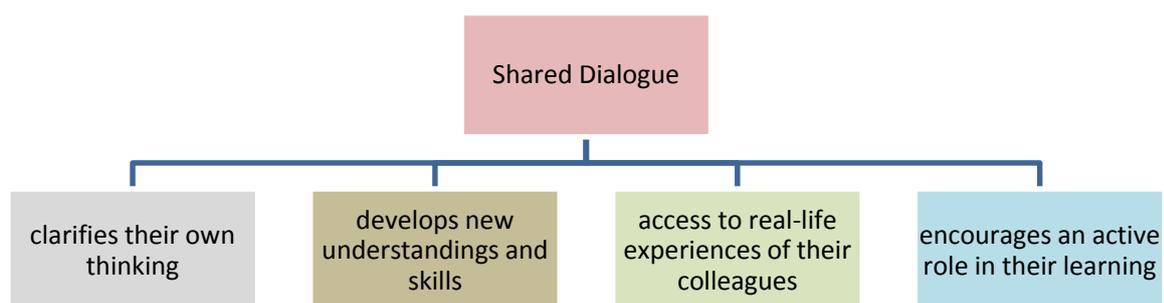
All of the mentors reported at various times (QLC sessions, their RJ, GSM, MTG and FI) that they found collaborative learning valuable because they were able to learn from hearing each other's' experiences, especially as the curriculum leaders led different subject areas. One mentor commented their value of learning with other mentors was due to: "Their wisdom and experience. The conversation moved me forward in my thinking. I could use things they tried and had worked well" (RJ). By working together the mentors developed and shaped each other's understandings of

mentoring. Another mentor commented that, “The most valuable aspect for me was hearing back from the mentors who were mostly from different learning areas” (RJ). This opportunity allowed the mentors to understand the similarities and differences the mentors were having compared with their own experiences. As a result the mentors could learn from each other’s mentoring experiences in a variety of contexts.

While the mentors often attended meetings together, such as the Learning and Teaching meetings for department leaders, these were information meetings rather than opportunities to learn collaboratively. One mentor referred to the pleasure of having an opportunity to actually learn alongside others, she stated: “I really enjoyed our first session [QLC 1]. It was so good to get together with the others and hear about what they are doing, to learn this stuff together” (GSM). This was echoed by all of the mentors at different stages of the project; one commented that it was the act of talking which was valuable in collaborative learning: “The act of talking about what I’m doing helps me learn” (RJ). And another mentor commented:

*It’s the talking thing, just reading something on your own or writing your own stuff is just.. it makes you think about it by talking it over with others it makes you think about what you do and why you do it and hearing others’ responses and thinking yeah I would do that or not do that ... I would like us to keep meeting in the future (FI)*

Just as the learning conversations between the mentors and mentees were crucial in furthering the learning of a mentee, these mentors identified the importance of talking for the following four key reasons (refer to Figure 12). By putting the mentors at the centre of their learning their immediate needs were being addressed through dialogue with each other.



**Figure 12: Reported benefits of shared dialogue**

Another benefit of collaborative learning was the act of sharing resources with each other during the QLC sessions. This was seen in the act of sharing observational tools (OT) resources and examples of effective questions for learning conversations. For example, one mentor showed each OT she had used and talked about what she had recorded in the classroom. There were many questions and

comments from everyone about these OTs, including requests for copies of the tools she had designed: “Can I have a copy of that one? “, “Yes I will email it to everyone” (QLC 4). The sharing of resources also occurred when the mentors discussed the types of questions they were asking their mentees during learning conversations. Each of the mentors tried using different questions and reported on their experiences and other mentors would request to have copies.

I noted in my RJ that it took time for rapport to be built between the mentors, even with a group of teachers who had worked with each other at the same school for a number of years. As each of the mentors was in a position of learner, there was some nervousness at the beginning of the project. This nervousness soon gave way to a warm and supportive atmosphere between the mentors and they relaxed into their role as co-constructors of their learning. The volume of laughter at the QLC sessions increased dramatically from the QLC 3 onwards. The learning conversations became less directed at me and more to each other as they discussed their experiences and progress. I observed a building of trust and rapport, such as in this excerpt after one mentor described the OTs she had created and used:

*Mentor 2: What did you draw?*

*Mentor 3: Can I have a look?*

*Mentor 2: That’s a great idea*

*Mentor 1: Yes it shows she did a demonstration here and walked around the front. It got even; they all got her attention at some time (QLC 3)*

The mentors became very supportive of each other as they experimented with mentoring skills.

Some mentors actively sought advice and support from the group:

*I need some suggestions of what could I say from the data I collect. I’m just asking these people to do me a favour letting me practise my observational skills in their room but if I were giving feedback on these in a post-conference what would I say? (QLC 3)*

This mentor felt comfortable in the QLC 3 to seek advice from the group to assist with her learning. The relationships developed during the course of the study ensured that the mentors could rely on each other for assistance with their learning: “I feel like I have two resources, I have this [pointing at the mentoring folder] and this group of people” (QLC 5).

All of the mentors mentioned the necessity for a mentoring programme to have commitment from the QLC members. They felt that the scheduled QLC sessions ensured that they had experimented with mentoring skills and were able to report to their peers on their progress at regular intervals.

Two mentors in particular expressed how motivating this was for them:

*Mentor 1: Having scheduled meetings meant I was motivated to work on something with my mentee so I could report back to the group at the next meeting. Because I was required to report on what I had been doing it ensured I did something (RJ).*

*Mentor 2: While you don't really enjoy it at the time, it has been about embedding a change in you. You can go to PD courses and things but unless you are forced to actually do it and come back and account to your peers what you have done, you probably don't change. Being forced to do it has been key (FI).*

The mentors felt that in their busy teaching weeks, professional learning could easily be neglected for more urgent matters which arise daily. The knowledge that their QLC was going to meet motivated them to prioritise their own learning. The need for commitment was highlighted in comments by one mentor. She saw the role of the PR as important and in future mentoring programmes she indicated she would like to see a continuation of the role of a facilitator:

*Someone needs to take responsibility for the momentum of each mentor and organise the group. To keep sure they are making progress ... by making scheduled meetings, providing resources etc. It is so easy as a teacher to focus on the immediate teaching/marking etc and let this process slip. (RJ)*

This mentor enjoyed the experience of being mentored herself as I would meet with her individually and help to focus each QLC on professional learning. It is interesting in a collaborative learning environment that the mentors still wanted there to be someone who scheduled the meetings.

Within this category of collaborative learning/QLC sessions, three further conditions for effective collaborative learning were identified by the mentors. These were time, size of the QLC group and length of the project (refer to Figure 13 for further details and supporting quotations for each of the three conditions) :

Time	Size of group	Length of project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mentors were either given relief for a teaching period or it occurred in their non-contact period.</li> <li>• <i>"We just need the time to get out of the cAsstroom and think about what we are doing as mentors."</i></li> <li>• <i>'I found this part of the project extremely valuable as we just do not have the time to be able to talk to other HOD's about our experiences. The provision of time supported the mentors focus on their own learning and Asstisted them to prioritise the work they were doing with their mentee. (QLC 5 )</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the mentors remarked that they found the size of the group conducive to collaborative learning. They would not have liked the group to have been any bigger as it was sometimes difficult to have time for all of the mentors to share their progress in a 50 minute teaching period.</li> <li>• <i>Mentor 1: It needs to be small, like our group (6 people max), and perhaps next year these mentors could train another round of mentors who could run QLC sessions with staff members. It's a time factor thing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentor 2: I think that the small group approach, like ours, is really important</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentor 3: Groups need to be small like our five mentors</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentor 4: The group size is important, no bigger than ours otherwise you wouldn't get to hear how everyone is doing</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentor 5: Six is the biggest effective team I think (QLC 5)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mentors commented on the need for adequate time to develop their mentoring skills and saw this as ideally occurring over one and a half to two terms.</li> <li>• <i>Mentor 1: That was a really good length of time [a term and a half]</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentor 2: The length of the programme was good.. I think spreading a programme over two terms, keeping the same commitments we had. If we had a clear structure, like we did, I think it would be fine</i></li> <li>• <i>Mentor 3: I think doing what we did over two terms would be good. It would give you more time to pick a better lesson rather than just choose a lesson because that was the only one you could get into to. Human beings work to deadlines and expectations so the length of time doesn't really matter, (FIs)</i></li> </ul>

**Figure 13: Three further conditions for effective mentor learning**

Given the pressures the mentors were under on a daily basis, it is not surprising that they appreciated being given time to meet as a QLC within their school day. The provision of time supported the mentors to focus on their own learning and assisted them to prioritise the work they were doing with their mentee. The mentors were passionate about the role of QLC sessions in assisting them to achieve deep learning. They saw the size of the QLC as being fundamental in allowing time for each member to share their progress. If there had been more members in their QLC, they suggested that the quality of collaborative learning would have been compromised; the sharing of progress would become superficial and opportunities for challenging and changing their understandings of learning could be lost. The mentors met for collaborative learning five times over a term and a half. All of the mentors felt that in order for effective learning to occur, they needed to spend at least this amount of time, if not two terms in regular QLC sessions. They also saw a need for structure through an organised schedule as curriculum leaders are very busy people who have many demands on their time.

In summary the analysis of this '*collaborative learning/QLC sessions*' category showed that the mentors found the QLC beneficial because it: clarified their thinking; developed new understandings and skills; provided access to real-life experiences; and encouraged an active role in their learning.

## **Category 2: Individual Meetings with the PR (MTG)**

All of the mentors found the meetings with the PR useful to clarify their mentoring goals at the beginning of the project. In their RJ they all commented that the GSM helped to clarify their goals and approaches as a mentor. The use of questioning enabled the mentors to process their own ideas as this comment from a mentor, in a goal-setting meeting, shows: "You have just asked me about five things that have been really useful." The success of the individual meetings lies in addressing the mentors' immediate learning needs as the mentors were engaged in their learning and I was able to provide any necessary resources.

The mentors also had the optional opportunity to meet with me during the study. Four out of the five mentors opted for this meeting. The purpose of the learning conversations with a PR was support for the mentors through the setting of goals and development of new understandings through experiential learning. The mentors appreciated this opportunity to discuss their specific situations and access resources pertinent to their mentoring goals, as illustrated in these comments:

*Mentor 1: She helped clarify my ideas, offered feedback. Offered ideas, could talk about specific situations. She had done the reading and had the 'expert' knowledge which meant I could tap into her rather than have to look it up myself. She had material that was pertinent to my situation to give me. She could point me in the right direction.*

*Mentor 2: When we talked about this you gave me the key to achieving my goal which was constructing open ended questions for my mentee then to come up with her own solutions to help solve problems they were having/areas needing work, rather than me feeling like I needed to say what she could be doing. The questions were so helpful and achieved this very goal!!(RJ)*

The MTGs ensured that some adult learning principles were being addressed. The learning conversation was relevant for the mentor and met their immediate and diverse needs. The mentors reported that by being actively engaged in their learning and having the opportunity to talk about their learning, they were supported to achieve their mentoring goals. Just as the act of talking was important for the mentors in the QLC sessions, it was also important for them in the MTGs, as this statement demonstrates:

*It was awesome having learning conversations with you as it has given me the opportunity to discuss issues and new methodologies which has been really helpful. By process of having a conversation with someone is far more engaging than having to go away and read things by yourself.*

Dialogue around learning is an effective tool for allowing learners to process their thinking and consider possible alternatives. This mentor identified that her MTG provided a modelling opportunity of the learning conversations she went on to have with her mentee:

*By talking through it helped me reflect on what I had been doing and moved me on in the process like the collaborative meetings helped me move on in the physical aspect of mentoring (how to do it) but our meetings helped me move on with the actual thought processing, emotional part, the where to next, they were learning conversations, you were actually mentoring me in the mentoring process, modelling the conversations we would have with our mentees, so that's what's been good about it. (FI)*

Just as her mentee went through a professional inquiry process of choosing a classroom-based learning goal and worked through possible approaches, so too did each mentor. They followed a similar process of selecting a goal and experimenting with using mentoring skills. By having the opportunity to talk through her goals and current progress, this mentor (see above) felt that she was given time to reflect and clarify how things were going and what her next steps might be.

Two mentors remarked that they found their MTGs provided them with “emotional “support (FI). They saw these individual meetings as an opportunity for me to “give encouragement” and “affirm [their] learning” (RJ). Both mentors were either new to the mentoring process or felt they lacked the necessary skills to provide opportunities for their mentees to take responsibility of their learning. By meeting with me they were further supported to build their confidence in dealing with new situations.

### **Category 3: Readings and practical mentoring resources**

I provided readings and practical mentoring resources for the mentors. These were reported by the mentors to be a valuable part of the project. The mentors felt that the readings were useful for the following four reasons (refer to Figure 14 below):

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## Readings

### • Relevant to their chosen mentoring goals

- The readings gave an understanding of the research behind best practice mentoring and practical applications of how to develop these skills.
- Initially the mentors reported that the “readings helped me to decide on my learning goals as a mentor” (RJ) and an understanding of their current relationship with their mentee, for example: *Helped me understand my role as a mentor. After reading the resources on the ‘Background to mentoring’, especially identifying with the phases of the mentoring relationship, it was comforting to see where I was at. My mentee and I have been through phase one and had moved to phase two. Reading the resource helped me to decide my goal for the project (RJ)*
- The readings had provided both mentors with a context of where they were currently placed which helped them shape their future goals. They provided the theory behind the praxis they were investigating.

### 1. The mentors reported improved confidence when they used ideas from the readings

- A mentor felt nervous at embarking on aspects of mentoring at the beginning of the study, such as classroom observation and having learning conversations: *Initial feelings of inadequacy about mentoring which were helped by use of the resources especially observation tools and effective questions to ask during post-observation conferences (RJ)*
- The readings provided relief for some mentors who did not feel comfortable with an expert-novice mentoring relationship. For example: *I have really enjoyed the readings that you gave us, they have been fantastic. Definitely has helped me. The readings about what a mentor was and the stances you can take as I have never been comfortable with the I am the expert telling you what to do stance, beforehand I thought that’s what mentoring was, so it was good to read that there were alternatives and think ... there is a place for me. That was a huge relief for me to find my style (FI)*
- The readings and resources continued to be a valuable part of the project as the mentors developed their mentoring skills.

### 2. Addressed their immediate concerns

- One mentor observed: “The readings were really helpful. I didn’t necessarily read all of them just what I needed to help me at that time” (FI). The mentors were aware of where to find relevant resources in their folder during the project and once the project was finished, which meant that they felt supported in their learning.

### • Making links between theory and praxis

- By understanding how theory links to practice teachers can apply their new knowledge not only to a specific issue but to other similar issues which arrive subsequently. All of the mentors referred to the practical resources as being the most useful written resource for them. In particular the resources on open-ended questions to use in learning conversations with the mentees and OTs to use in classroom observations were considered the most valuable resources. These comments from two mentors illustrate this:

*Mentor 1: The readings were really useful, especially the first ones on the style you can take. It was the practical suggestions that I found most useful. I haven’t read all of the resources but it’s good to have them to dip back in when I need them.*

*Mentor 3: The second thing the resources were good for was the OTs. My mentee setting of her goal was good as she thought that student engagement was an issue but through my observations we could both see that it wasn’t, so we could delve deeper and move onto her rapport with her year 11 (FI)*

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**Figure 14: Benefits of readings**

## Category 4: Reflective journals (RJ)

The mentors reported that the learning journals provided opportunities and time for them to process their thinking especially as these were written at regular intervals throughout the project.

The provision of reflection starters was appreciated by the mentors. They felt these gave them some

guidance on how to structure their RJ. When they were given the starters, two mentors commented that they were “really helpful” and “It’s good to have starters” (QLC 1). All of the mentors used the starters or reflection models for the majority of their reflective entries. All mentors varied which starters or models they used for each of their entries.

All of the mentors commented at some time during the project that they found the act of reflection in their journals to be useful in their learning process. One mentor stated that writing her RJ gave her time to process ideas which arose in the QLC sessions or MTG. She wrote that “Mentors and mentees should keep reflective notes on discussion to enable focus to be clear” (RJ). Two mentors did state that finding time to complete the RJ was not always an easy task and that to maximise the benefits of reflection it was better to complete the reflective entry as soon as possible after a QLC, learning conversation with the mentee, MTG or classroom observation:

*I always find reflections useful; it really makes you think about what you did and why you did it. But provided I did them straight away, otherwise it was hard to remember everything I did (FI)*

One tension reported by two mentors was having sufficient time to process new ideas and analyse their own behaviour as mentors. This was an important part of the project as it embedded a change of practice for the mentors. Of the two mentors who expressed difficulties in finding time to complete their journal, one in particular remarked several times how much she was struggling with finding adequate time to write in her journal. Despite the frequency of the comments, she was one of the mentors who thought the process of completing a RJ was considered tremendously beneficial. This suggests that while the mentors may not have enjoyed this part of the project, due to time restrictions, it clearly had value in achieving its goal; challenging the mentors’ beliefs and understandings about mentoring.

The same mentor who frequently commented on her difficulties in completing the journal, also spoke about the usefulness of writing regularly in her journal as this was required as part of the project. The mentor talked how the regularity of the QLC sessions made her accountable to the group as she needed to discuss what she had been doing with her mentee at each meeting (FI). She commented:

*They were annoying to do but they were good because again they made you accountable for what you were doing. The reflections forced you to think about changes to your practice. I would have liked to have changed even more than I did ... if they are long-term embedded changes, then it has been successful (RJ)*

For this mentor, the RJ recorded the changes in her beliefs and understandings about mentoring and the resulting changes in her practice. The time to reflect ensured that she had time to process her learning. She saw this process as a tool in bringing about long-term changes to her mentoring skills.

In summary the data analysis of this *'effective professional learning'* theme shows that the mentors found the act of learning about mentoring together, especially talking about their mentoring experiences, a valuable part of the study. The MTGs clarified their mentoring goals; the readings gave them an understanding of the research behind best practice mentoring and practical applications of how to develop these skills. The RJs provided the mentors with an opportunity to process their thinking about mentoring.

## **Theme 2: Leadership Role**

The theme of leadership role examines the mentors' views of their curriculum leadership role during and at the end of the mentoring project. It also includes the mentors' views on principal leadership in its connection with professional learning. The theme of leadership role arises from data collected primarily at the beginning and end of this mentoring project. The connection between leadership and learning is discussed in Chapter 2 and the concepts of shared leadership and mentoring as a leadership activity are also examined in this chapter. 'Leadership role' is defined as the mentors' understandings of their curriculum leadership role. This theme only has two categories: *'developing understandings of leadership'* and *'role of the mentor'*. Five data sources were used, including the IIs, MTGs, QLC sessions, RJs and FIs.

### **Context for Theme 2: Initial definitions of leadership and role of mentor**

Appendix 9 provides some baseline information on mentors' early views of their curriculum leadership role prior to the intervention study commencing. The findings come from early sources of data, such as, the GA survey, IIs, QLC 1, GSM and the first RJ entry. Firstly, Appendix 9 summarises how the mentors view effective curriculum leadership and explores the tensions they feel due to the expectations from SMT of their leadership role (IIs). Mentors' initial views of mentoring are also compared with the final interviews (FIs). Secondly, Appendix 9 presents the mentors' confusion about the role of the mentor, their decisions about the interactive approach/positional stance they wished to develop in their mentoring relationships and the tensions they felt existed for curriculum leaders in their role as a mentor. These understandings of the role of the mentor are discussed as a point of comparison for mentors' views during and at the end of the intervention study.

### ***Category 1: Developing understandings of Leadership***

This category looks at the mentors' views of effective curriculum leadership after the initial stages of the project. Five data sources were used, including the IIs, MTGs, QLC sessions, RJs and FIs.

The data analysis of this category is organised into three sub-categories:

- understandings of leadership,
- leadership tensions, and
- mentoring as a leadership activity

## Understandings of leadership

The mentors' developing understandings of leadership were expressed during and at the end of the study. The mentors had an interesting conversation about the principal's role in teacher professional learning (QLC 4). As a leader the mentors felt that the principal should demonstrate her commitment to quality teaching by taking ad hoc classes to experiment with approaches to teaching practice:

*Mentor 1: It would be good to see [the principal] going into a class and teaching some groups*

*Mentor 2: Some shadow learning*

*Mentor 3: Since she is not in the classroom, she could go into classrooms and ask to try out some stuff*

*Mentor 2: She could come into mine and do some literature techniques on [author], with my year 13s*

*Mentor 1: The students would be gobsmacked and love it, it would be brilliant*

*Mentor 3: There's nothing like understanding people's problems until you try it yourself (QLC 4)*

This conversation shows that the mentors believe a leader should be actively involved in professional learning alongside the teaching staff and this would be a beneficial form of role modelling not only for students but teachers too. It also supports a model of leadership that understands first-hand the experiences of teachers who are focussing on their professional learning through professional inquiry, rather than a 'top-down' transactional leadership model.

One mentor addressed a concern her mentee had about students having equitable access to teacher support (QLC 5). The mentor talked with her mentee about how the mentee saw her role as a teacher. She felt this was appropriate in her role as a mentor. She then addressed the perceived inequity the students were experiencing with other teachers in the department as she felt it was her role to do this as an Asst HOD. Interestingly, three other mentors also confirmed that they thought this division of action, for the separate roles of mentor and Asst HOD, was appropriate.

## Leadership tensions

Throughout the project the mentors' perceptions of effective curriculum leadership were influenced by the reported expectations of the SMT. The mentors discussed the use of OTs; one mentor described an encounter she had with the DP:

*Mentor 1: Because I haven't ever observed teachers before and I needed to in my new role as Asst HOD, I went down to see [the DP] to say I didn't know what I was supposed to be doing as the form [the school attestation form] asked the teacher to identify their goal, asked the observer to comment on*

*three separate areas of focus during the lesson and complete the behaviour grid. I just didn't think it was possible to do all of those things at once! He said I could ignore parts that weren't relevant to their goals.*

*Mentor 2: Oh that would have useful to know!*

*Mentor 3: No one has told us that.*

*Mentor 4: I was wondering what we were to do with those forms.*

*Mentor 1: I was exhausted and I found it incredibly stressful to do it in one period.*

*The mentors then discussed the need for staff to have professional learning opportunities around carrying out classroom observations before being asked to complete them (QLC 2)*

This conversation highlights several important points. Firstly it demonstrates a view of curriculum leadership as the execution of formalised attestation processes. Secondly, it appears that the necessity to complete the formal documents and to do this accurately is a source of anxiety for the curriculum leaders. The lack of professional learning and clarity around how the forms were to be used caused the curriculum leaders angst and frustration. The clarification offered by the DP provided the mentors with guidance and removed the ambiguity from SMT expectations.

## **Mentoring as a leadership activity**

At the beginning of the project the mentors' prevailing view of effective curriculum leadership was as a managerial role which focussed on the management and delivery of the curriculum and assessment. By the end of the study the mentors' views of curriculum leadership had expanded to recognise the importance of mentoring for a curriculum leader.

One mentor stated that she found the project useful for highlighting her approach to leadership in general. She described effective curriculum leadership as:

*finding out where the members of your team are and deciding which kind of leadership style you need to employ with them... so that you are applying different ways of working with your staff depending on where they are at (F1).*

The experience of discussing possible mentoring approaches in the QLC sessions has impacted on her approach to her curriculum leadership role. She was able to recognise during the project that different people required different approaches to mentoring and she could see how the ways of working closely with members of her department would change according to the professional learning needs of each teacher. A second mentor described her views on curriculum leadership at the end of the project when compared with her original views from the beginning of the project:

*My views have changed quite a bit. I can see on another level how I can help my junior teachers [teachers of years 9 and 10] by actually mentoring them. I can see now how I can make a difference to them as teachers. I feel confident at that now whereas beforehand I was like Ahhh what do I do? (F1)*

This mentor had originally defined the role of a leader as a visionary who is able to get others to follow along in the same direction as the leader. This statement demonstrates that she believes she can facilitate the learning of the teachers in her learning area by working alongside them in a mentoring role.

The mentors often referred to the benefits of their own professional learning as mentors. One mentor stated that she felt “quite stimulated this year as a result, I’m learning a lot” (QLC 4) in reference to her mentoring role and new role as Asst HOD and another stated with reference to the mentoring project “This is brilliant what I’m doing because I’m learning “(QLC 3). The mentors acknowledged that they are learning and changing their practice and supporting their mentees to challenge their own teaching practice, yet there did not appear to be a conscious link to leadership-in-action for the mentors. It was curious to note that the mentors did not refer to the development of their mentoring skills as a leadership activity in the QLC sessions. The mentors focussed on the value of having effective learning conversations with their mentees which put the mentees at the centre of their learning (QLC 2). They discussed the use of OTs and ways of presenting the data they collected to their mentees so that they could interpret the arising issues themselves and their next steps of action. The mentors did not directly refer to their actions in these learning conversations as leadership activity or part of a curriculum leader’s role. References to leadership role were limited to accountability observations which curriculum leaders are required to carry out by senior management (SMT) as discussed above. When discussing these accountability requirements, the mentors quickly referred to the need to complete these as part of their curriculum leadership role.

Similarly the mentors discussed the classroom observations which were selected by the mentee as an effective way of putting the mentees at the centre of their learning (QLC 3). Once again, at no time did any mentor refer to this collaborative mentoring approach as a leadership activity. Perhaps the views of effective curriculum leadership are so well-formed and part of the school culture that the mentors did not see the facilitation of professional learning they were engaged in, as a leadership activity. Only the formally validated leadership practices, such as the completion of registration and attestation documents were accepted in this school culture as clear leadership activities.

One mentor, however, did recognise mentoring as a leadership activity. She stated that the project has made her:

*aware of the mentoring aspect of professional learning. It is very easy to fall into a directing telling way of leading rather than a coaching approach. I’m more aware of that now and conscious of not doing it like I had been. I see now that the role is about building relationships and seeing them develop as passionate teachers and sharing that (FI)*

This statement demonstrates a significant shift in thinking for this mentor. She had previously seen leadership as a positional authority role where the leader was the expert and people were managed to carry out the leaders' decisions. This changing conception of leadership is apparent in this statement:

*I don't think I was as appreciative that this role is about people and not managing them but seeing them develop, it's the role of the curriculum leader to encourage and develop them to be the best they can be, to develop their potential. Because I want them to be effective and independent... All you are doing is co-ordinating them, releasing them to be that rather than controlling or managing them (F1)*

This mentor clearly articulated her desire for independent self-reflective teachers and could see the positive benefits of a collaborative mentoring model in achieving her goal. Another mentor also specifically referred to mentoring as a leadership activity. She had previously included "building teacher expertise" as one component of a curriculum leaders' role (II). Later she linked her previous statement "building up teacher expertise" to mentoring: "I guess that's what you are doing when you are mentoring so that's how I see curriculum leadership" (F1). This shows recognition of mentoring as a leadership activity.

One mentor agreed with her previous descriptions of a curriculum leader but wished to modify her definition by stating:

*I would have to add mentoring into that now. That's what an effective curriculum leader does. They don't just do those sorts of things [referring to her previous list of tasks] but they definitely do mentor them, develop their strengths ... and I definitely see that as not being developed enough in teaching, it's not taught. (F1)*

All of the mentors were in agreement at the end of the project that teachers would benefit from undertaking some professional learning in mentoring, as they were doing. Therefore, it appears that the experience of being involved in the mentoring project had helped shape new understandings of curriculum leadership for these mentors.

In summary the analysis of this 'developing understandings of leadership' category shows that the mentors initially viewed their curriculum leadership role as largely management of people and systems. They often reported a tension between meeting the school's accountability measures and offering mentoring support teachers for in their departments. By the end of the study they expanded their views of leadership to recognise the importance of mentoring.

## ***Category 2: Role of the mentor***

The 'role the mentor' is defined as the role the mentors play in supporting a teacher to own, analyse and suggest solutions for his or her own practice. The mentors' role is their understandings of mentoring, the interactive approach or stance they assume in a mentoring relationship and the

tensions they experience as a mentor and curriculum leader. The data analysis of this category is organised into the following sub-categories:

- collaborative approach to mentoring, and
- who should mentor?

### **‘Collaborative’ approach to the mentoring relationship**

As reported earlier, the mentors wanted to facilitate a collaborative or non-directive approach with their mentees. This approach to a mentoring relationship shaped their understandings of their role as a mentor. The data analysis of this sub-category is organised into the following sections:

- reciprocity,
- subject knowledge as a mentor, and
- mentor roles with indirect classroom focus

#### ***Reciprocity***

During the project, the mentors chose to work towards building an open and reciprocal relationship. While the mentoring relationship focussed on the classroom learning needs of the mentee, the mentors reported that they were learning an inordinate amount about their leadership capacity as mentors and about the craft of teaching, such as: “This year I am getting as much as I’m giving as my mentee is in the same subject area and is incredibly self-reflective” (RJ). The mentors felt that they were learning specific mentoring skills as well as about teaching practice while they worked with their mentee. One mentor commented that the project had taught her “about different types of mentoring and taught me that I need to listen more – ask more reflective questions i.e. ask rather than tell” (RJ). The journey of learning new skills and challenging existing practices was reported to be a positive experience for this mentor.

The experience of developing an equal and open mentoring relationship was novel. The mentors’ relationships had focussed on their positional authority and their role as an expert. A collaborative or non-directive mentoring relationship was welcomed by all of the mentors, as this comment illustrates:

*I’m just there to collect information and for her to make her own judgements on it. I’m feeling a lot happier about the whole process of recording and information gathering, and being impartial, not making judgement on it as then the other person is going to feel a lot more comfortable and trust you a lot more (MTG)*

Not only did the mentors feel relieved of the pressure they felt in having to supply all of the answers in a mentoring relationship, but they could also recognise that a collaborative relationship was more likely to evoke trust between teachers.

Even though the mentors supported a collaborative approach to learning, two mentors in particular found it difficult at times to facilitate such an approach, because their PRT mentees were not forthcoming in offering solutions for their own classroom concerns. One mentor commented that: “I feel like I’m being more of a mentor making suggestions than a coach who supports her decisions” (QLC 4). The mentor felt that when discussing a classroom observation of her mentee’s lesson, her mentee was unable to suggest possible alternatives to try in the next lesson. The mentor found herself making suggestions to her mentee about possible approaches. This highlights a tension this mentor felt in her role as a mentor. She was aware that by supporting the mentee’s own decision-making will assist the mentee’s feelings of ownership yet she feels the responsibility rests on her to offer solutions. This mentor acknowledged her tendency to “solve people’s problems”, saying “I am inclined to rush in and offer to help” (RJ), the use of open questioning techniques may also support the mentee was arriving at her own solutions for her concerns.

### ***Mentor roles with indirect classroom focus***

One mentor worked with her mentee on issues of classroom practice but soon found that the areas of greatest concern for her mentee were interdepartmental issues of assessment practice. She felt that she was moving outside the role of an educative mentor in spending time working on her mentee’s goal of understanding and creating clearer assessment practices in the department. Interestingly, other mentors recognised the work this mentor was doing with her mentee as a necessary part of her role a mentor. The mentors made comments, such as, “But that’s part of the mentoring role”, “Yeah absolutely” (QLC 5). The remaining mentors also agreed. The mentor reported that she found herself “talking to other people in the department to ensure that [my mentee] has the resources and the support she needs” (QLC 5). As she had for issues of classroom practice, this mentor was providing support for collaborative learning, rather than offering solutions for the mentee’s problems. The broadening of the role of educative mentoring to include areas which less directly impact on classroom teaching provided a fruitful discussion for the mentors and an acknowledgement of the broad spectrum of their role. While exploring their role as a mentor, the mentors also discussed who should play this role.

### **Who should mentor?**

The mentors discussed who would be most suitable as teacher mentors, including whether it is part of a curriculum leadership role (FI). The key areas of focus in these discussions were the role of subject-specific mentoring and whether or not mentoring relationships should be hierarchical in nature. The data analysis of this sub-category is organised into the following sections:

- subject-specific mentoring, and
- teachers as mentors

### ***Subject-specific mentoring***

The mentors were unanimous in their belief that mentors should hold subject-specific knowledge of their mentee's teaching subject. One mentor commented in her interview that "Much of what I worked with [my mentee] about was based on specific [subject] knowledge" (F1). Another stated that: "It really needs to be within subjects because mentoring is a mix of curriculum and classroom knowledge" (F1). Both of these mentors see the importance of shared subject knowledge within educative mentoring as the focus is on improving classroom practice.

However, two mentors did comment that subject specific mentoring might not always be necessary in all mentoring relationships. One mentor stated that while she saw important benefits for a mentor working with a PRT to have specific-subject knowledge, she thought that for experienced teachers subject-specific knowledge may not be as necessary. What was important was the pairing of the learners: "It's more important that it is someone you feel confident with, someone you respect professionally" (F1). The second mentor concurred with her comment:

*It would depend whether the issues arising are generic or subject-based. I think sometimes when you are looking from the outside it is easier because you are not distracted by the content of it you are can see it more from the eyes of the student (F1)*

This mentor is acknowledging that as a subject specialist, mentors can become distracted by the subject content of the lesson rather than on the teaching practice used to provide a learning experience for students. A non-specialist may find it easier to look past the content and help the mentee to focus on teaching techniques and student learning.

### ***Teachers as mentors***

All of the mentors in this project were curriculum leaders and as such they held positions of responsibility in their departments. As discussed earlier, this caused tensions in their mentoring relationships as they were ultimately responsible for completing registration and attestation documents for the teachers in their subject areas. All of the mentors commented that they did not think it was necessary for mentors to be teachers who held positions of responsibility in their schools. One commented that suitability for mentoring did not depend on positional authority but an ability to work well with others:

*Not necessarily those with responsibility but experienced teachers, good practitioners who want to do it, X factor teachers as you can be a good teacher but not necessarily have that X factor which makes for a really good mentor. Part of it is how they relate to well to other teachers and students (F1)*

This mentor is focussed on the abilities of the mentor rather than their positional authority. She supports experienced teachers who have a willingness to mentor combined with an ability to work well with others in a non-judgemental capacity, the ideal mentors. Her comments were supported by another mentor who stated that, “it is only motivated people who would make [mentoring] meaningful” (FI). Clarity in the roles the curriculum leader mentors would play, as opposed to the non-hierarchical mentor pairings, would need to be established. As suggested by three mentors, a dual system may work well. Curriculum leaders could mentor PRTs and experienced teachers could be paired in reciprocal learning relationships. One mentor describes how she could see this working:

*I think there are two types of mentoring relationships, the hierarchical one where the person with leadership responsibilities in the department, it's part of their responsibility to mentor people in their department and they are responsible for the attestation. Those people are better with the PRTs as that is a separate issue which needs to be offered. And then I think you could have the option of staff opting into a [collaborative] mentoring relationship which is part of a professional learning programme. Regular mentoring relationship. It would require all staff being upskilled in the art of mentoring (FI)*

For this mentor, the ability to create effective mentoring relationships requires professional learning for all teachers involved. It is interesting that she still views mentoring for PRTs as a role for curriculum leaders while the professional learning of experienced teachers can be entrusted to colleagues who do not experience an hierarchical imbalance.

The concept of teachers' reciprocal mentoring relationships was supported by a mentor who exclaimed that she thought:

*We should all be mentors! At an absolute basic level all HODs should be trained but then the rest of the department should be paired up to have equal mentoring relationships (FI)*

Both of these comments demonstrate the mentors support for collaborative mentoring relationships while still alluding to the tensions between accountability processes and educative mentoring the curriculum leaders experienced during the project. This concern was voiced by another mentor who said that curriculum leaders would still need to hold the responsibility for signing registration and attestation requirements and therefore:

*it is important for the HOLA to build a relationship with the beginning teacher through mentoring so that they are able to complete the attestation requirements with confidence. Especially since complaints etc from parents/others come to the HOLA, so we are aware of the background which a mentor wouldn't be unless the HOLA told them about these (FI)*

As the mentors experience the benefits of learner-centred mentoring which focus on the learning needs of their mentee, they are clearly grappling with the tensions of accountability requirements.

A mentor who supported experienced teachers having reciprocal mentoring relationships with each other, remarked:

*I think that in an egalitarian relationship we shouldn't be responsible for attestation with each other as we are asking each other to take risks etc and the stakes are too high if we are signing each other off (FI)*

The balance of power in mentoring relationships was an important issue. The tensions of accountability and collaborative educative mentoring remained unresolved by the end of the project. Most of the curriculum leaders openly discussed this tension with their mentees and made it clear when they were completing any observations or forms as part of registration and attestation. The mentors kept these separate from the collaborative educative mentoring they were developing between themselves and their mentees.

Another mentor agreed that HOLAs did not have to fulfil the role of mentors, however she did warn, that the workload connected with effective mentoring was “a big ask in terms of workload commitment” (FI) and as a result she thought it may not be realistic to ask teachers to mentor each other. One mentor thought not only should potential mentors experience professional learning around mentoring but “also any teachers in charge of teacher trainees” as these teachers are also in a role where learning conversations and classroom observations are part of a beginning teacher’s learning (FI).

### **Theme 3: Professional learning about mentoring**

The focus of this last theme ‘professional learning about mentoring’ focuses on the types of professional learning about mentoring the mentors found beneficial in developing their understandings of becoming a mentor. They describe the learning process and skill development they experienced in learning to have effective learning conversations with their mentees, and use classroom observations effectively. Six data sources were used, including the IIs, GSMs, QLC sessions, MTGs, RJs and FIs. The data analysis of this theme is organised into three categories:

- Interactive approach/positional stance,
- learning conversations, and
- classroom observations

#### **Category 1: Interactive approach/positional stance of the mentor**

The interactive approach or positional stance of the mentor refers to the approach or position the mentor holds in the mentoring relationship (as discussed in Chapter 2). The stance the mentors took in their mentoring relationship was reported to have been consciously chosen so that their mentees could become “independent teachers who are not reliant on mentors” and “move forward with their practice and change their practice” (QLC 1). In order to achieve their goals the mentors all wanted to use a collaborative or non-directive approach where possible. One mentor commented that she

wanted her mentee to “come up with her own goals” and be able to “translate her own goals into action” (GSM). Another mentor echoed the need for mentees to choose their own learning goals by saying, “in order for [my mentee] to take ownership of her goals, she needs to be the creator of them” (GSM). One mentor recognised that learner centred mentoring would require a shift in her approach to mentoring. She stated that she “needs to move away from a directive stance and listen more. Move away from me telling her what she should be doing, facilitating rather than directing” (GSM). The process of thinking about their current mentoring stances and which stances would best result in learner-centred learning, took some time for the mentors. This was an important part of the process for all of the mentors as it set them up for developing specific mentoring behaviours to expedite their approach to mentoring.

## **Category 2: Learning conversations**

Learning conversations refer to the one-on-one educative learning conversations which occurred between a mentor and mentee and the learning conversations the mentors had in the QLC sessions. The mentor-to-mentee learning conversations occurred several times during the duration of the project. The data analysis of this sub-category is organised into the following sections:

- use of questioning skills,
- mentors’ active listening skills, and
- an educative mentoring focus.

### ***Use of Questioning Techniques***

The use of open-ended questions was a key focus in having successful learning conversations. All mentors indicated that they would like to develop their use of open-ended questions when having a learning conversation with their mentee (GSM). One mentor commented: “I want to try some techniques like probing etc” and another stated: “I went on a course which looked at ... coaching conversations which I am keen to try with my mentee” (GSM). All of the mentors recognised that effective learning conversations required specific skills, particularly the use of questions which developed the thinking of their mentee. They were motivated to cultivate these skills so that deep learning could occur, as shown in this comment:

*“I feel I am at a point where I can reflect on what I have said [in learning conversations] and improve on this to make my conversations more powerful. I would like to ask more questions which let the mentee lead the conversation more” (RJ).*

In the QLC sessions, the mentors talked with each other about their experiences of using various questioning techniques where they identified an understanding of the effectiveness of open questions in this process, such as this comment shows:

*I asked her questions about what she wanted to specifically achieve. This resulted her generating a much more meaningful and specific goal which we then looked at together. This process was really useful for her and me (QLC 4).*

Another mentor reported that:

*During the learning conversation I was very conscious to follow the questions that I had in front of me as I did not want to be giving my mentee the solutions as my goal was trying to get her to come up with them ... I got very good responses back from my mentee ... I think she found this also and it gave her more confidence as she had thought of and implemented these strategies herself (RJ).*

These vignettes demonstrate that these two mentors deliberately employed questions they believed would provide opportunities for the mentees to take ownership of their goals and learning processes. In QLC 2-5 sessions, the mentors shared the types of questions they would ask their mentee during learning conversations and they felt that the preparation of the questions in advance gave them confidence about how to structure their learning conversations. The experiences, reported from their first learning conversations with their mentees, encouraged the mentors to further develop their questioning skills for subsequent conversations.

Most of the mentors commented at the beginning of the project that asking open-ended questions was a difficult skill to acquire and they found it took some practice. One mentor commented:

*Now I see what you meant about writing stuff down - because you have to. I didn't really think about it otherwise how would I know what to say at the time? Like the good questions to ask to probe and get her thinking more. Otherwise I would think of the good questions later once we were done but probably not at the time (GSM).*

One mentor stated that “the use of open ended questions was invaluable in the preparation of my learning conversation to meet my goal” (RJ). For her, the concern of asking meaningful questions was alleviated through preparing possible questions to use. The preparation of open-ended questions assisted the mentors in asking questions which promoted mentee ownership of learning and assisted in preventing the mentors from reverting to a directive model of mentoring.

Even at the end of the project, one mentor commented that “That learning conversation bit is still hard. The openness of the person is hard” and that this would be an area she would continue to work on as a mentor (FI). Two mentors were concerned that their mentees were inexperienced teachers and therefore unlikely to be able to suggest solutions to their own issues. During an MTG and in the QLC sessions, these two mentors were able to explore the use of specific questions to support their mentees in suggesting their own possible approaches to use in the classroom. They shared the issues they were facing with each other and the PR in order to discover possible questions to ask in order to support their mentees’ learning. This is illustrated in this conversation between a mentor and me:

*PR: So what questions can you ask her to get her to think about some of these things?*

*M: What do you mean?*

*PR: Like what does/did she want her students to be able to do in that lesson?*

*M: Oh right so I could ask her what she thought students needed to know in order to be able to solve that problem, the background stuff they need to know... Ok then I can watch her try out some of those things to give her feedback on them (MTG)*

Not only was the mentor able to formulate a possible line of questioning but also how she could support her mentee through classroom observations of the mentee experimenting with solutions to her issue.

One mentor shared with the other mentors that she was especially concerned that the use of semi-structured open questions may not assist in creating an authentic conversation:

*I was consciously trying to achieve a sense of authenticity in the conversation as I had notes, I had written open questions written down, I wanted to move away from it sounding "staged". I didn't want to sound as if I was coming from a place of superiority rather equality and I wanted my mentee to feel a sense of value at the end of it. I was surprised that it went so well as it was all just open questions. (QLC 2)*

This comment illustrates how the experience of having a learning conversation was rewarding for the mentor. The mentor did not expect the use of pre-prepared open-ended questions to provide an authentic framework for a learning conversation. Her surprise at the success of this conversation resulted learning which changed her practice because she plans to use these questioning skills in subsequent learning conversations.

The process of developing the skills necessary for effective learning conversations was reported as a rewarding experience for all of the mentors, as noted by this mentor:

*I think learning how to have an effective learning conversation has helped me to mentor more effectively because it made me more confident while having the actual conversation and it also meant the conversation was prepared thoroughly before hand and therefore achieved the results I wanted. The use of open ended questions was invaluable in the preparation of my learning conversation to meet my goal (RJ)*

This mentor reports that her confidence in her questioning skills had improved and this had given her greater confidence in holding learning conversations. She felt that the effectiveness of the learning conversations had improved as a result. This had been achieved through opportunities to discuss possible approaches in the QLC sessions with other mentors and the practical experience of experimenting with new skills during learning conversations with a mentee.

### ***Active listening skills***

In addition to asking questions, the mentors focussed on using active listening skills during their learning conversations, such as listening more than talking, use of open and active listening body

language, and use of paraphrasing and probing. One mentor described her learning conversations with her mentee as: “It’s been about her doing more of the talking and me less” (FI). Two mentors commented on their conscious use of active listening skills. One said she was “aiming for a 70-30 ratio” and another stated “Because of the questions I used, I found that mine was more like that, certainly in comparison to what I had been doing” (QLC 2). They identified that by using active listening skills the focus was on the mentee’s learning and their role was to facilitate this learning.

The focus on active listening led to a greater level of comfort in the mentors about their role, as illustrated by a mentor’s comment: “I felt a lot more comfortable with this conversation. I actively looked and listened” (RJ). One mentor was able to draw on previous learning from a course and use of paraphrasing to ensure she limited the amount of talking she did in a learning conversation:

*In order to stop yourself from talking too much it was suggested that you limit yourself to only paraphrasing what your mentee has said and not say anything else. So there was a main question, and other questions underneath you could ask and then you need to paraphrase. So as soon as you were told things you were paraphrasing it back – ‘So you have told me ... ‘ and then you go straight to your next question (QLC 2).*

The mentors deliberately thought about how to be an active listener as they all expressed an inclination for talking in a learning conversation. The mentors were able to create common understandings of effective listening skills in the QLC sessions. They were aware of the importance of developing skills to limit their talking time in a learning conversation so that the focus was on the mentee’s learning.

The mentors wanted the mentees to drive their own learning because they believed it would contribute to the depth of the mentees’ learning. This view is expressed by this mentor: “I went on this course and they said the person who does the most talking does the most learning” (GSM). Like the use of open-ended questions, active listening skills were skills which the mentors stated they found difficult to improve. It was an area they continued to work on during the whole project and is an on-going goal for some. One mentor reported at the conclusion of the project that:

*I try so hard not to do all the talking and ask her questions which help her learning. She talks a lot more now. When she wants to change something I ask her how she might go about doing it rather than giving her the answer. (FI)*

This mentor reported that she deliberately used active listening skills to ensure that the focus was on the mentee’s learning.

In summary the analysis of this ‘*learning conversations*’ category indicates that the educative mentoring approach of using deliberate use of questioning techniques and active listening skills enabled the mentors to focus on the mentees’ learning.

### ***Educative Mentoring Focus***

All mentors had identified that they wanted to create a mentoring relationship which had an educative mentoring focus through the use of professional or teacher inquiry (see Chapter 2). The mentors wanted to look at ways they could support their mentee to move forward with reflection; “to put reflection into action” (QLC 1) as one mentor described it. They saw this as providing support for their mentee to experiment with approaches and they used questions in their learning conversations with their mentee to provide opportunities for this to occur. I discussed with the effective open-ended questions such as: “What do you want it to look like? What could you try to move towards achieving your goal? What would you like me to observe as you focus on this goal?” (GSM). These questions centred on the mentee choosing a current issue from the classroom which the mentor could help them unpack. One mentor stated that her mentee wanted to investigate how her students were finding a particular unit of work, “the feedback told her she was going too fast. We talked about it and she was reflective about this and she wants it to be her next goal of what she will work on.”

The data analysis of this *‘learning conversations’* category shows that the educative mentoring approach of deliberate use of questioning techniques and active listening skills enabled the mentors to focus on the mentees’ learning.

### **Category 3: Classroom observations**

This sub-category reports the analysis of data related to the classroom observations of the mentee’s teaching. The mentors used OTs to record evidence of the mentee’s chosen aspect. The data was shared with the mentee in a post-observation meeting where the mentor and mentee explored the evidence collected in the OT and possible next steps of action.

The data analysis of this sub-category is organised into the following sections:

- structured OTs,
- reported specific mentor confidence in the process of giving feedback after using OTs, and
- specific and clear outcomes of using classroom observations

Some of the OTs were provided by me during QLC sessions and individual meetings with the mentors, others were shared between the mentors at QLC sessions, some mentors created their own and one mentor got other OTs from the DP. One mentor shared the OTs she had created with the other mentors: “I made up this sheet and used it when I watched her. Every one or two minutes I would scan the students and check whether it was on task behaviour or off-task/distracted “(QLC 4). Another mentor also shared tools which she had sourced from the DP:

*I talked to [the DP] and he suggested some other OTs we could use. Use a stopwatch to time each sequence in a class. Draw a grid of behaviour and work, tally, negative comments about behaviour, positive comments about work. (QLC 2)*

The mentors stated that they felt a variety of OTs could be used to provide valuable and specific evidence to support their mentee's learning. The OTs recorded data from the classroom which provided the mentee with information to support the development of their chosen goal. The mentors found the OTs simple and easy to use and they enjoyed having a bank of possible tools. One mentor stated "I found using this tool during my observation very easy, recording what the mentee did or said and then the reaction of the students" (RJ). They also expressed confidence in creating their own OTs for varying situations so that they could provide valuable feedback for their mentees. The opportunity to discuss the effectiveness of the OTs during the QLC sessions provided the mentors with support in experimenting with different OTs.

### **Structured OTs**

All of the mentors felt that the structured nature of OTs was an advantage and they often talked about this feature of OTs in the QLC sessions. They felt more comfortable using a structured tool with which they could record evidence. All of the mentors referred to the OTs as "objective" pieces of data as opposed to their previous experiences of writing an opinion-based summary of classroom events (QLC 4). This term was not used by me or in the readings which were made available to the mentors. The mentors felt that the evidence collected would benefit their mentee's understanding of their practice, as this comment by a mentor suggests:

*It was so good that it wasn't based on my judgement but on evidence, it suits my nature, so I could use this one to calculate on/off task behaviour in a first visit and then once the teacher has tried new strategies I could go back and use it again as a measure, so that we would have a number behind it. (QLC 4)*

This sentiment was supported by another mentor who commented: "I have had a look at some of these tools and I really like how objective they are, just to facts of what went on in the lesson" (MTG). They referred to their own experiences of receiving unsubstantiated feedback from classroom observations and stated that they felt relieved to use these OTs. The mentors' perception of the OTs as providing "objective" evidence would suggest that the mentors were desirous of feedback tools which removed subjective comments by observers so that the teachers they were observing could be supported to draw their own conclusions and take ownership of changes they could make to their practice.

Two mentors expressed nervousness at observing teachers for whom they held line responsibility, such as: "I don't really know what I'm doing with classroom observations. I haven't done any training in them before. "How do I spot something to focus on in a lesson"? (II) Another mentor was

concerned that any tools we use should lead to meaningful feedback and teacher reflection: “I want to be able to use something that helps me give clear feedback” (I1). The concerns of these two mentors were allayed through the structured nature of the OTs used. During QLC 4, discussion ensued regarding the observational records taken by an observer. The mentors commented that if a teacher observing a lesson recorded ‘all the students were engaged most of the time’, the teacher receiving that feedback might not believe the comments. They felt that if the observer used a structured OT which recorded evidence of the behaviours of the students, that the teacher receiving the feedback would be more likely to trust the feedback. One mentor explained that the OTs treated teachers as professionals as it gave teachers evidence which they could use to change their own practice. The OTs provided the mentees with evidence from their lesson and they were able to analyse the data and own alternatives for practice: “I like the objective nature of them, especially when you are dealing with adults who are professionals. It gives clear evidence” (F1).

### ***Reported Mentor Confidence***

All mentors had indicated in the gap analyses that they did not think they had received adequate training in how to carry out or use OTs effectively. While all had completed observations on members of their department for professional standards accountability and attestation purposes, none of the mentors reported a feeling of confidence in their past practice of how to provide feedback which would result in meaningful learning for the teacher being observed. The mentors reported that they had grown in confidence in being able to choose appropriate tools to use but also in the feedback that they could give in the post-observation conference. One mentor stated:

*Yeah and now what I feel really comfortable about is having a bank of techniques I can go and look up, so if they say I want to focus on this, I can say I will use this tool for that purpose to give good feedback (QLC 4)*

The reported building of confidence was an important part of the learning process for the mentors. They wanted to develop specific skills as a mentor in order to mentor others effectively; knowing how to use OTs was one of these skills.

The mentors spent a large proportion of their RJs commenting on their growing confidence with learning conversations due to the use of the OTs. Three mentors commented that that in future mentoring programmes OTs should be used as a part of the learning conversations between mentors and mentees. One mentor commented: “Classroom OTs should be used as they allow for objectivity and for both parties to discuss data constructively” (RJ). This perceived growth in confidence is in part due to the evidence-based nature of the OTs as this allowed for more focussed learning conversations post-observation, such as this comment:

*Having a focus for observation and some ideas of different way to observe a lesson was really helpful in the follow up learning conversation as it removed the focus in the conversation from 'this went wrong...' to this is what I saw, making it a factual thing. (RJ)*

Even at the beginning of the project, after the mentors completed their first classroom observation using an OT tool, they expressed relief during the QLC sessions at having evidence on which to base their post-observation conference. One mentor commented that “I feel good about having some tangible evidence to show her how effectively she met her goal as she does tend to doubt herself” (QLC 3). Once the mentors held a post-observational conference using the evidence from the OT tool, they saw how useful the evidence was in giving meaningful feedback.

The more practice the mentors had at using OTs as stimuli for post-observational feedback, the more confident they reported they felt:

*After finding two types of techniques tools for observations, I used them in class. I was feeling relaxed and confident to give feedback. They were information gathering and not my opinions which I felt more comfortable giving factual feedback. (RJ)*

This mentor feels more comfortable in her new repertoire of OTs providing confidence in giving feedback to her mentee. For all of the mentors this was a change in practice from how they would have completed an observation in the past, as noted by this mentor:

*I completed a classroom observation for another member of my department last week and have to say I approached the task in quite a different way to this time last year when I observed her. I felt more confident about the whole thing. We had our learning conversation beforehand and I think I was able to offer her much more valuable feedback than I did this time last year. (RJ)*

This change was seen as favourable for all of the mentors, even those who had been observing teachers for some years. Their reported confidence was linked to the belief that they were providing meaningful and specific feedback to their mentees through the use of OTs.

### ***Specific focus and clear evidence***

All five mentors welcomed the specific focus of the OTs. They felt it gave classroom observations a clear purpose. One mentor stated, “It was helpful to have a focus for the observation and an activity to carry out during the observation” (RJ). The mentors felt confident using an OT tool which looked at a specific aspect of the lesson, especially as the aspect had been chosen by the mentee. It gave the mentors confidence that the data collected would contribute to relevant and timely learning for the mentee: “Having only little things to focus on in a lesson seems [to] develop people more effectively” (FI).

OTs provided valuable feedback on specific aspects of the lesson. This mentor had made earlier comments about the nature of observations she had experienced as a PRT, primarily the lack of

specificity and value of the feedback she had received. She clearly saw these tools as a way of improving the learning of the teacher being observed.

All mentors commented that they believed the OTs provided clear data. One mentor when discussing her experiences of using a particular OT, commented that the data made it “clear that the students were really engaged almost all of the time” and that as a result she could see a pathway forward with her mentee, “So I hope she will see that she has met this goal and choose something else to focus on once we have had our post-observation meeting” (QLC 4). Another mentor used a ‘cause and effect’ OT and reported that she was “able to say at 1.02pm these two students wandered off while you were giving that demonstration etc which was great, it was factual not personal and she talked about how she could have prevented this” (QLC2). Having clarity of purpose was important for the mentors in their post-observation meetings with their mentees, framed by evidence from the OTs.

The mentors stated that their mentees were able to take ownership of their learning and be challenged to think about other possible areas of focus: “We talked about the observation I had done and she could see that the students were really engaged” (MTG). OTs allowed the teacher being observed to identify causes for lack of student engagement: “It showed that this chunk went on for too long as the students lost focus. [The mentee] was able to identify this herself when she saw this grid” (QLC 4). The OT tool had uncovered the source of why the lesson had not progressed as smoothly as the mentee wanted. Without the use of the OT tool, the mentor believed that she may not have been able to uncover the problem. The OTs also provided information that surprised both the mentor and mentee. An example is when a mentor talked about a situation where her mentee was surprised by the results of the OT. The OT she used “showed that the group at the back corner was the group who were off task the most ... she was really surprised by this as she didn’t think this group was a problem and didn’t know they were off task” (QLC 4). OTs can provide another source of lesson information or data for a teacher which may not be obvious when absorbed in the teaching of a lesson.

The data analysis of this ‘*classroom observations*’ category shows that the mentors found using structured OTs beneficial in Assisting them to give meaningful and specific feedback to their mentees, and consequently greater confidence in holding these learning conversations. They also perceived that the OTs provided specific and evidence to Assist the mentee’s learning.

## Summary

The key themes which arise out of the data collected are centred on the mentors' understandings of professional learning, their role as a mentor and their understanding of leadership. The previous experiences of professional development and professional learning and the nature of their school culture strongly influence their views of learning. Their experiences of imposed professional development contrasted to their experiences of collaborative learning in this project. The mentors clearly articulated the conditions which effectively contributed to their own learning, particularly in the development of the skills needed to partake in meaningful learning conversations with their mentees and carry out classroom observations successfully.

Once again the mentors' views of mentoring were influenced by their school environment, and their initial uncertainty of their role was addressed through collaborative learning practices. The mentors' confidence in choosing an interactive approach or positional stance, which suited them in their mentoring relationship, was attributed to an exploration of possible mentoring stances. Throughout the project the mentors experienced tensions and concerns about their role as curriculum leaders and the requirement to complete accountability and attestation documents. These concerns were the focus of much discussion and prompted the mentors to explore how collaborative relationships, rather than hierarchically-imbalanced relationships, could work in mentoring relationships.

The mentors' views of their leadership positions were influenced by their school culture and their experiences of mentoring in this intervention study. While the mentors described mentoring as an important part of their leadership role at the end of the study, they still viewed their role as curriculum leaders in terms of the accountability processes they were required to complete. The mentors saw the role of a mentor as an opportunity for collaborative professional learning.

This data demonstrated that a collaborative learning experience, such as a QLC, can challenge and develop previous experiences of professional development. Learning about mentoring and leadership and can provide openings for new understandings to emerge through a shared learning opportunity where the mentors' are actively engaged in their own learning, however the influences and expectations of a school culture cannot be ignored. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the key findings from this study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### *Introduction*

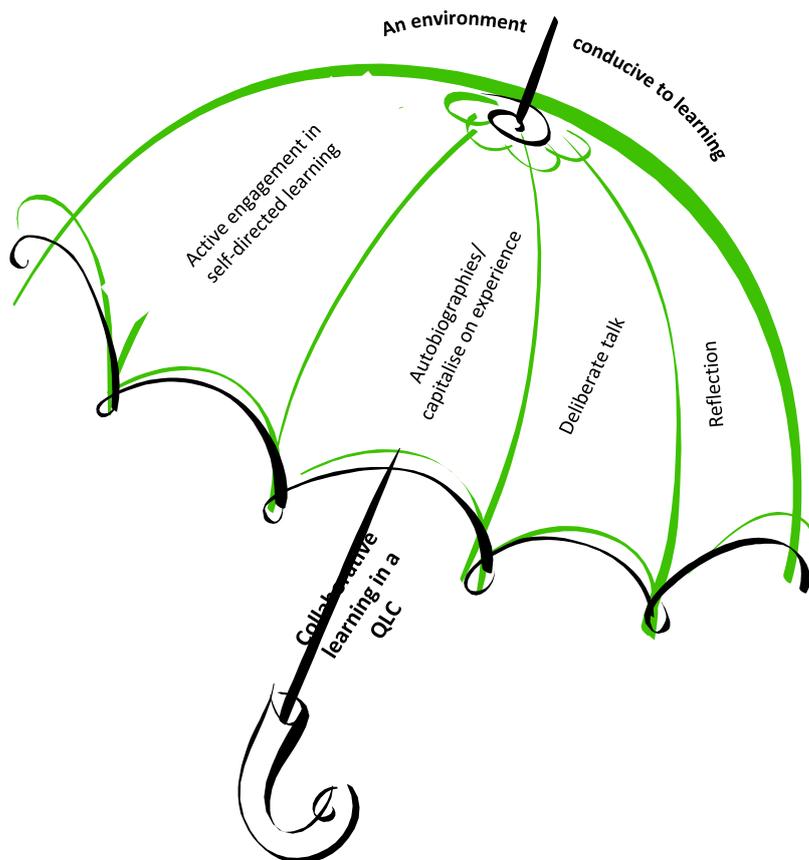
This chapter synthesises the findings of my study using three main themes, namely the factors which contributed to effective professional learning of the curriculum leaders (RQ 1), their understandings of their leadership role (RQ 2) and how this affected their own learning and the kind of learning about mentoring which was beneficial for the curriculum leaders (RQ 3). Each theme is linked to one of the three research questions. In reporting the findings of this study research questions 1 and 3 will be reported together, followed by research question 2. Each of the three research questions are discussed in a separate section and each section presents the major findings from the study.

### **Research question 1: Effective professional learning**

This study provided the environment and resources for a QLC so that the curriculum leaders could experience structured opportunities for talk about practice. The study focussed on what was needed to ensure that the learning conversations, in the QLC sessions and between mentor and mentee, were beneficial for all participants. My findings signal what the participants considered to be the factors associated with effective professional learning about mentoring which was the topic underpinning the QLC. A collaborative learning environment, named as a QLC, was trialled as a potential environment where the mentors could be supported in their learning. This environment addressed key adult learning principles to ensure its success. These findings are organised into *key adult learning principles* and *an environment conducive for learning*.

### **Addresses key adult learning principles**

The key factor for effective professional learning for the five curriculum leaders in this study was the value of working together and the support received from being in the QLC to deepen their understandings about mentoring. This factor was found in several of the data sources. My findings are echoed in the work of Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, and Association of Teacher Educators (2008) who claimed that because learning is a social and cultural activity, it is important that teachers have the opportunity to learn together to co-construct their new understandings which will lead to school improvements. The success of collaborative learning can be found in its close relationship with several adult learning principles depicted in a visual form (refer to Figure 15). The umbrella serves as a visual metaphor to show how the mentors are protected by the structure of the umbrella which suggests an environment conducive to learning. The bones of the umbrella are the key adult learning principles which work together to ensure successive learning.



**Figure 15: Major factors for effective professional learning**

I will turn my discussion to each of these adult learning principles in turn.

### **Active engagement in self-directed learning**

Learning, centred in practice, was important for the participants who welcomed the opportunity to share their challenges of being a mentor. This adult learning principle is supported by this study where the curriculum leaders were encouraged to be actively engaged in their learning by: formulating their own learning goals, practising the art of mentoring, talking about understandings of mentoring in the QLC sessions, experimenting with mentoring tools, such as observational tools (OTs) and reflecting on their learning. The curriculum leaders all found the practical problem-focussed focus with immediate application to their practice a valuable component of their learning.

All of the mentors had strongly voiced their dissatisfactions with previous passive professional development experiences. These had typically been one-off PD opportunities that whilst inspiring at the time were most often forgotten once teachers returned to their classrooms. One mentor captured this by saying “I hate those experiences when you just sit there and someone talks “. The mentors stated that unless participants actually engaged with learning, it was unlikely to have any

impact on their practice. They also were disappointed when there was no professional learning on how to implement the visiting speaker's ideas and information. They reported that these occasions had "limited helpfulness. Yet again bits and bobs, no follow up so not used". The lack of connection and application to practice rendered the professional development as fruitless in their eyes. Therefore a collaborative learning experience which actively engaged the mentors and allowed for self-directed learning was reported to be "valuable".

A finding of this study was that through the process of professional inquiry, the mentors were able to deepen their mentoring knowledge and skills. The mentors found that by choosing their own mentoring goal and working towards this goal through the support of the QLC and PR and immediate application of new understandings and skills, they were able to develop their learning about mentoring. Self-directed goal choice was emphasised so that the learning was relevant to the curriculum leader. Carroll (2011) reports that by making links to their own experiences teachers take ownership of their own learning and therefore have a better chance of their learning making a difference to their work. As a result two mentors focussed on using questioning techniques which would support their PRT mentees in offering solutions to their classroom practice problems. Another mentor wished to focus on using OTs for classroom observations and as such delayed having learning conversations with her mentee until she felt comfortable with how to use various OTs. It was the dialogue that mattered because it explored how they might improve their mentoring with colleagues. The individualised approach to learning provided by a professional inquiry model allowed the mentors to meet their immediate needs as relevant to their specific situations.

The structure of the professional inquiry approach gave particular focus on the need for individual learners' goals. The mentors were unanimous in wanting to create situations where their mentees felt supported to choose their own relevant goals. One mentor said she had "asked questions [the mentee] about what she wanted to specifically achieve. This resulted in her generating a much more meaningful and specific goal which we then looked at together".

The findings which show mentor dissatisfaction with previous passive professional development, are similar to those described by Knapp (2003) and Timperley (2008). Knapp (2003) refers to a dissatisfaction with disjointed, ad hoc, 'in-service workshops' which dominated professional development programmes in schools. Instead he favours professional learning opportunities which actually make changes to teacher thinking, knowledge, skills and approaches to instruction. In her background paper for AITSL, Timperley (2011a) states that it is by focussing on the process of learning, rather than the attendance of workshops and courses run by 'experts' that an understanding of practice can be deepened.

## **Teachers' autobiographies and opportunities to capitalise on experience**

A finding of this study was that it was important for the curriculum leaders to explore their prior understandings of the role of a mentor in order to understand new information and co-construct new understandings of their role as mentors and mentoring as a part of their leadership role. As one mentor described it "if they are long-term embedded changes, then it [the learning] has been successful". For this mentor, the process of being actively engaged in her learning challenged her existing knowledge. She created new understandings which were viewed as long-term change to her practice. The supportive, collaborative environment under which she was learning provided the foundation for the learning to occur.

The experiences of learning how to mentor alongside others provided opportunities for the mentors to capitalise on their experience and create new learning. The mentors strongly valued the opportunity to practise and experience mentoring skills. The mentors put their new understandings of mentoring into immediate practice in the learning conversations and classroom observations they had with their mentees. They were supported in their experimentation by the collaborative discussions in the QLC sessions which provided support for the experiences they were facing and suggestions for next steps.

These findings resonate with the notion that adult learners need to actively interpret new information through the lens of prior understandings (Dumont et al., 2010; Timperley, 2011a). By exploring their past and current understandings of mentoring the curriculum leaders jointly interpreted new information and made changes to their practice. Bradbury (2010) supports the notion that effective mentor learning is learning which models the kinds of learning experiences in which educative mentors will be involved whilst working with their mentees.

### **Deliberate talk**

In several data sources, the mentors discussed the value of the deliberate talk in the form of the learning conversations they engaged in, during the QLC sessions, as well as the learning conversations with their mentees. The QLC sessions provided occasions for the curriculum leaders to talk openly about their mentoring experiences, the problems they encountered and opportunities to reframe and broaden their theories of practice through reference to research literature where relevant. The mentors reported that by being actively engaged in their learning, having the opportunity to talk about their learning, and receive peer feedback, they were supported to achieve their mentoring goals. As expressed by one mentor, "the act of talking about what I'm doing helps

me learn". Collaborative learning conversations provided the environment for meaningful change to teacher practice.

The findings of this study showed that the mentors valued sharing resources with each other which they had tried using. These were provided either by me or the mentors. Of particular interest were resources on effective questioning techniques to use in learning conversations with their mentees and OTs the mentors experimented with for use during classroom observations. All of the mentors reported that they found great value in the "wisdom" and support they received from their peers and the opportunity to learn from others' experiences, as this quotation demonstrates, "meeting of other mentors at regular periods to discuss what's worked, what hasn't, to ask advice, to look at some other resources". Colleagues can provide new perspectives and alternate strategies which a teacher may not have considered.

An important finding of this study was that opportunities for learning conversations gave the mentors an opportunity to develop their leadership skills through the leadership activity of mentoring. The mentors were able to support their mentees whilst also developing their own leadership skills. Further connections between learning and leadership will be explored under question 2.

Similarly many writers refer to the importance of learning conversations (Berger, 2007; Blase & Blase, 2003; Brookfield, 1995; Lovett, 2002b) for providing opportunities to see practice in new ways and analyse and respond to problems. McGee and Fraser's (1994) support the provision of collaborative environments which allow for the sharing of resources in a supportive environment. Huber (2011) argues that sharing experiences and new understandings together allows adult learners to develop new competencies, and it is necessary to practice new approaches, receive feedback and reflect on the experience. Cheliotis and Reilly's (2010) view learning conversations as a means of linking learning and leadership together.

## **Reflection**

A main finding of this study was the importance of reflection in, on and about practice for both mentors and mentees. The mentors found the opportunity to reflect in the form of a reflection journal a vital part of their learning process. The mentors commented on how valuable it was to have time to engage in the process of removing themselves from the lived experience; considering their learning; approaches of practice; and possible alternatives, to be useful preparation for the QLC discussions which were held regularly and recording thoughts in a reflective journal. One mentor commented that she believed that, "Mentors and mentees should keep reflective notes on

discussion to enable the focus to be clear". The process of keeping a RJ gave the mentors time to process new ideas and analyse their own behaviour. It was an important part of the project as it embedded a change of practice for the mentors as this mentor explains "The reflections forced you to think about changes to your practice".

For these mentors the act of reflection needed to occur as close to the learning experience as possible in order to benefit from the greatest gain. The findings of this study demonstrated that there was a close relationship between the reflection which occurred as part of the discussions in the QLC sessions and the RJs. As the mentors chose whether they reflected after a QLC, learning conversation with the mentee, MTG or classroom observation, the mentors' learning dovetailed between the QLC discussions and their own processing of new understandings in their journals. The mentors reported that there was value in the process of collaborative teacher dialogue in the QLC sessions to reflect on their practice but also the space to step back from mentoring practice which the RJs provided.

The mentees also kept RJs and they were following a professional inquiry model for examining their practice, they were supported to reflect on their practice in their learning conversations with their mentors. One mentor commented that her mentee asked her students to complete an evaluation in order to:

*find out how they were finding the topic and the feedback told her she was going too fast. We talked about it and she was reflective about this and she wants it to be her next goal of what she will work on.*

This mentor is illustrative of all of the mentors who found the reflective process to be valuable in encouraging the mentees to examine specific aspects of their practice.

This study found that support was needed around the structure of the RJs and this was provided in the form of suggested reflection starters. The mentors found that these resources provided a starting point for the examination of their practice and for assisting them in forming possible next steps. The participants' RJs became a pedagogical learning tool that promoted learning (Moon, 2006). All participants were able to use their RJs to see the growth process which occurred over the duration of the intervention study.

While the findings of the study strongly support the act of reflection, two mentors did state that finding time to complete the RJ was not always an easy task and that to maximise the benefits of reflection it was better to complete the reflective entry as soon as possible after a QLC, learning conversation with the mentee, MTG or classroom observation. As one mentor commented, "I always

find reflections useful; it really makes me think about what I did and why I did it. But provided I did them straight away”, the immediacy of the reflection was important.

Similarly Watson and Wilson (2000) support teacher reflection because of its potential to change learning whilst in the midst of professional practice. Moon (2006) maintains that a RJ has the advantage of slowing the pace of learning and the process of writing a journal encourages mentors to make a “commitment to [making] modifications, plans and experimentation” (Jonson, 2008, p. 113). RJs also allowed the mentors to acknowledge and explore the emotions associated with the learning process and the opportunity to step back from events and actions (Moon, 2006).

The second key group of findings were the structured systems which provided support for the mentors’ learning. I will turn my discussion to each of these support structures in turn.

### ***An environment conducive for learning***

A key finding from this study was how important a structured collaborative learning environment was for the curriculum leaders’ learning. The curriculum leaders favoured the structured nature of the QLC, particularly its: regularity of meetings; support provided through the PR; and support provided through readings and practical mentoring resources. They claimed that in combination these aspects provided a framework which supported their learning enabling them to examine their beliefs and assumptions about leadership, learning and mentoring and embed new understandings and changes to their practice. Figure 16 illustrates these key findings. The umbrella continues to represent an environment conducive to learning and this environment is expanded to include a deck chair which represents support mechanisms for learning about mentoring.



**Figure 16: Major findings for effective professional learning**

## **QLC structure**

The mentors regularly reported an improvement in their understandings of leadership, learning and mentoring by the end of the study.

The regularity of the QLC meetings and the expectation that they, as mentors, would implement some of their learning in their learning conversations with their mentees was a motivating force. In between the meetings there were opportunities for practical application of their new skills. The mentors believed that this aspect of a structured QLC made them accountable to each other. One mentor said:

*Having scheduled meetings meant I was motivated to work on something with my mentee so I could report back to the group at the next meeting. Because I was required to report on what I had been doing it ensured I did something.*

The group reported that they highly valued the opportunity to learn together and learn from each other's experiences, as this quotation demonstrates: "I value their wisdom and experience. The conversation moved me forward in my thinking. I could use things they tried and had worked well".

This reinforced members' sense of duty to the QLC to act on suggestions made during the intervention study.

This is similar to findings by Martin (2011) and Lovett and Andrews (2011) who discuss the importance of a PLC or QLC in providing a structure which supports teachers learning alongside one another within and are able to lead their own learning, as it is not imposed by others. A PLC or QLC encourages collaborative learning which has a common purpose and function. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) explain that the notion of "creating meaning" is "one of the central features of a learning community" (p. 46) which was the experience of the mentors in this study.

## **Readings and practical resources**

The mentors found the resources provided to them were valuable tools in shaping their existing knowledge and forming new understandings of mentoring. These readings discussed the underlying beliefs and assumptions held by the mentors before development of specific mentoring skills could begin.

Initially the background reading material assisted the mentors in formulating their own mentoring goals and understandings of the type of mentoring relationship they wished to establish with their mentee. The readings provided an understanding of the research behind best practice mentoring and practical applications of how to develop these skills. As one mentor stated, the "readings helped me to decide on my learning goals as a mentor". Another explained that the research she read at the beginning of the study "helped me understand my role as a mentor... especially identifying with the phases of the mentoring relationship, it was comforting to see where I was at". The mentors found the research on the interactive approach or positional stance they could take in their relationships fundamental to cueing their existing understandings and forming new understandings. The process of choosing an interactive approach took the mentors a third of the total time of the intervention. All of the mentors chose a collaborative or non-directive approach to their mentoring after reading various research, such as that by Glickman (2002) and Achinstein and Athanases (2006). This quotation from one mentor demonstrates how important the process of forming new understandings was for the mentors:

*I appreciated the readings about what a mentor was and the stances you can take as I have never been comfortable with the 'I am the expert telling you what to do stance', beforehand I thought that's what mentoring was, so it was good to read that there were alternatives and think ... there is a place for me. That was a huge relief for me to find my style.*

The readings on questioning skills were put into practice. The mentors consulted the readings and resources as was relevant in order to address their immediate concerns. One mentor observed: "The

readings were really helpful. I didn't necessarily read all of them just what I needed to help me at that time". In this way the mentors addressed their understandings of mentoring as it was relevant to their immediate practice.

This finding also links to Timperley's (2011a) writing where she stated that an understanding of how theory links to practice ensures that teachers can apply their new knowledge not only to a specific issue but to other similar issues which arrive subsequently. The readings and practical resources provided the mentors with theory they could use to inform their practice.

## **PR support role**

The findings of this study saw the mentors reporting that they found the role of the PR (who facilitated the QLC sessions) important in creating and maintaining a supportive climate conducive to learning. In particular, the mentors reported that they valued the scheduled QLC meetings, a group focus and opportunities to share their experiences and receive support. However, I suggest that perhaps after some initial familiarity with the QLC process this role could be fulfilled by a member of the QLC rather than a facilitator. One mentor summarised her feelings when she stated:

*Someone needs to take responsibility for the momentum of each mentor and organise the group. To keep sure they are making progress ... by making scheduled meetings, providing resources etc. It is so easy as a teacher to focus on the immediate teaching/marking etc and let this process slip.*

The mentors also reported that the support offered by me in MTGs and GSMs provided direct support for their learning in four key areas: clarification of their mentoring goals at the beginning of the project; the opportunity to discuss their specific situations and access resources pertinent to their mentoring goals; opportunities for dialogue around their mentoring experiences; provision of emotional support "which gives encouragement" and affirms learning. By focussing on each mentor's individual goals, I was able to support the mentors 'specific needs. The following comment by a mentor is illustrative of several comments made by the mentors about the opportunity to engage in the act of talking about their specific situations:

*opportunity to discuss issues and new methodologies which has been really helpful. Having a conversation with someone is far more engaging than going away and reading things by yourself*

Once again the act of talking about mentoring practice was an important element for professional learning for these mentors. For one mentor the individual support provided by me provided her with a model she could use in her own learning conversation with her mentee.

My role in this study is similar to the facilitator roles described by Stoll (2003) and Timperley (2011a). Stoll (2003) discusses the importance of a facilitator of a PLC who can 'hold the context' of the dialogue so that discussions are kept focussed on the group's goals. She holds this as one of three

basic conditions for an effective PLC. The other two conditions are: all participants need to suspend their assumptions and become open to change; and all participants need to regard each other as colleagues. Likewise, Timperley (2011a) supports the need for a facilitator who keeps the group focussed but also states that the facilitators of a PLC must 'work with' teachers rather than 'on' teachers.

### **Research question 3: Learning about mentoring**

This research question is divided into four sections: *professional inquiry, mentor interactive approach, use of skills in learning conversations* and *structured OTs in classroom observations*.

#### **Professional inquiry**

My findings demonstrate that the use of a professional inquiry model, as part of educative mentoring, worked well for both directing the mentors' own learning about mentoring and the mentees' exploration of their practice (from the viewpoint of the mentors). The mentors reported that a professional or teacher inquiry approach was beneficial for their mentees as it put the mentee into the driver's seat of their own learning as they examined their classroom practice. The cyclic nature of professional or teacher inquiry meant that the mentees were supported to take ownership for their own professional learning in each step of the cycle, such as this comment from one mentor suggests: "I feel that the discussion that followed was much more fruitful than in the past as it led into a discussion about planning in terms of the skill progression".

By using a teacher inquiry model in educative mentoring, the mentors felt that they were supporting their mentees to examine the issues relevant and meaningful to them. They saw the inquiry approach as a way of supporting their mentees "to put reflection into action". The mentors felt this approach generated more meaningful discussions about practice in the learning conversations with their mentees than they had previously enjoyed. The mentors reported that their mentees "talked more" during the learning conversations when they used a teacher inquiry approach as the mentee was talking about what they did and what they would like to try next. They also found that they received:

*very good responses back from my mentee ... I think she found this also and it gave her more confidence as she had thought of and implemented these strategies herself.*

While these experiences are reported from the mentors' perspectives, it does show that the mentors in this study found a teacher inquiry model which focussed on teachers' own classroom concerns an effective tool in generating meaningful discussions about practice. This approach also

respects a teacher's professionalism in choosing their own learning focus. It ensures a teacher can take ownership of their practice and exert agency in making changes to practice.

These findings are closely linked to those of Feiman-Nemser (1998) who advocates frameworks which support mentors and mentees to co-construct new meanings together through a continuous inquiry stance. Dietz (2008) also argues that professional inquiry models, as action research cycles, provide a structure under which new ideas can be implemented, progress can be monitored and room can be made to test the impact of new practices.

### **Mentor interactive approach in learning conversations**

A major finding of this study was that the mentors spent a considerable amount of time at the beginning of the project considering which positional stance or interactive approach they would take in their mentoring relationships. Once they had chosen a collaborative or non-directive stance, the mentors felt relieved to have a framework for their relationship which uses specific skills. It was only at this point that they could work on skills for learning conversations and classroom observations. They frequently referred to the skills they were using in these two areas as meeting their goal of creating a collaborative or non-directive relationship. They also referred to their positional stance in situations where they felt they were unable to exhibit the mentoring behaviours they felt were part of a collaborative or non-directive relationship due to the response made by their mentee. A tension for the mentors occurred when they were unable to use the behaviours associated with their positional stance and return, albeit briefly, to a more directive approach.

Even though a collaborative or non-directive mentoring stance was a new approach for the mentors, all of them chose and welcomed this approach to mentoring after reading recent literature on mentoring. Their previous mentoring relationships had focussed on their positional authority and their role as an expert but this did not sit comfortably with a number of the participants. One mentor expressed her relief in this comment:

*I have never been comfortable with the 'I am the expert telling you what to do' stance, beforehand I thought that's what mentoring was, so it was good to read that there were alternatives and think thank God there is a place for me. That was a huge relief for me to find my style.*

This links closely to Koballa, Bradbury, Glynn, and Deaton's (2008) suggestion that these relationships blur traditional roles of mentor and mentee so that both parties jointly arrive at new understandings of practice which is what the mentors in this study were able to do through collaborative educative mentoring. Through educative mentoring, the mentors and mentees both focused on professional learning which impacts on students in the classroom (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). By mentors taking a collaborative or non-directive stance, mentees were supported to take

ownership of their own learning and mentors benefit from reciprocal learning and the development of their leadership skills. Achinstein and Athanases found that the stance a mentor took in dialogue impacted on the mentee's reaction as the choice of mentor positional stance affects the mentoring skills employed by the mentor, such as the use of open or closed questions.

### **Use of skills in learning conversations**

The mentors identified the development of their questioning skills and active listening skills as being important for having effective learning conversations which support mentees to develop their teaching practice. These were the two key features on which they all focussed at some point during the intervention study to improve the quality of the learning conversations they were having with their mentees.

All of the mentors set an individual goal of developing their use of open-ended questions in their learning conversations with their mentees. They had read various pieces of research in order to select questions and/or a model of questioning with which they felt comfortable, such as the GROW model (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009). The mentors reported that open questions encouraged the mentee to take more responsibility for their own learning than had occurred in previous conversations. One mentor said "I was very conscious to follow the questions that I had in front of me as I did not want to be giving my mentee the solutions as my goal was trying to get her to come up with them". The use of open-ended questions resulted in getting good responses from their mentees which led to changes in practice.

Most of the mentors commented at the beginning of the project that asking open-ended questions was a difficult skill to acquire and they found it took some practice. The experience of preparing open questions was appreciated by all of the mentors, "Now I see what you meant about writing stuff down - because you have to ... how I would know what to say at the time?" This mentor found when she prepared open questions she could "probe" her mentee "and get her thinking more", something she had not thought possible at the beginning of the study. While the process of developing effective questioning skills was considered difficult by the mentors, nevertheless, they found it a rewarding experience. One said "it has helped me to mentor more effectively because it made me more confident while having the actual conversation". The mentors reported an increase in their confidence in using questioning techniques through repeated practice during the study. One mentor, in particular, was anxious and said, "to achieve a sense of authenticity in the conversation I had notes. I had written open questions, I wanted to move away from it sounding staged". She found the experience unfamiliar at first, "I was surprised that it went so well as it was all just open questions... I can see how I can use this with any teacher I work with".

This study also found that by focussing on active listening skills the mentors created space for their mentees to talk about their own practice and suggest solutions to their own problems. The mentors consciously focussed on their mentees “doing more of the talking and me less” while they aimed for a “70-30 ratio” of talking time as recommended by Tolhurst (2006). In order to achieve this, the mentors employed various strategies, such as “limiting yourself to only paraphrasing what your mentee has said and not say anything else” as they were aware that “the person who does the most talking does the most learning”.

These findings are linked to other writers, such as Cheliotis and Reilly (2010) who see learning conversations as a way to stimulate growth and change teacher practice. The need for time and experimentation with questioning skills is also linked to studies by other writers. For example MacBeath and Dempster (2009) suggest that the development of skills, tools and strategies required for having disciplined dialogue will take time and regular practice and cannot be rushed. Glickman (2002) and Tolhurst (2006) emphasise the particular importance of listening skills.

## **Observational tools**

A major finding from this study was the mentors appreciated the structure which the OTs offered them. This was with particular regard to the writing of specific and clear outcomes which assisted them give post-observational feedback to their mentees. The mentors also used OTs to collect evidence-based data to address their mentees’ chosen goals. They claimed the OTs were straightforward and easy to use.

The mentors used OTs regularly grew more comfortable in using them to record evidence. All of the mentors referred to the OTs as “objective” pieces of data as opposed to their previous experiences of writing an opinion-based summary of classroom events. Two comments illustrate the mentors’ views of using evidence-based data. One said “It was so good that it wasn’t based on my judgement but on evidence, it suits my nature” and another said “I have had a look at some of these tools and I really like how objective they are, just the facts of what went on in the lesson”. The mentors’ perceptions of the OTs as providing “objective” evidence suggested that the mentors found the OTs they were using provided evidence-based data rather than the “emotive” and “subjective” comments they had previously used.

These findings are supported by the literature on the benefits of using OTs in classroom observations (Chism, 2007; Jonson, 2008). Bubb (2007). Wragg, Wikeley, Wragg, and Haynes (1996) argue that classroom observations can give teachers the opportunity to move from autonomous isolation to interactive professionalism. OTs can provide critical evidence for teacher reflection as the data

collected and feedback received can assist teachers in challenging existing realities in their specific context. The use of evidence-based data is also found by Absolum (2006) to influence action plans as well as assist the “monitoring, reviewing and evaluating” which takes place as part of teacher learning and staff development (Ministry of Education, 2005). Therefore OTs can provide clear evidence on which to base changes to practice.

## **Research question 2: Understandings of leadership**

The key findings for the mentors’ understandings of leadership are organised into *views of leadership* and *mentoring as a leadership activity*.

### ***1. Views of leadership***

#### **Managerial views of leadership versus motivation for the role**

The initial findings, at the beginning of the intervention study, showed the curriculum leaders’ views of their leadership roles as focussing on positional leadership, managerial tasks and curriculum delivery. They viewed their role as managing what the teachers in their department or learning area were teaching, and assessing. In particular, the curriculum leaders felt that they needed to be the holders of curriculum knowledge and they needed to ensure the members of their department were delivering the curriculum according to a recently changed curriculum and aligned to NCEA assessment standards. The language used by the mentors demonstrated their understanding of their role as being their sole responsibility which is linked to Townsend and MacBeath (2011) who describe the language of leadership literature as focussing on a sole ‘leader’ at the top of a hierarchical pyramid who plays a directive or monitoring role.

These views of curriculum leadership were incongruent with the curriculum leaders’ reported motivation for seeking a leadership position. One mentor who was motivated to apply for her position said it was “to make a difference, like working with people, helping them become better teachers”. As the job descriptions for these curriculum leaders focussed on their role as positional leaders responsible for managerial tasks and curriculum delivery it is not surprising that this was the prevailing view. While some of the curriculum leaders had made efforts to focus on pedagogical leadership, this learning was largely dominated by a need to be compliant with national assessment standards and practices. In the busyness of the school day and the school’s culture and professional development structures, these curriculum leaders whole heartedly agreed they needed more time to be pedagogical leaders.

## **Influences of school culture**

The curriculum leaders' understandings of leadership were influenced by their job descriptions. The expectations of SMT that the curriculum leaders should be experts in their subject(s) areas who would pass expert knowledge onto the members of their teams (especially in relation to curriculum and assessment changes) influenced the curriculum leaders' perceptions of their role.

A main finding of this study was that tensions of accountability were strongly voiced by the mentors throughout the intervention. While they expressed their belief in educative mentoring throughout the study they still felt bound by the accountability expectations placed upon them.

One mentor commented that the observation of teachers in her department for accountability measures was something she needed to do in her new role as Asst HOD. Another mentor expressed her frustration at the school's accountability classroom observation forms:

*Here [at this school] there is a focus on doing these big sheets [accountability process] and it's so formal. Now I can see that they are not really that useful. It feels like you are filling in something for the sake of filling it in. It would be much better if you could do little observational things like we have been doing and get useful information for what your person is working on. I have learned that observations have to be more meaningful. What does anyone get from someone using one of these forms? Surely it should be a meaningful experience? But we still have to complete them.*

This mentor valued the regular learning conversations with her mentee and the mentee driven professional inquiry approach. She commented that she now saw mentoring as:

*I see it now as working with [my mentee], by going into her class etc as she requests and giving feedback etc rather than waiting for the accountability moment where you fill in the big sheets about the person.*

The mentors managed their perceived tension by working with their mentee using a professional inquiry model and separating this educative mentoring relationship from the accountability measures they were required to complete. They still completed the required forms but clearly indicated to their mentees that these forms were separate from the mentoring work they were working on together, as they did not want to jeopardize the trust and rapport they had built in their collaborative or non-directive mentoring relationships.

In New Zealand schools where self-governance is exercised, the burden of accountability is placed upon senior leaders who are expected to adhere to accountability measures through systems such as observation, monitoring, appraisal, benchmarking and targets. This presents a tension for leaders in finding a way to balance the government's understanding of leadership for learning and leadership for learning as seen by schools themselves.

## ***2. Mentoring as a leadership activity***

By the end of the study the teachers' views of curriculum leadership had shifted to include the leadership activity of mentoring as indicated by this comment: "I see now that the role is about building relationships and seeing them develop as passionate teachers and sharing that". Another mentor commented:

*I don't think I was as appreciative that this role is about people and not managing them but seeing them develop. It's the role of the curriculum leader to encourage and develop them to be the best they can be, to develop their potential.*

One further example is the mentor who said:

*I can see on another level now how I can help my junior teachers [teachers of years 9 and 10] by actually mentoring them. I can see now how I can make a difference to them as teachers.*

By the end of the study the mentors viewed leadership as ideally being shaped on a distributed leadership model as they saw this as a means by which they could collaboratively construct understanding of professional learning and improve student outcomes. However, they saw a tension in these views of leadership inside the school's prevailing culture of positional, transactional leadership. Their ability to manage this tension remained unresolved by the end of the study. Likewise their experiences of a collaborative learning culture through the QLC experience had raised their awareness of what their roles could include if not dominated by compliance agendas.

The coaching or mentoring role was considered a rewarding one for the curriculum leaders. One mentor said she felt "quite stimulated this year as a result, I'm learning a lot ... This is brilliant what I'm doing because I'm learning "further endorsing MacBeath's (2012) advocacy for leaders having an explicit focus on learning in their work.

Similarly, Harris and Muijs (2004) promote for informal roles, such as coaching, because of the potential to build teacher leadership and to contribute positively to teacher satisfaction and school improvement.

### **Views of mentoring role**

A finding of this study was the mentors' separate expectations of their mentoring and curriculum leadership roles. The mentors had an interesting discussion about how they saw their roles as curriculum leaders and mentors. In the QLC, one mentor addressed a concern her mentee had about students having equitable access to teacher support. She clearly stated that she felt she had two roles to play in supporting her mentee. She felt it was appropriate in her role as a mentor to talk to her mentee about the role of a teacher, what areas of concern the mentee had as a classroom teacher and the possible solutions the mentee would like to try. The mentor reasoned that this was

part of her mentoring role as she was focussing on educative mentoring and this was a teacher practice concern.

This mentor viewed the perceived inequity the students were experiencing with other teachers in the department as part of her role as a curriculum leader since she viewed leadership as a managerial role which focusses on management of people and systems. Her views were discussed by the other mentors at the QLC and they all supported her division of the roles of mentor and curriculum leader and the actions taken. The division of roles is interesting here as it shows by the last QLC that the mentors still perceived their curriculum leadership roles as management roles. Even though the mentors could articulate that mentoring was a leadership activity, it seems that this leadership activity still sat outside their views of what is expected from curriculum leaders by the school culture.

## **Teachers as mentors**

An interesting finding of this study was the view of all of the mentors, to a certain extent, did not think it was necessary for mentors to be teachers who held positions of responsibility in their schools. One mentor stated:

*We should all be mentors! At an absolute basic level all HODs should be trained but then the rest of the department should be paired up to have equal mentoring relationships.*

She also thought that all teachers should benefit from professional learning around mentoring so that teachers could exercise leadership with each other. One mentor clarified her understanding by dividing the roles of mentor and curriculum leader. She felt that there were “two types of mentoring relationships” the “hierarchical one” between a curriculum leader and a PRT and collaborative “mentoring relationships which are part of a professional learning programme”. The second type of mentoring relationship she described was the role teachers can play as leaders who took responsibility for their professional learning. Implicit in this understanding is a belief that curriculum leaders should, in their positional role, support the learning of PRTs, whereas experienced teachers could enjoy a truly collaborative or non-directive relationship. However, this was not the view of all of the mentors. Another mentor believed effective mentors were “good practitioners who want to mentor” and do not necessarily have to hold a position of authority but be “experienced teachers” and have “the X factor”. It was this collaborative and/or non-directive mentoring relationship in which mattered for them.

These findings link to Harris and Mujis (2004) who argue that the idea of teacher leadership is teachers taking a leading role in school improvement. This has more relevance to teachers as the term, teacher leadership, is associated with collaboration, partnership and professional networking .

It is also supported by Murphy (2005) who suggests the concept of teacher leadership arises out of the classroom. He, like Timperley et al., (2008) and Robinson's (2009) findings, sees teacher leadership as making a difference to student achievement.

### **Mentor understanding of subject area**

A finding of this study was that the mentors were unanimous in their belief that mentors should have subject-specific knowledge of the subject area being taught by their mentee, when that mentee was a PRT. This may indicate that the mentors continue to perceive their role, even by the end of the study, as requiring expertise in curriculum matters in order to support the learning of their mentee. These views arose out of a discussion in a QLC about a mentor who noted the challenge of content mastery, saying "I am not familiar with my mentee's subject area". This view was supported by other mentors who described their mentoring relationship as being "based on specific [subject] knowledge" and needing shared subject knowledge "because mentoring is a mix of curriculum and classroom knowledge". This was a prevalent view when describing a mentor mentee relationship when the mentee was a PRT. This could be due to the fact that the school culture and SMT expectations were on a curriculum leader providing guidance for a beginning teacher in a traditional mentoring relationship rather than using a collaborative or non-directive approach.

Interestingly however, two mentors did comment that shared subject knowledge might not always be necessary for the mentoring of experienced teachers. This may indicate that in these circumstances the curriculum leaders felt less pressure to fulfil the role of 'expert' when teachers had acquired full registration.

These findings contradict recent research on mentoring. While experience in teaching is considered necessary for a mentor, subject-specific knowledge is not always stated as being necessary by writers such as DeBolt (1992) and Odell and Huling (2000). However some writers, such as Jonson (2008) and Achinstein and Athanases (2006) report that command of the curriculum is essential for being a good mentor, as is skill of teaching, but acknowledged that these alone are insufficient. A mentor also needs to be able to build effective relationships with their mentee and facilitate their learning. Thus there is no agreement on whether mentor subject-specific knowledge is essential for mentoring to be beneficial.

### ***Summary***

This chapter has discussed the key findings of this study in relation to the literature on teacher professional learning, leadership and mentoring. Effective professional learning of curriculum leaders is grounded in key adult learning principles, such as: active engagement and self-directed

learning; teachers' autobiographies and opportunities to capitalise on experience; deliberate talk and reflection. Curriculum leaders also need supportive structures to ensure learning can take place, such as: a QLC, support role from a member of the QLC such as a PR; and readings and practical resources.

This study found that curriculum leaders' views of leadership were strongly influenced by the school culture in which they worked. Despite contrary motives for assuming their leadership roles, the curriculum leaders held largely managerial views of their role at the beginning of the study. These views of leadership expanded to include the activity of mentoring during the study. The mentors' views on their mentoring role grew out of their own mentoring experiences.

Lastly, this study found that curriculum leaders required specific learning around mentoring to develop an understanding of how to mentor effectively. Their learning centred on: professional inquiry, the interactive approach or positional stance in their mentoring relationship; skills for effective learning conversations; and the skills of classroom observations. The next chapter will provide a summary of the key findings, recommendations and future directions of professional learning on mentoring.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This concluding chapter highlights what has been learned from observing and learning alongside five curriculum leaders as they developed their leadership potential as mentors. There are four main sections of this chapter. The first is devoted to the key findings, the next, implications, followed by the limitations of the data sources and research design, and finally suggestions for further research.

### *Key findings*

Both the literature on adult learning and the findings of this study support the need and value of collaborative learning for teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008). It is argued that a collaborative approach allows teachers to be learners together and breaks the isolation they typically encounter as classroom teachers. The opportunity to learn within supportive models, such as a PLC or QLC affords teachers with opportunities to exercise their leadership potential as teacher leaders. These models enable them to develop a shared purpose, support each other's learning and turn theory into praxis so that deep learning can occur. The mentors in this intervention found that the QLC structure provided them with an environment where they could be actively engaged in their learning through the regular meetings. They valued opportunities to reflect, talk about theory and practice, and, to put new learning into immediate use. The key findings from this study centred on the benefits of shared learning, namely opportunities for deliberate talk, opportunities for teacher agency, specific tools for developing mentoring practice, and understanding of the curriculum leaders' leadership role. These four key findings will be discussed in turn.

### **Deliberate talk**

A key finding in this study was that talking about practice was deemed to be important. Deliberate talk, in a QLC between mentors, or, between mentor and mentee, supports teachers' needs to be actively engaged in their learning of issues which have immediate application. As expressed by one mentor, "the act of talking about what I'm doing helps me learn". It was clear that the feedback received from others in the QLC enhanced the teachers' critical reflections of their practices. The open and safe environment of the QLC provided the mentors with a forum where they could, as stated by one mentor, "discuss what's worked, what hasn't, ask advice, [and] look at some other resources". The mentors could also discuss their mentoring experiences, the problems they encountered and had opportunities to reframe and broaden their theories of practice.

These curriculum leaders had previously enjoyed few opportunities to learn together and certainly none where the learning was on-going and supported as it was in the QLC. They found the chance to talk about their own experiences of mentoring particularly useful for reflecting on their practice but

also because it offered them opportunities to listen to the “wisdom and experience” of their colleagues”. An important aspect of the deliberate talk was the focussed nature of the conversation. This was a marked contrast to the casual staffroom chat about learning. Each mentor was deliberate in how she talked about her mentoring experiences and the other members of the QLC used open questioning skills to encourage each mentor’s self-reflection and ownership of the next steps of practice. In showing these behaviours they were using the QLC to practise their mentoring language with one another. I now turn to the second major finding of teacher agency.

## **Teacher agency**

The findings related to teacher agency are about teachers taking responsibility for their learning in their specific contexts. The view of teacher agency demonstrated in this study is not simply a quality held by teachers but the actions that the mentors took (Priestley, Robinson, & Biesta, 2012). Their teacher agency was achieved in and through concrete contexts for action. The mentors reported that through the opportunity to choose their professional learning goals, self-direction of learning and active engagement in that learning, they were supported to develop their mentoring skills and understandings about leadership. As the literature on teacher agency highlights, the mentors in this study were enabled and constrained by their social and material environments.

The mentors’ past experiences of ‘seagull- style’ (Easton, 2004) professional development had constrained their learning because they had involved passive listening. There was, as one mentor described, “No follow up, so not used”. The mentors felt their learning was enabled by the self-directed process of setting their own mentoring goals, experimenting with various approaches and reflecting on the outcomes. In order for the mentors to exercise their teacher agency, they found particular tools to be useful in developing their mentoring skills. I now turn to this important finding.

## **Tools for practice**

The mentors found several ‘tools’ had assisted the development of their mentoring skills. These tools included observational tools, possible positional stances/interactive approaches, questioning skills, professional readings and other practical resources, reflective journal, and a professional/teacher inquiry model. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

The use of observational tools for classroom observations was an important element of the mentors’ learning. They found the use of these tools to be fundamental in providing a platform from which they could collaboratively unpack the mentee’s practice and support the mentee as she looked at alternatives and next steps. They found the process of a pre-observation conference, observation and post-observation conference beneficial. The mentors also reported that it was useful for

mentees as they reflected on their own practice. Looking at possible observational tools (OTs), trialling the use, of these and in some cases, creating their own OTs, was a major part of the mentors' learning about mentoring. These comments from the mentors show that they found the process gave them a "focus for observation". They saw the evidence collected from the various tools as "tangible evidence" and one intimated "not just my opinions which [meant] I felt more comfortable giving factual feedback". The mentors wanted to maintain a collaborative or non-directive stance and saw these OTs as a means to facilitate this goal.

The mentors' exploration of possible positional stances or interactive approaches to inform mentoring skills (Athanasos et al., 2008; Glickman, 2002) was a main finding. They experimented with possible approaches to their mentoring relationships and this learning provided an important platform from which they developed specific mentoring skills, particularly in the deliberate learning conversations they had with their mentees. By choosing a collaborative or non-directive approach the mentors found that learning was reciprocal and their mentees were supported to take ownership of their own learning. The process of reading about, reflecting on and experimenting with possible interactive approaches took a considerable amount of time. Nevertheless the mentors reported relief at choosing a stance which suited them as this comment suggests: "I have never been comfortable with the 'I am the expert telling you what to do' stance". Thus it was their ability to choose an approach which they believed would work well in their mentoring relationship which mattered. This process laid an important foundation for the mentors' learning, because it informed their choice of their mentoring goals, the style of mentoring relationship they chose to develop and the skills and techniques they cultivated. It gave the mentors confidence in experimenting with mentoring skills as they had a framework within which they were working.

The development of questioning skills which supported the mentors' chosen positional stance was deemed to be crucial for holding effective learning conversations between a mentor and mentee. A considerable amount of time in the QLC sessions was spent formulating possible questions to use in learning conversations with their mentees, trialling these questions and discussing next steps for future learning conversations with their mentees. The mentors found the use of resources and readings useful, such as the GROW model (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009) in formulating open questions which encouraged the mentee to take more responsibility for their own learning than had occurred in previous conversations. The mentors were motivated to try a variety of open-ended questions as they were clear about the positional stance they wanted to develop in the mentoring relationship. They saw the questioning techniques as a means through which they could support their mentee in deliberate learning conversations. All of the mentors found it required considerable practice to build

their repertoires of effective mentoring questions and many commented that this was an area they would need to continue to develop after the intervention study ended.

Access to professional readings and other practical resources was deemed beneficial for the mentors at the beginning of the study and subsequently when they had an immediate need. One mentor said the “readings helped me to decide on my learning goals as a mentor”. Another purported that relevance to her immediate personal needs was important, claiming, “I didn’t necessarily read all of them just what I needed to help me at that time”. In particular, the mentors found the readings on the interactive approach or positional stance the mentors could take in their relationships fundamental to shaping their existing understandings and forming new understandings. As this process took a considerable amount of time, it was important for the mentors to be able to read and reflect on possible approaches to mentoring practice.

This study also found the act of writing a reflective journal served as a learning tool. These journals provided teachers with the space required to reflect on their mentoring practice and the emerging knowledge from the QLC sessions. Their completion of the journal reflections endorsed the value of reflection noted amongst the adult learning literature (Moon, 2006). Another site for reflection was the actual QLC session where the mentors engaged in reflecting on their own and others’ practice. Some used their reflective journals as prompts for discussion at the QLC sessions. Others completed their reflections after the QLC sessions referring to topics of conversation which had been discussed. Regardless of how their journals were used, the mentors found the act of reflection an important tool in removing themselves from the lived experience to consider their learning, approaches of practice, and possible alternatives. It gave the mentors space and time to process new ideas and analyse their own behaviour. It was a valuable tool in embedding a change of practice, as this mentor explained “The reflections forced you to think about changes to your practice”.

The use of professional/teacher inquiry for their own learning about mentoring and as a framework for structuring their mentee’s learning about classroom practice was also important to learning about mentoring. A professional inquiry approach meant that the mentors’ learning was relevant and immediately applicable to their context. They were able to choose their own goals, co-construct approaches to mentoring, and experiment with these. They also reported that the use of professional inquiry provided a structured framework for their mentees. The mentees also chose their own learning goals and addressed issues in their immediate practice with support from their mentors. All of these tools were central to the mentors’ development of their skills. I now turn to the last major finding of the study: understandings of leadership.

## **Understandings of leadership**

The views of leadership held by teachers in this study were shaped and influenced by the school culture in which they worked. This finding is echoed in leadership literature as it is difficult for teachers to see themselves as leaders when a leadership role is regarded as belonging only to those in formally acknowledged positions. In their curriculum leadership roles, the mentors defined their role in accordance with their job descriptions and the expectations of senior management to ensure that the teachers within their departments delivered the current curriculum. The experience of developing understandings around mentoring in a QLC, served to influence the teachers' views of leadership. They made connections between leadership and learning and the importance of mentoring as a leadership activity. By the end of the study the mentors were adamant that mentoring should be an important part of a curriculum leader's role, as one mentor's comment illustrates: "That's what an effective curriculum leader does, they develop teachers' strengths". Moreover they recognised that teachers' professional learning needs vary, and required "different approaches to mentoring".

The teachers in this study experienced a tension between the accountability role they were required to complete as part of the performance management system in their school and the mentoring role they wanted to develop. As managerial understandings of leadership were encouraged in the school culture, the inclusion of mentoring as part of leadership was a view less explored. A change of the school's culture to support teachers as leaders as supported by Harris and Mujis (2004), and the creation of a PLC could in some way begin to mitigate this tension for the curriculum leaders. The experiences of the participants of this study are linked to the findings of Lovett and Andrews (2011) who support schools creating and maintaining cultures which value learning amongst the staff as well as the students. Furthermore they endorse learning conversations as a way of encouraging teachers to improve their teaching practice, but they warn against upholding traditional forms of professional development, which limit teacher ownership of learning. This stifles teachers' ability to revitalize their teaching and responsiveness to student learning needs. These findings now lead me to a discussion of the implications of this study.

## ***Implications***

This section will consider the implications for the curriculum leaders who participated in this study and for the school where they worked. There are four key implications for the mentors' school and two key implications for the group of mentors.

## **School**

Schools need to take responsibility for educating, supporting and nurturing teachers so that they are capable of mentoring one another. The current trend in leadership literature which connects leadership and learning focuses on improving outcomes for students. As a result, teachers need to be able to reflect on their practice and explore possible alternatives which improve learning for their students. The role of a mentor is crucial in this process. The improvement of practice cannot be left to chance. Schools therefore need systems and processes which will support the development of mentoring skills within their skills. There are two main implications for the school where the participants of this study worked.

Firstly, the school, where the mentors work, currently offers professional learning groups (PLGs) as part of their PLC. These follow a professional inquiry model based on teacher classroom practice. It may be beneficial to provide professional learning around how to have deliberate learning conversations for facilitators of PLC groups and potentially all staff. Likewise, it may be advantageous to offer professional learning for all staff around how teachers can observe each other teach, including the use of observational tools.

Secondly, in order for all teachers to have the opportunity to be actively engaged in their learning and exercise their teacher agency, it may be constructive to offer opportunities for discussions to clarify potentially conflicting roles and responsibilities, such as the role of appraisal/accountability versus 'educative' mentoring. This could involve an exploration of whether curriculum leaders should mentor as well as attest to the performance of PRTs/other teachers in their departments as this was a key tension for the mentors of this study. A discussion to clarify definitions of the role of the SCT, curriculum leaders who mentor PRTs, and the school's Induction programme would be helpful in this regard. Likewise debate about the potential of a teacher peer mentoring framework could provide opportunities to revisit the school's current appraisal and accountability systems. Lastly, a consideration of the potential for involvement in *Phase Two: What is Evidence?* of the New Zealand Teachers' Council Appraisal Workshops 2015 would perhaps provide the necessary professional learning support for all teachers at this school through a focus on teacher inquiry and the Registered Teacher Criteria.

## **Mentors**

The curriculum leaders who participated in this study exercised their teacher agency in developing their mentoring skills. In focussing on their leadership role of mentoring, these mentors took responsibility for their own learning and supported one another in the QLC to learn collaboratively.

In order to offer on-going support to these mentors, there are two key implications which are proposed.

One implication is that it may be favourable to offer on-going opportunities for shared learning in the form of a QLC for these mentors and any teachers who mentor others as the participants of this study found deliberate talk within the framework of a QLC a supportive and enriching experience. In turn these mentors could support the learning of other teachers who wish to develop their understandings of mentoring. This would provide an opportunity for these mentors to continue to talk deliberately about the specific skill set of mentoring and reflect on their practice.

A second implication related to the need to make provision for support of curriculum leaders is the development of their mentoring skills. Therefore, it may be useful to provide further on-going opportunities for professional learning around 'educative' mentoring for curriculum leaders and potentially any interested teachers (for example, the New Zealand Teachers' Council Induction and Mentoring Conference in 2015).

### ***Limitations***

This section will discuss the limitations of this study. I include possible limitations relating to the application of my chosen data methods, power relationships with my colleagues, the membership of the QLC, the time allowance for our interviews, and use of reflective journals.

It is possible that a power imbalance existed between the mentors learning together with the PR in the QLC. Our professional status in the school might have impacted on the way we could talk together about our practice. In particular I wondered about the mentors' safety to talk about challenges they were facing and how honest they could be with each other and me. I was very aware that the prevailing mentoring roles at the school were between mentors as experts and mentees as novices. This was not a learner to learner relationship as was my intention with the quality learning circle experience. As a result it was important for me to develop trusting relationships with each curriculum leader so that they were comfortable in learning alongside one another and me. While we had all worked with each other at the same school for at least four years, it is possible that the different type of sharing required of the QLC might have needed more time to develop than was possible in one and a half terms. Once again this was addressed to a certain extent by the support I could provide in my facilitation role and the structure of the QLCs which placed all participants as learners. It was also helpful that I was on study leave for the duration of the intervention study, rather than holding my own curriculum leadership position. I argue this distanced our usual relationship into the background.

The membership of the QLC may have been another limitation. The mentors had no choice about the composition of the QLC group. While they were all curriculum leaders in the school, this did not necessarily mean that they would feel comfortable in a professional learning group with colleagues in similar roles where they were expected to expose their practices. A requirement of the QLC was for participants to put their learning into practice in between QLC sessions, for example, conduct learning conversations with their mentee or a classroom observation. It is possible that the mentors may have felt anxious or pressured to ensure the success of these requirements. Measures were taken to guard against this by ensuring that each mentor discussed their progress without prejudicial comments from me. It was important that the mentors felt able to talk about their mistakes or challenges when mentoring when they met as a professional learning group (QLC). As the QLC facilitator I consciously tried hard not to make judgements regarding whether a mentor was mentoring effectively or not.

Another possible limitation is whether there had been sufficient time for the interviews which had been squeezed into release time between teaching periods. The mentors may have felt rushed or under pressure to move quickly through their responses due to the one period time constraint of the interviews. I had given them the interview questions at the beginning of both interviews so that they would come prepared for a focused discussion knowing I needed to make the most of the time available to us. Similarly it is possible that the teachers felt more obligated to answer in a particular way, to please me as their colleague.

Likewise with the reflective journals, the mentors may have chosen to write responses which they believed I would want. They may have felt pressured to record events to show that they were making progress in their mentoring experiences despite my explanation that they could record their journal as they wished and choose any form of reflection (not just the possible starters/forms provided). They may not have been ready for this autonomy.

### ***Further research***

There is an urgent need for schools to ensure that those in mentoring roles are trained and supported in their work. Further research on how to offer on-going support for teachers wishing to develop their mentoring skill set is needed. While this study focussed on how a group of curriculum leaders could develop their own mentoring skills, it does not answer the question of sustainability of their mentoring practice for the future. Further research is needed into how small scale studies, such as this one, can be translated into school-wide systems and processes so that more teachers may have the same opportunities to develop their skill set. This intervention study focussed on the

professional learning of curriculum leaders as mentors. While four of the mentors worked with PRTs, one did not. Further research is warranted to target teacher at all stages of their careers.

Principals have a responsibility to provide on-going support for teachers developing their mentoring skills but they too need assistance to make available these opportunities. While there are some formalised programmes available in New Zealand, the need remains for this support to be available in every school. It is also important to offer teachers opportunities for leadership which do not remove them from the classroom.

The urgency of schools taking mentor learning and support seriously must be realised. A new government initiative called *'Investing in educational success'* takes for granted that teachers can be effective mentors without professional learning. My thesis has shown that teachers benefit from collaborative learning opportunities to develop specific mentoring skills and realise there is much more to mentoring roles than the teachers imagined.

### ***Postscript***

In January, 2014, the National government announced an initiative called *'Investing in educational success'* to create four new leadership positions with remuneration. This initiative recognises the need for "highly capable school teachers who will act as role models for those in their own school and those in their area. Their classrooms will be open for other teachers, including beginning teachers, to observe and learn from their practice" (Parata, 2014, p. 1). While this sentiment is not new it endorses the need for teachers to see their colleagues as a source of learning and for learning to be centered in practice.

This initiative has been positively received by some groups, including the PPTA who have welcomed extra resourcing to support teachers, as well as encouragement for greater collaboration between teachers across schools. PPTA has described the positions as providing the potential for good teachers to advance their careers without having to leave the classroom to take up leadership positions. The four roles of 'executive' principals, 'expert' teachers, 'lead' teachers and 'change' principals have two advantages. New opportunities for leadership will be created for teachers because existing positions will be vacated by the successful applicants. In addition these positions will offer a fresh challenge for experienced leaders moving beyond their own schools to share their expertise. While it is heartening to see that this government initiative recognises the importance of peer mentoring within education, a number of unanswered questions remain.

Firstly, this initiative does not mention the skill set which these mentors will need and how they will acquire such skills for these roles. There is an underlying assumption that teachers and principals will

be chosen because they are seen to already possess this skills set. There is an urgent need to support schools in selecting teachers who have the skills for these positions. Schools need to provide support for teachers in the development of these skills and I argue that schools require assistance in offering this support to teachers.

Secondly, this initiative lacks acknowledgment of a school's context. This intervention study has demonstrated how the context in which teachers' work is integral to the success of their learning. While one teacher or principal may experience success in one school context, it does not necessarily follow that they will understand another's school's context or that the same strategy will work for all teachers.

Thirdly, there still remains a need for teachers and schools to develop their own systems for supporting each other's professional learning as suggested by this intervention study. It is also unclear from where this model of remunerated leadership positions has derived. In order to ensure success of this initiative, it is necessary to use a model which has enjoyed success in research.

Regardless of the outcome of this initiative, the leadership activity of mentoring will continue to be a powerful avenue through which teachers can employ their own agency and take responsibility for their own professional learning. It is through "interaction, collaboration and dialogue" that we can achieve effective learning as teachers (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011) because it is "the act of talking about what I'm doing [which] helps me learn" (RJ). The power of respectful, learner-centred talk cannot be underestimated. This is where the focus should be turning because deliberate quality talk about practice is the prompt for asking questions and a vehicle for working together to find solutions. This is mentoring at its best.

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## Appendices:

### Appendix 1: Mentoring Gap Analysis

Thank you for taking 15mins to complete this gap analysis. The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand how you perceive what our school offers to support teacher learning, especially in the mentoring of teachers.

*Adapted from Teacher's Council Induction and Mentoring Pilot 2009-2010*

Aspect – Does your current school system have:	☐/ ☑	Comment on the situation currently at your school:
Clear and well documented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole school vision</li> <li>• Whole school purpose</li> <li>• Whole school desired outcomes (eg Professional learning community, on-going learning for all teachers, shared understanding of characteristics of effective teaching)</li> </ul>		
A comprehensive mentoring programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of how to mentor other teachers</li> <li>• A process by which to select mentors</li> <li>• Provision of time for mentoring</li> <li>• Mentoring protocols</li> <li>• Support for mentors</li> <li>• Resources available</li> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of the mentor clearly outlined</li> </ul>		
Opportunities for a range of prof learning (PD): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations (internal)</li> <li>• Observations (external)</li> <li>• PRT external courses</li> <li>• PRT network group</li> <li>• NCEA development</li> <li>• Subject association/courses</li> <li>• Form teacher training</li> </ul>		
Process of induction for new teachers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School systems and processes</li> <li>• School culture</li> <li>• Agreed collaborative processes</li> <li>• Lines of responsibility</li> <li>• Role of HOD in mentoring</li> <li>• Person accountable for formal assessment of PRT (registration)</li> </ul>		
A plan for all teachers to meet RTCs (registered teacher criteria): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process of developing a portfolio</li> <li>• Formal documentation</li> </ul>		
Observations – for all of those who mentor other teachers, a knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of observation tools (e.g. '4 Minute Walk Through', Video stimulated Recall, Specific Aspect observation etc)</li> <li>• Clear process for pre/post observation</li> <li>• Agreed protocols for post observation conversation</li> <li>• Formal requirements (keeping observation records) for specific purposes such as PRTs</li> </ul>		
Any other comments you wish to make:		

PLEASE RETURN TO \_\_ PIGEONHOLE BY WEDNESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> MAY

## Appendix 2: Career Outlines

The Mentoring Project: Background on You

When I write my thesis I will describe your experiences of professional development before embarking on this mentoring programme. Can I please ask you to complete the following:



**1. Outline of your teaching career:**

Position	School/institution	Year (s)	Areas of responsibility

**2. Your professional learning experiences:**

What professional development have you undertaken whilst you have been teaching? (postgraduate study, professional readings, external professional development, internal professional development opportunities etc). You don't need to list everything but just the types of professional development you have had the opportunity to undertake, what was memorable/useful etc. I'm looking for the signals that you had for opportunities to learn on the job, so if you think you missed out on meaningful learning experiences in some of the schools you taught at, could you please indicate that also.

Type of prof development	School	Year (s) if you remember!	Usefulness

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## Appendix 3: Semi-Structured Interviews

(approximately two during the intervention study).

### Guiding questions for semi-structured interview early in intervention study:

1. Tell me about your role as a curriculum leader?
2. What attracted you to seek a curriculum leadership role?
3. What do you think effective curriculum leadership looks like? Looking at your job description how realistic would you say the description actually is for the role you play?
4. What professional support do you currently offer members of your department to develop their practice? How did you arrive at this?
5. What collaborative learning opportunities do you offer in your department where all teachers can develop their practice?
6. What would help you to better know how to support the staff in your department?

### Guiding questions for semi-structured interview at the end of the intervention study:

1. Tell me about the successes and challenges in your curriculum leadership role which you have experienced during this project. Has your view changed since the beginning of the project? (reminders of previous responses will be given)
2. Last time you described the attributes of an effective curriculum leaders as being ... Have you altered your views on this? If so, what are your beliefs now? To what do you attribute any changed beliefs?
3. What changes have you made to the way you assist others to learn during this intervention? What strategies have you employed that you felt were successful?
4. What processes and strategies from this intervention assisted you in developing your leadership skills as a mentor?
5. How can your role as a mentor be further supported in the future?

## **Appendix 4: Discussion Points for Mentors at QLC sessions**

The PR emailed the mentors the following questions to consider prior to the QLC 2:

- what you were consciously trying to achieve in the learning conversation?
- what worked?
- what surprised you about yourself/mentee?
- what you would like to go better/differently next time?
- where to from here with your mentee?
- whether you also did a classroom observation and how this went?
- any resources you read/used which were useful?

The PR emailed the mentors the following questions to consider prior to the QLC 3:

- what you were consciously trying to achieve in the learning conversation?
- what worked?
- what surprised you about yourself/mentee?
- what you would like to go better/differently next time?
- did you feel as if you are starting to develop some specific mentoring skills compared with your first learning conversation?
- where to from here with your mentee?
- How did the classroom observation go? Did you have a quick pre-conference meeting? What observation tool did you use - how did it go? What worked/didn't work well in the post observation conference?
- any resources you read/used which were useful?

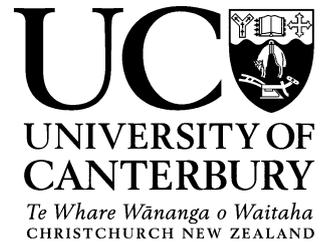
## Appendix 5: Timeline of Overall Process of the Study

<b>Data Method</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<b>Gap Analysis Survey</b>	Term 2, week 1 - 3 <sup>rd</sup> May, 2011
<b>Career Outlines</b>	Term 2, week 5- 30th May, 2011
<b>Initial Interviews</b>	Term 2, week3/4 – 16 <sup>th</sup> -27 <sup>th</sup> May, 2011
<b>Goal-setting meetings</b>	Term 2, week 6 – 6 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> June, 2011
<b>QLC sessions</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> : Term 2, week 5 – 3 <sup>rd</sup> June, 2011 2 <sup>nd</sup> : Term 2, week 8 – 23 <sup>rd</sup> June, 2011 3 <sup>rd</sup> : Term 2, week 10 – 8 <sup>th</sup> July, 2011 4 <sup>th</sup> : Term 3, week 2 – 11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2011 5 <sup>th</sup> : Term 3, week 4 – 25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2011
<b>Optional Individual meeting with the PR</b>	Term 2, week 11 -11-15 <sup>th</sup> July, 2011
<b>Mentor Reflective Journals</b>	Completed during the project Term 2-3, 2011. Completed by Term 3, week 5 – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2011
<b>Mentee Reflective Journals</b>	Completed during the project Term 2-3, 2011. Completed by Term 3, week 5 – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2011
<b>PR Reflective Journal</b>	Completed during the project Term 2-3, 2011. Completed by Term 3, week 5 – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2011
<b>Final Interviews</b>	Term 3, week 5 – 29 <sup>th</sup> August-2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2011

## Appendix 6: Information Letter for Curriculum Leaders

Telephone:  
Email:  
28<sup>th</sup> February, 2011

Building leadership capacity of curriculum leaders in a secondary school  
Researcher: Amira Aman  
Information Sheet for Curriculum Leaders



I am a Master's student at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. In my role as a head of department I have become increasingly aware that how teachers support one another's learning collaboratively is crucial for the professional learning of all teachers. In my previous master's studies I have been exploring the potential of coaching/mentoring and have been introduced to a range of strategies. I am keen to explore these further with other teachers. I have decided to focus on curriculum leaders and the ways they mentor/coach staff in their departments as the topic for my thesis. I invite you to accept my invitation to be a participant in that study as together we will be trialling a range of strategies to make the most of the mentoring/coaching relationship. If you agree to take part you will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a gap analysis about your current leadership role (s) and opportunities at your school. This will take approximately 15 minutes.
- Take part in collaborative learning conversations with other curriculum leaders (a Quality Learning Circle) about your experiences of leadership as a mentor. In these sessions we will provide support for each other as you develop your mentoring skills by sharing goals, strategies, experiences and next steps. You will be provided, by the researcher, with mentoring frameworks, readings on effective mentoring and mentoring strategies (such as ways of talking in your learning conversations) on which to base your mentoring approaches. These will occur approximately four times during the end of Term One and throughout Term Two. You will be provided with relief cover for each of these collaborative sessions.
- Take part in individual learning conversations with the PR to set your mentoring goals and support you in as you work towards reaching these goals. These will occur approximately four times during the end of Term One and throughout Term Two.
- Complete a reflection journal to record your mentoring experiences. The form of this journal will be negotiated with you, such as a writing journal, email, audio tape. You will also be provided with a variety of reflective journal frameworks to assist you in completing your journal. Senior management will be asked if they would consider relief cover to enable you to have time to complete your reflective journal.
- Take part in individual learning conversations as the mentor with a member of your department being the mentee. The learning conversations will provide you with opportunities to practise, refine and develop your mentoring skills. The purpose of the learning conversation is to provide an authentic context for you to explore your mentoring actions and trial some new approaches. You will work collaboratively with your mentee to assist them in the setting of their own learning goals which may be based around the new *Registered Teacher Criteria*. These will occur approximately four times during the end of Term One and throughout Term Two.
- During and at the end of the study, you will be asked to take part in two semi-structured interviews to provide information on your experiences of the mentoring intervention. These interviews will take approximately 20 minutes.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. However, while I can guarantee that I will not disclose your name as a participant in this study to any other party, other participants may reveal your name to others outside of this study. All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

The results of this research may be used to inform the understandings of leadership building and mentoring practices at your school and to make recommendations for further development at our school. All participants will receive a report on the study. The results of this study may be submitted for publication to national or international journals or presented at educational conferences. If this occurs, I will also take care to ensure anonymity in publications of the findings.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (details above) or either of my two supervisors, Dr Susan Lovett (345 8108, susan.lovett@canterbury.ac.nz), or Dr Jane McChesney (345 8102, jane.mcchesney@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

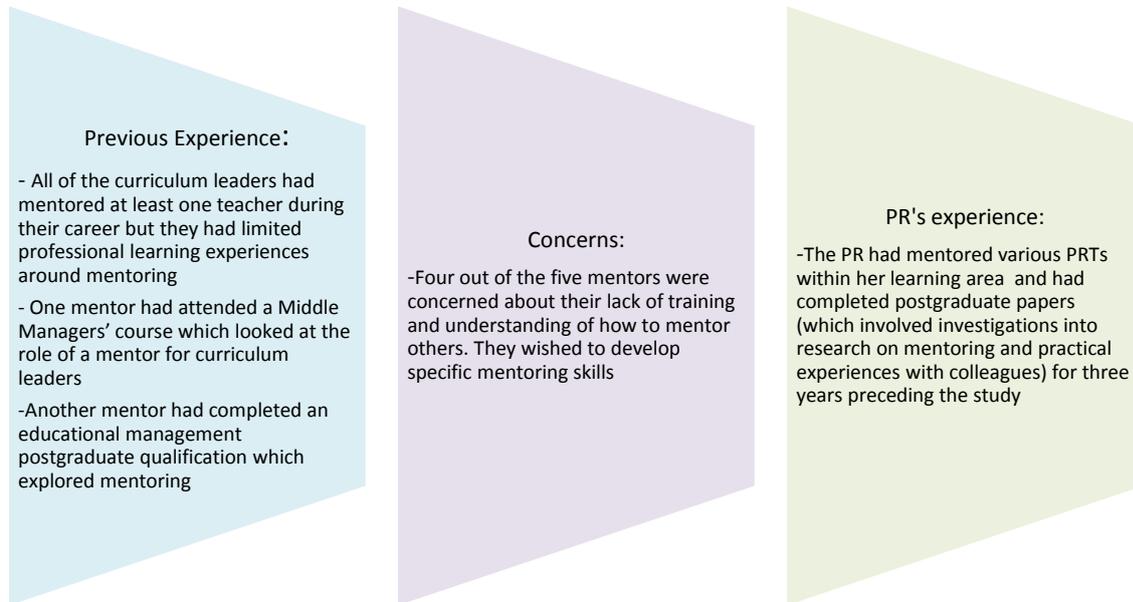
If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided by 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2011. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

Amira Aman

## Appendix 7: Contextual detail of data sources

### GA Survey

As discussed in Chapter 3, the first data collection method, the GA survey (refer to Appendix 1) aimed to provide information on the curriculum leaders' views of the school's current provisions for professional learning and mentoring. The results of the GA survey are summarised below in Figure 17:



**Figure 17: GA Survey results summary**

### Initial Interviews

The purpose of the initial interviews was to explore the curriculum leaders' understandings of their leadership role in the school, their preparedness for their role and the ways in which they support the development of other teachers in the department. There were three key findings from the initial interviews: The views of leadership were focused on managerial responsibilities of positional leadership and these views influenced by SMT expectations; the professional development opportunities the curriculum leaders offered (present and past) for their department/learning area members were listed; and areas of development for their own mentoring skills were stated.

### QLC 1

The purpose of the five QLC sessions was discussed in Chapter 3. In QLC 1 I reiterated the purpose of the project as a collaborative learning opportunity for the curriculum leaders to focus on developing their mentoring skills. The rules for and the format of the QLC sessions were explained by me: matters of confidentiality were assured and agreed upon by all participants. The stages of the project, which had been explained in the information letter, were restated so that the curriculum leaders were aware that each of the QLC sessions would provide opportunities for the mentors to take turns talking about their mentoring experiences. These involved discussions about aspects such as, the art of practising questioning skills in learning conversations with a mentee, active listening skills, experimentation of observational tools (OTs) in classroom observations, and providing feedback using OTs following a classroom observation.

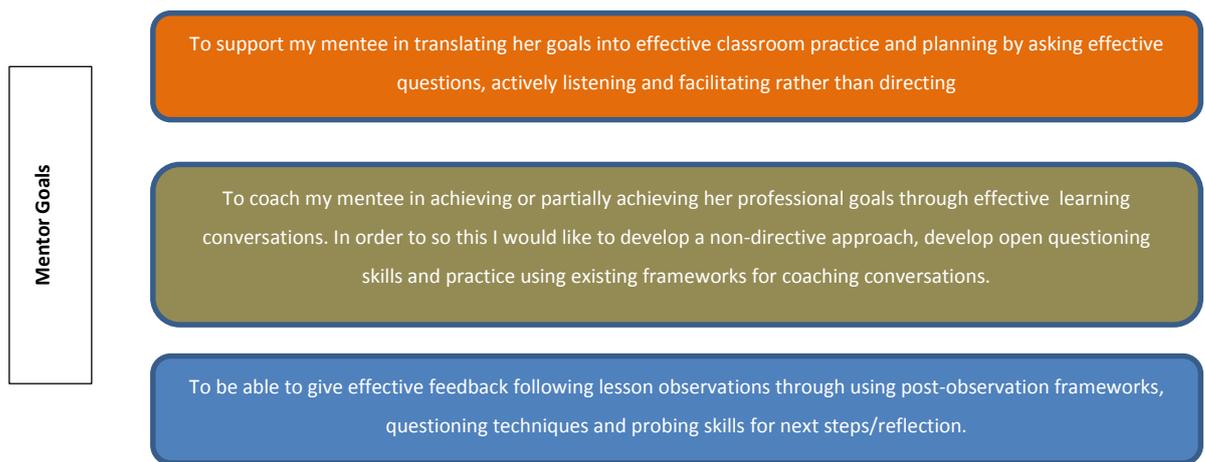
As the curriculum leaders had not experienced collaborative learning opportunities in the past, the QLC sessions were established so that they could learn collaboratively from one another in an open and safe environment. The content, role of readings and next steps of QLC 1 is summarised in Figure 18 below:

<b>QLC 1</b>		
<b>Content</b>	<b>Role of readings</b>	<b>Next steps</b>
What the mentors hoped to gain from the collaborative learning experience and possible goals they could choose to focus their development (refer to the GSMs below)	The PR provided a range of readings to support the curriculum leaders' understandings of mentoring, such as mentoring styles and stances, adult learning principles, phases of mentoring relationships and characteristics of good mentors. These were provided, for the mentors, as they felt unsupported in their role as a mentor and they requested assistance (GA). This was one of the reasons the curriculum leaders were interested in participating in this study.	At the conclusion of QLC 1 the mentors were asked to consider their own possible mentoring goals in a professional inquiry approach to learning. Individual meeting times were scheduled to discuss these with the PR (see below).
The aims of their mentoring relationships. All of them wanted their mentees to be independent problem-solvers who could suggest and problematize issues in their own classroom practice.	As discussed in Chapter 3, there was no compulsion for the mentors to read the resources, they were provided for those wishing to read some background research to inform their choice of mentoring stances before they participated in their first learning conversation with their mentee.	The mentors were asked to have a learning conversation with their mentee about the mentee's classroom teaching goals which may have taken the form of a pre-observation meeting, a learning conversation about the mentee's progress on their goals or a post-observation feedback meeting.
There was confusion of the roles various staff played in mentoring others in the school, so the PR provided job descriptions from the PRT Co-ordinator, the SCT, and expectations from SMT about a curriculum leader's role as a mentor for teachers within their learning areas (GA). These were shared with the mentors and discussion ensued about the various roles staff played. This provided the clarity which had been sought.	They were also used to provoke thought and provide points of discussion for the QLC sessions.	They were also asked to complete a reflection entry based on QLC 1, their MTG or any part of the project using one of the supplied resources or one of their own choosing (see below for the section on RJs).
The mentors also discussed mentoring styles, adult learning principles and the changing nature of mentoring relationships.	The PR also provided resources on RJs as the mentors were asked to keep a record of their experiences during the project. The PR provided guided practical resources, such as reflection starters, self-guided reflection and Gibb's model of reflection. Once again these resources were provided as a guide for mentors if they chose to use them, rather than compulsory reading.	

**Figure 18: QLC 1 summary**

***Goal-setting meetings***

The mentors met individually with the PR to discuss their personal mentoring goals after QLC 1. As the curriculum leaders were following a professional or teacher inquiry model, they chose their areas of focus so that these could be discussed and problematized by the members of the QLC. Some of the goals selected by the curriculum leaders were (refer to Figure 19):



**Figure 19: Sample mentor goals**

These meetings focussed on the mentor choosing her own mentoring goals. The meetings provided an opportunity for the mentors to discuss issues important to them, such as interactive approach or positional stance, effective learning conversations, the use of resources to support their mentoring goals, use of OTs, benefits of learning collaboratively and usefulness of specific readings/resources.

***Career Outlines***

The purpose of the COs has already been discussed in Chapter 3 (also refer to Appendix 2). The two key ideas which emerged out of the career outlines were frustration at school-based 'seagull' professional development and the mentors' experiences of individual professional development.

***Remaining four QLC sessions***

As described in Chapter 3, the mentors requested some possible optional reflection questions to frame their discussions in the QLC sessions. Questions to consider and discuss at the next QLC (refer to Appendix 4) were emailed by me to the mentors prior to each of the remaining four QLC sessions. At every QLC session, each mentor took turns in describing and analysing their learning conversations and classroom observations (as relevant). Some chose to frame their experiences around the discussion questions but others chose their own approaches.

The QLC sessions were held approximately two weeks apart from one another. As highlighted by Figure 5 in Chapter 3, this was to give the mentors' time to reflect on their experiences, meet with their mentee to have a learning conversation and carry out a classroom observation if relevant.

The content of QLC 2 was described in Chapter 3. The mentors discussed specific questioning techniques and phrases they would or had used in their learning conversation with their mentee, such as these questions from the GROW technique (discussed in Chapter 2): What is the issue on which you would like to work today? What is happening at the moment? What are the different ways in which you could approach this issue? Which option or options will you choose? (Parsloe & Leedham, 2009). The use of OTs was also an important topic of discussion and the positional stance they were taking as a mentor in the questions they asked their mentee and their approach to classroom observations.

The content of QLC 2 was as follows:

#### QLC 2

In QLC 1 the explanations of the mentors' progress was directed at me, but in the subsequent QLC sessions, the mentors directed their discussion to each other about effective techniques for learning conversations, such as questioning skills. They also sought feedback from one another and contributed suggestions and comments collaboratively.

My role during these four QLC sessions was to provide additional resources and readings if required, ensure that all mentors were given opportunities to discuss their experiences and join in discussions where appropriate.

The mentors' discussed techniques for effective learning conversations and I provided research material, such as mentee goal setting, provision of feedback, listening for learning and effective questioning.

#### Figure 20: QLC 2 summary

The three foci points of QLC 3 have been described in Chapter 3. When the mentors deliberated possible approaches to classroom observations, they discussed the value of holding pre-observation meetings for clarity on what the mentee would like a mentor to observe, the use of OTs to record data, and the process of post-observation feedback. I provided readings on aspects, such as, the observation-conference cycle, the John Heron feedback model and various classroom OTs. Once again these were optional resources which some mentors chose to read and use as relevant for their situations. The cycle of action from one QLC to the next was provided in Chapter 3 (Figure 2).

During the focus on the mentors' experiences with questioning techniques in learning conversations with their mentee and the use of OTs, one mentor used questions shared by another mentor in QLC 2: "What is the reality for you at the moment? What are you going to do next? How will you know when you have done it?" with her mentee and this resulted in "a really good discussion about what went well and why it did, and what then it would do for her planning". Another mentor discussed the OTs she tried, such as the "cause and effect tool" where she drew the "movement of the teacher/students" in the classroom (QLC2). Each of the mentors shared what they had recently tried; sought support from the other mentors and strategised about how they could approach their next learning conversation.

#### QLC 4&5

In the remaining two QLC sessions the mentors' followed the cycle presented in Figure 7. One mentor shared about a lesson she observed where her mentee wanted to focus on lesson 'chunking' and on/off task behaviour, so the mentor designed an OT to record this (QLC 4).

Two mentors felt that their mentees lacked the skills to offer their own solutions to their issues. One explained that "if I asked her how she might address the issues she didn't know what to say to my leading questions" (QLC 4). This example gave rise to a QLC discussion about the sorts of approaches and questions could be asked to best support this mentee.

The PR ensured that each mentor was given time to discuss their experiences but the discussion and dialogue surrounding the experiences was led and supported by the mentors themselves. They also spontaneously discussed the elements of the project which they felt were working well for them, such as the QLC sessions, readings and other methods. There were occasional discussions about leadership roles especially in relationship to the principal leading learning.

#### Figure 21: QLC 4&5 summary

##### *Individual meetings between mentors and the PR*

In QLC 3, the mentors requested MTGs to individually discuss their progress and access support for the development of their mentoring skills. This was an option which had been offered throughout the intervention. Four out of the five mentors requested these learning conversations and they occurred between the QLC 3 and 4. In order to meet their goals of collaborative or non-directive mentoring, the mentors wanted to discuss issues, such as: specific behaviours for their chosen interactive approach/positional stance; use of questioning skills to support mentee reflection; and approaches to post-observational learning conversations using data from OTs

One mentor, in particular, was concerned about how to encourage her mentee to suggest solutions to her own teaching practice goals rather than relying on her mentor to provide solutions.

##### *Reflective Journals*

As discussed in Chapter 3 the mentors (and PR) kept their RJs during the intervention project. As Figure 1 indicates the mentors were encouraged to complete an entry following a learning conversation with their mentee, QLC or classroom observation. Some mentors gave

individual entries to me at the time they wrote them and others gave it to me and the end of the study. The reflective journals traced the mentors' experiences of collaborative learning about mentoring.

The reflective journals reinforced the messages the mentors' conveyed during the QLC sessions and the individual meetings with me. A summary of the key issues articulated in the RJs are as described in Figure 22:

RJs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their role as a mentor (early entries)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the interactive approach/positional stance they wished to take with their mentee and the sets of behaviours appropriate for a collaborative or non-directive approach.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• description and evaluation of educative mentoring techniques, such as questioning skills, as they experimented with these</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimentation of OTs, their use and impact on their learning conversations with the mentees</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• methods which they found beneficial for their learning, particularly the collaborative nature of the QLC sessions and to a lesser extent the MTGs</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of specific readings which particularly useful for them in relation to their own mentoring goals or the context of their relationship with their mentee</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recommendations for future mentoring programmes or professional learning for curriculum leaders (final entries)</li> </ul>

**Figure 22: Content of RJs**

**Final Interviews**

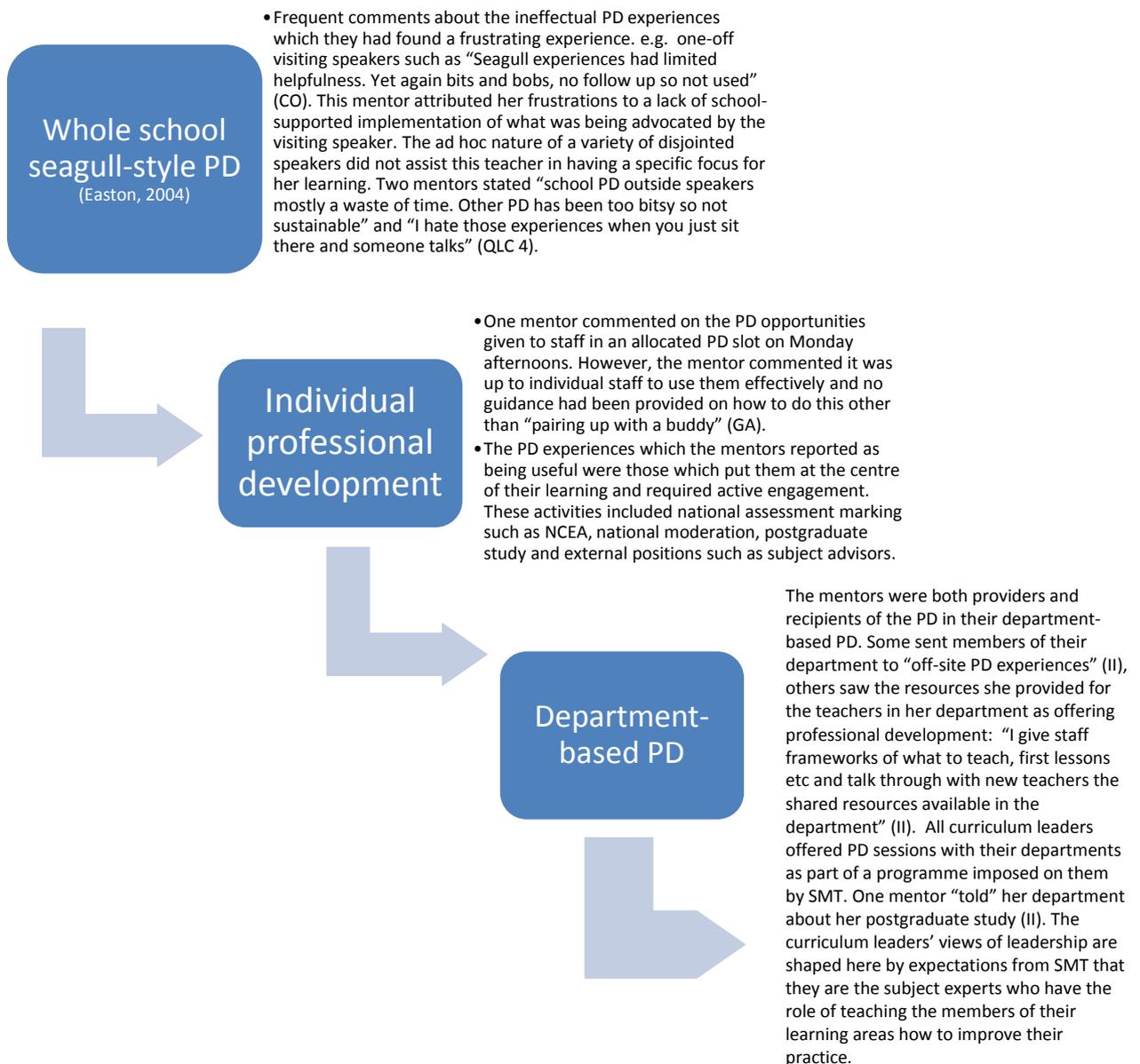
As discussed in Chapter 3, after the fifth and final QLC, I interviewed each mentor to review their experiences and developed understandings of their role as a mentor. The key points for discussion are presented in Figure 23:

FIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who should play the role of a mentor and the reciprocal rewards of a mentoring relationship.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They referred to the benefits of various methods of collaborative learning they had experienced in the study and the learning around mentoring which they found valuable.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the end of their interviews the mentors made recommendations for future mentoring programmes or professional learning for curriculum leaders.</li> </ul>

**Figure 23: Content of FIs**

At the conclusion of the intervention study, the data was triangulated in order to inductively derive recurrent themes and ideas. The process of how the data analysis was analysed is discussed in the Methodology chapter.

## Appendix 8: Context for Theme 1- Professional Development



**Figure 24: Mentors' previous PD experiences**

## Appendix 9: Context for Theme 2- Initial definitions of leadership/role of mentor

### *Effective curriculum leadership*

All of the mentors described curriculum leadership as the “management of curriculum delivery” (IIs). They saw their role as managing what the teachers in their department or learning area were teaching, and managing student assessment. Given the climate of curriculum change currently being experienced by these leaders, they saw the implementation of the new curriculum and ever-changing NCEA assessments (standards alignment) as an important part of their role. One mentor saw her leadership role as an “interface between school and department” (II). All of the mentors saw their role as involving many administration tasks, such as running a budget, electronic records of assessment grades, managing teaching resources. Three mentors referred to their leadership role as leading the professional learning of others. One mentor commented that effective leadership required “someone who moves the department towards better teaching” and another stated that there was a “big difference between managing and leadership” (II). However, the prevailing view of curriculum leadership was one of curriculum management. The mentors felt that they needed to be experts in their subject area and keep up-to-date with curriculum changes so they could ensure that the curriculum being delivered by the teachers in their learning area was accurate and meeting assessment requirements. No teacher explicitly mentioned collaborative professional inquiry of teachers within their learning areas or any form of mentoring when asked to describe their role as a curriculum leader.

When the mentors were asked to describe what they thought effective curriculum leadership looked like, the mentors were unified in listing several characteristics (refer to Figure 25).

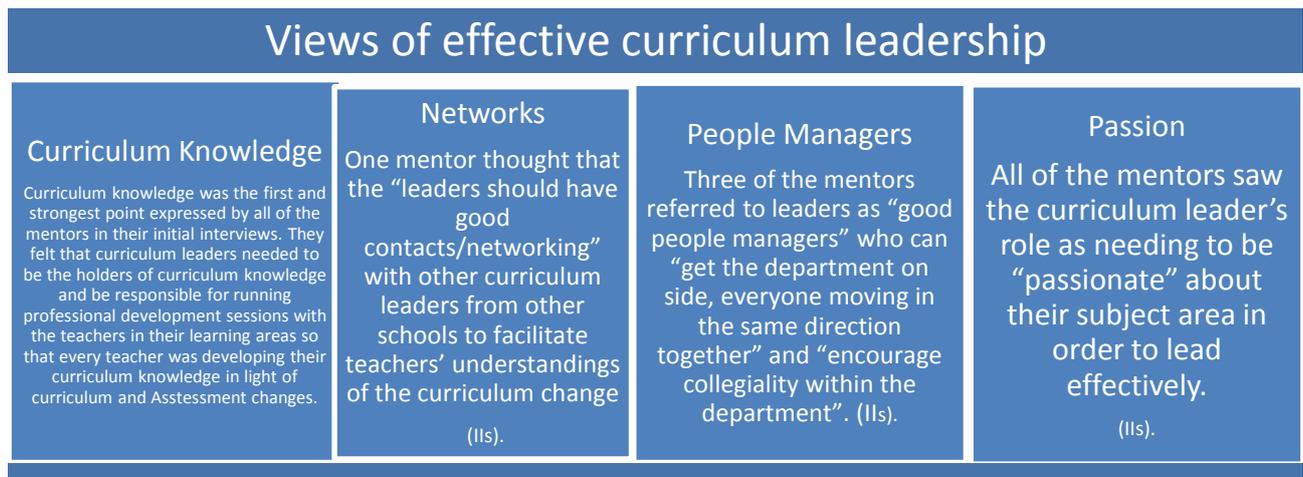


Figure 25: Views of effective curriculum leadership

to the “top down expectations of student achievement” as there was a constant need to report on and justify student achievement or lack of it. One mentor also referred to the weighty expectation she felt from SMT to keep up with the “curriculum changes and led these in your department”. This same mentor felt she needed to consult the members of her department with pending changes to curriculum and assessment but considered this was a very difficult task in a large department where members did not agree. It appears that these expectations all contribute to the mentors’ views of themselves as a sole leader with ultimate positional authority and responsibility.

While one mentor mentioned distributed leadership when describing her views of effective leadership (II), no mentor explicitly cited mentoring as a leadership activity associated with their role as a curriculum leader.

### ***Initial understanding of the role of the mentor***

As described in Figure 4, there was confusion among the mentors at the beginning of the project about the role of a mentor and how that role functioned alongside other roles within the school's professional learning programme. Nine respondents commented that they were aware that a time allocation was given to teachers who mentored PRTs but were unaware of any training the school offered these mentors other than being able to approach specific members of SMT for assistance if needed (GA).

Ten participants seemed to be aware that there was a PRT Induction Programme run by a member of SMT (GA) however there was a lack of clarity of the role of HODs as mentors in this process. The nature of 'mentoring' was interpreted differently by various curriculum leaders from emotional support, to the authority figure who attests the teacher's performance to educative mentoring support.

Interestingly, two respondents seemed to suggest that it was more experienced teachers who took on mentoring roles and therefore no training was necessary. This demonstrates a view of mentoring as not requiring specific skills or behaviours or a belief perhaps that such skills are acquired with experience as a teacher. As curriculum leaders are required to mentor PRTs at this school, this would suggest that these two respondents believe that experience as a teacher and positional authority are the requirements for effective mentoring.

The lack of training and professional learning around mentoring meant that the mentors reported a lack of confidence and clarity in their roles. One mentor initially commented that: "After the first collaborative meeting I felt inspired ... Before, the idea of my role and responsibilities as a mentor being focused on, was a bit daunting" (RJ). Without the opportunity for professional learning the mentors felt unclear about their purpose as a mentor and the approaches they could undertake. In a climate where curriculum leaders were expected to 'know' how to mentor team members through positional authority, it was a relief for them to be supported in their own learning.

### ***Tensions***

The mentors experienced a number of tensions in their roles, especially in the early stages of the project. A key tension for all of the mentors was the tension they felt between meeting the expectations from management regarding accountability measures in their role as curriculum leaders and how to balance this with a collaborative learning relationship with their mentees. Specifically the perceived tension was between expectations from SMT that they complete the registration forms and professional standards attestation forms for teachers in their departments while also engaging in an educative mentoring relationship. These aspects of accountability were separated from the school appraisal system which saw individual teachers choosing areas of focus for professional learning and progress was directly reported onto SMT.

The accountability measures required curriculum leaders to complete a classroom observation using behaviour grids. Two mentors expressed concerns about how to marry the expectations of classroom observations with a learner focussed mentoring model (QLC 1). The mentors decided it would be easier to keep the school's behaviour grid separate from their mentoring relationship as they did not want to impose a 'check' on their mentees it was their aim that the mentees chose their own goals and focus learning areas. The mentors were aware of the hierarchical imbalance between mentees and mentors, and how attestation measures could erode the level of trust built up over time. If mentoring relationships occurred without a hierarchical imbalance, it would be easier for mentors to create an educative mentoring relationship based on trust.