

The Challenge of Autonomy: Exploring the role of ICT and Self-evaluation in the development of today's teacher

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Declaration

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

Signed: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. J. A.', written over a horizontal line.

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I wish to acknowledge all of the help and support that I have received over many years of study from family, friends and colleagues.

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Joe O'Hara

Abstract

This work divides into three parts. Part one is concerned with the worldwide growth of an evaluative culture in recent decades. In many areas of life, but particularly in the public services and even more particularly in education, there has been an intense push to develop systems of accountability and increasing concerns with obtaining 'value for money'. In the opening chapters the roots of this movement are explored.

The chapters in part two explore in the context of part one the emergence of a new system of school inspection and evaluation in Ireland which is entitled Whole School Evaluation. It is argued that even though this model has been influenced by the international growth of evaluation and accountability systems its development and operation in Ireland has been heavily constrained by tradition and political context. A key element of this new system of Whole School Evaluation is the emphasis placed on school and teacher self-evaluation that is to say schools and teachers developing the capacity to systematically research their own activities and produce evidence to support their professional judgements. However the research conducted and reported in chapter six indicates that, in reality, there is little such self-evaluative capacity in the system and that work must urgently be undertaken to develop this.

Part three of the work describes one such project. It shows beyond doubt that practitioners quickly come to see immense developmental potential and possibilities of empowerment through the process of investigating their own practice in a structured and data led manner. This has also been shown to be true in other similar projects. Unfortunately research also shows that these processes are hard to sustain since isolation and lack of ongoing motivation seems to gradually erode early enthusiasm for reflection and self study.

The case made in this work is that a very promising solution to this problem is to be found in the creation of sustained communities of practice using increasingly cheap and easy to access Virtual Learning Environments. In summary then the blended approach to programme delivery proposed provides a vehicle or platform through which the collegiality and mutual reinforcement which are key to sustaining self-evaluation can be provided.

Chapter One: Introduction

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to develop systems and approaches to the empowerment of teachers and schools enabling them to become self-evaluating entities. The early part of the dissertation describes how the evaluation and inspection of many public services, including education, has become increasingly common in most countries in the developed world. There are various reasons why this may be the case. It can be argued that it is on the one hand part of the movement towards low trust policies derived from the ideology of neo-liberalism which seek to apply the values of the market to the public sector. On the other hand, it can also be argued that increased evaluation is a necessary and defensible component of democratic accountability, responsibility and transparency. What cannot be denied is that this process, both at the level of nation states and more widely through the policies of influential organisations such as the OECD, the EU and the World Bank, continues to gather pace. Equally however, there is also a growing debate regarding the appropriate extent of such evaluation particularly as research increasingly shows that external monitoring of an intrusive kind can seriously damage the autonomy and morale of professionals. In consequence in many areas of professional regulation and in the public sector in particular, a worldwide debate continues as to the balance to be achieved between accountability and professional autonomy, between professional development and external judgement.

As part of this debate a relatively new concept has begun to gain sway which is that professionals should be empowered to systematically analyse their own practice and thus generate the data and evidence necessary both to empower their own development and also to justify their professional judgements to external audiences. Education is perhaps the best of all exemplars of this emerging focus on what has become known as self-evaluation. It has become understood that there are serious drawbacks to monitoring systems which are primarily concerned with making judgements from an external perspective. In consequence, across many education systems, there are increasing efforts being made to develop models of evaluation which can reconcile the competing goals of autonomy and accountability through encouraging teachers and schools to internally evaluate performance through the use of data and evidence and present the outcomes to justify their actions to

external agencies such as inspectorates. However clearly the success of such an undertaking depends to a huge extent on the capacity of individual professionals and schools to undertake self-evaluative research. To date there is a paucity of evidence to demonstrate that significant progress has been made in developing the necessary attitudes and skills to achieve this goal. The heart of this work therefore is about experimenting with new and innovative approaches to empowering teachers and schools to develop self-evaluation capacity.

Part one of this work contains three chapters. Chapter two deals with the emergence of evaluation as a central movement in public sector governance in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The political background to this development is analysed and competing theories and practices of evaluation are discussed. Chapter three looks more specifically at evaluation, inspection and appraisal as these concepts apply to education, teachers and schools. Here it is suggested that simplistic notions which seem to underpin a good deal of the recent policy agenda in this area are naïve and simplistic and that this reality is now becoming ever clearer. Chapter four analyses the type of school and teacher evaluation systems which are emerging in many countries and jurisdictions. It is argued that there is clear evidence of a convergence in educational evaluation towards a compromise between internal self-evaluation and external inspection and monitoring. It is further argued that this compromise is gradually but steadily moving in the direction of greater reliance on professional self-evaluation with light touch external monitoring.

In the context of part one chapters five, six and seven, which make up part two of the work, chart the emergence of a new school and teacher evaluation / inspection regime in Ireland. Chapter five analyses the pilot project on which the new process is based. Chapter six investigates the key documents which underpin whole school evaluation Irish style and chapter seven reports on research in twenty four schools concerning the perception of school leaders and teachers with regard to the new evaluation system. What emerges from these chapters is that whole school evaluation in Ireland exemplifies vividly the type of school evaluation systems emerging in many other countries. For example it is a compromise between self-evaluation and internal inspection which has been developed

through elaborate consultative processes designed to allay the fears of the various partners involved. On the other hand because it is such a compromise it exemplifies serious flaws including a very underdeveloped focus on data and evidence, a very limited role for key stakeholders such as parents and pupils and an extremely cautious approach to the content and use of the final evaluation reports. In common with many similar systems a key failure is the unacknowledged but very clear lack of capacity in schools to collect evidence to support the analysis of their professional activities.

In order to begin the long and complex task of assisting schools to develop a self-evaluative capacity part three of this work describes an extensive project undertaken with trainee teachers and experienced practitioners in Dublin City University. The goal of the project was to enable teachers firstly to develop a theoretical understanding of and sympathy for self-evaluation. Secondly it was designed to equip the participants with the methodological skills necessary to undertake self-evaluation. Finally it experimented with the use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLE's) to support and sustain practitioner self-evaluation. This final part of the work contains six chapters. Chapter eight analyses initiatives and projects in other parts of the world designed to develop professional self-evaluation capacities. Chapter nine examines the exciting emerging literature on VLE's and particularly their potential capacity to support professional development and knowledge creation in a novel and emergent manner. Chapter ten describes the methodological approach taken to this research and in particular the groundbreaking Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000) designed to analyse the online data collected as part of the research process. Chapter eleven begins by describing the programme created to empower the trainee and experience professionals to understand and undertake self-evaluation. The second part of this chapter evaluates the outcomes of the project under two key headings namely the response of the practitioners to developing and using research methodologies and instruments and the extent to which the participants demonstrated an understanding of an enthusiasm for the process of self-evaluation. Chapter twelve reports on the project evaluation under a third heading which is the extent to which the use of a VLE allowed participants to create a sustainable community of practice. This online community was focused on participant's self-evaluation practice and it is suggested that

such an initiative could underpin a continued engagement with the concept in their future professional lives. This latter is a key point in that previous experimentation with teacher led research and evaluation has tended to show a steady decline in the use made of the practices and techniques learned over time. It is hoped that the VLE can provide the platform or mechanism to sustain interest and encourage ongoing collaborative self-evaluation.

Finally chapter thirteen draws together the strands of the three parts of the work and links key findings in each to elaborate a coherent framework through which self-evaluation can become the underpinning foundation of an effective system of whole school evaluation.

The work was carried out by a researcher who as been a member of staff at the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University for the past ten years. The programmes run by the School, many of which were developed by the researcher in collaboration with other colleagues, provide a background and a context for much of the second part of the work. In addition, the strong collaborative culture present in the School allowed the author draw from the collective experience of a committed group of practitioner researchers in the course of both the initial design of study and the practical development of some elements of the final programme.

Part One: Introduction

In part one of this study the rise of school and teacher evaluation as a worldwide phenomenon is charted. It is argued that this process has been driven by influential political ideologies characterised by their opponents as neo-liberalism and managerialism and by their proponents as 'new public management' and much needed reform. These ideologies and an associated 'reform agenda' have been systematically encouraged by governments, sections of the media and perhaps most influentially by key trans-national agencies such as the OECD, the World Bank and the European Union. Key words and concepts have come to characterise this agenda. These include choice, accountability, transparency, value-for-money, deregulation and decentralisation of responsibility for performance to individual institutions such as schools. These goals are to be achieved through such processes as regulation, quality assurance, quality control, audit, benchmarking, evaluation and inspection.

The impacts of these policies on public services have been felt in many countries. In education this has been manifested in the prioritisation by many governments of two key goals. The first is that of transferring primary responsibility for pupil achievement from central authority to individual schools and teachers. To achieve this it is envisaged that schools and teachers will become more autonomous taking greater responsibility for budgets, planning, self-evaluation and professional development. Somewhat paradoxically however to ensure the maintenance and indeed constant improvement of 'standards' these same schools and teachers are to be the subject of sophisticated surveillance procedures including 'teacher-proof curricula', increased student testing, benchmarking, inspection and external evaluation. One result of these policies has been that virtually every education system in the developed world and indeed many others have been busy creating or where they existed before reforming their school evaluation policies and procedures.

However it is gradually becoming apparent that as the key policy goals of autonomy and accountability are difficult to reconcile in practise it follows that the design and implementation of evaluative systems that can encompass both is problematic. In consequence, it is argued in this study, a kind of hybrid system of school evaluation is

gradually emerging in very many education systems. This hybrid involves a varying mixture of self-evaluation by schools and teachers, which encourages autonomy and professionalism, combined with external inspection to ensure accountability. The balance in these hybrid systems between internal responsibility for evaluation and external monitoring is largely, it will be argued, a function of very complex factors specific to each jurisdiction. Part one will explore these emerging theories and practices in detail.

Appendices

Volume 1

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Chapter Two: The Age of Evaluation

Evaluation, Neo-liberalism and the New Public Management

In an article entitled 'I audit, therefore I am' in The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES, October 18, 1996) Michael Power, Professor of Accounting at the London School of Economics, defined our era as 'the age of inspection, the evaluative state and the audit society'. He went on, 'whatever term one prefers, there can be little doubt that something systematic has occurred since 1971. In every area of social and economic life, there is more formalised checking, assessment, scrutiny, verification and evaluation' (Thrupp and Wilmot, 2003: 14). Thrupp suggests that the 'something systematic' that happened was the perceived failure of Keynesian social democracy around the time of the first oil crisis in the nineteen seventies which has subsequently underpinned what he describes as 'the neo - liberal project whose aim is to inject the competitive nature of the market into what are perceived as a stifling, inefficient and expensive public sector'. Bottery (2004: 62) postulates that these policies are impacting on the provision of public services in several contradictory ways, of which the following are the most relevant to this study:

1. Satisfying the greater demands of clients will be hindered by the need to reduce expenditures and increase efficiency.
2. The pressure to use private sector concepts and practices such as efficiency and profit will conflict with traditional, contrasting public sector values such as care and equity.
3. There will be tension in terms of trust as governments see the need to allow enhanced autonomy and creativity but yet are unwilling to abandon low trust policies of targets, performativity and compliance.

Imposing these low trust policies (O'Neill, 2002) has, in the view of Schwartz and Struhkamp (2004), brought evaluation to the centre of the stage, 'in the current mode of transformed governance called new public management evaluation often plays a crucial role as an instrument to maintain bureaucratic control'.

Johannesson et al (2002: 335) agree that these developments represent 'the new liberal agenda and the new public management' both characterised by 'buzzwords' such as 'decentralisation, choice, goal setting, accountability, transparency, managerialism, evaluation, competition and privatisation'. Johannesson et al (ibid. p 335) go on to

argue that the ‘marketisation’ of every sphere of public life is an international trend that represents a radical move away from the concerns around equity and inclusion that dominated public policy discourse in the nineteen seventies and the nineteen eighties. In the new ‘discourse of progress’ or ‘system of reasoning’, as they define it, ‘science’ is relied upon to rationalise social systems, preferably ‘packaged as easy to install techniques to secure and measure social and economic progress’. This process, it is suggested, gradually norms both institutions and professionals to accept what Foucault describes as ‘governmentality’, by which he means the acceptance and internalising of language and techniques (such as, for example, appraisal, inspection and so on) which ultimately undermines their freedom and professional status.

Not all commentators take such a negative view of ‘the new public management’ or accept that the underpinning theory is neo-liberalism. For example, Dan O’Brien senior editor of the Economist Intelligence Unit suggests that it is the ‘end of ideology’ by which he means the left right divide that has brought ‘the rise and rise of evidence – based policy making’. He goes on to argue that since policy is no longer driven by ideology it now responds to ‘evidence about what works’ and that this has also contributed to the ‘internationalisation of thinking on policy’ (O’Brien, 2006: 12). What is problematic about O’Brien’s interpretation is the implicit view that relying principally on empirical evidence to drive school policy is somehow ‘non-ideological’. In fact it involves an ideology of faith in positivist and technical rationalist approaches to social science research which is open to question. Moreover, as Chevalier et al (2004) point out, such an ideology tends to be strongly linked to theories of choice, competition and the role of the free and quasi-free market in driving school efficiency. This of course can only work in practice if the ‘information’ on which ‘consumer’ decisions are based is founded on valid and reliable evidence and of course if the consumers have the economic independence and resources to make real choices. The latter point is perhaps beyond the scope of this work, but the former, the validity and reliability of much positivist educational research, is a dubious proposition as we shall see in due course.

‘New public management’ of course has been applied in education as much or arguably more than in any other area. Anthony Giddons (2004: 510) remarks that ‘the commercialisation and marketisation of education reflects the cost cutting pressures of

globalisation as schools are being reengineered in much the same way as business corporations'. Guy Neave (1998: 265), speaking of the European Union as a whole, and specifically of schooling, also uses the term, 'the evaluative state' and remarks on the paradoxical blend of devolution and centralisation being experienced by schools in most European countries. Neave goes on to spell out this paradox: while it appears that schools are being given more autonomy to manage their own affairs, they are at the same time being subjected to greater Government regulation and scrutiny, mostly by way of the setting and monitoring of performance targets and through increased inspection and evaluation. Meuret and Morlaix, (2003: 53) regard this process as 'a logical consequence' of what they perceive to be a genuine effort to decentralise power to schools and report that the OECD see evaluation as 'a key way to enhance the responsiveness of schools to the needs of their intake as well as to allow them to improve'. Moos (2003) sees a wide international movement to put down decision making to school level while simultaneously putting up the pressure on schools to render a value for money account in both financial and achievement terms. In the US, work by Elmore and Fuhrman (2001:4-5) argues that 'the theory that measuring performance and coupling it to rewards and sanctions will cause schools and the individuals who work in them to perform at higher levels underpins performance based accountability systems operating in most states and thousands of districts'. These systems, Elmore and Fuhrman suggest, represent a significant change from traditional approaches to accountability in that 'the new approaches focus primarily on schools, while in the past school districts were held primarily responsible. The new approaches focus on performance and other outputs while in the past districts were held responsible for offering sufficient inputs and complying with regulations. Significant concessions such as bonuses are now offered as are threats of school closure'. In Australia, Banks describes education as one of the many services now 'measured' by government. He explains the process as follows - 'equality indicators measure how special needs groups compare in terms of participation and retention rates, while effectiveness is measured in terms of learning outcomes with regard to reading, writing and numeracy, and efficiency is measured in terms of government expenditure per student, staff expenditure per student and staff to student ratios (Banks, 2005).

Of course, inspection of itself is not new, nor indeed is educational research concerned with identifying effective teaching methods, assessment models and so on. As Nevo (2002: 4) points out,

even before the terms accountability, standards or benchmarking were in use, there was a clear demand by politicians, administrators and the public at large that schools be evaluated externally to find out if they were fulfilling their duties... This demand has never ceased, even when external evaluation was highly criticised by innovative educators and when internal evaluation was encouraged by way of an alternative.

Similarly, educational research directed to finding ways of improving schools has also been highly visible and influential for at least the past three decades. Importantly, in the context of this work, this research increasingly suggests that formal school and teacher self evaluation as opposed to external inspection represents an important component in making schools more effective. Zepeda (2003) brings together from the school improvement literature the factors that are found in improving schools. Firmly embedded in this list is the capacity of the school to engage in self-evaluation, and internal monitoring of progress. Schmoker (1999) stresses the need to use data to inform school improvement and includes this along with effective teamwork and the establishment of common and measurable goals as key factors in effective school improvement. Joyce and Showers (2002) provide evidence of the importance of using a range of data including student achievement to inform the provision of professional development for teachers and organisational improvement for schools. Leithwood, Atkin and Jantzi (2001) argue that internal monitoring systems and frameworks in schools are vital in informing strategic direction and should include data on areas such as policies and procedures, planning processes, instruction, assessment and management and leadership. In short, research on growth oriented teacher and school evaluation, though limited, strongly suggests that schools and teachers can benefit greatly from evaluation processes that provide data and evidence to feed into awareness building, goal setting and professional development. Hargreaves (2006) argues that the collection, analysis and use of evidence by teachers and schools as part of their own continuous improvement is a key and inescapable element of professionalism. In essence, therefore, the idea of schools and teachers as being involved in formal evaluation and self-evaluation is not new and is strongly endorsed by the research evidence.

What appears to be a relatively new phenomenon, however, is the attempt to limit or certainly change the nature of professional autonomy in teaching by, as Judith Sachs (2003: 22) puts it, 'placing teachers in a long line of authority in terms of their accountability for reaching measurable outcomes...a line that stretches through the principal to the district or region and then to the central administration'. This corporate or managerial model of educational control perceives the teacher to be, in the words of Brennan (1996: 22),

a professional who clearly meets corporate goals set out elsewhere, manages a range of students well and documents their achievements and problems for accountability purposes. The criteria of the successful professional in this corporate model is one who works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised targets set for the accomplishment of both students and teachers as well as contributing to the school's formal accountability processes.

Kinshelow (2004: 9) describes this process as 'the deskilling of teachers which involves breaking down their tasks and delegating them to low skill workers', something he urges teachers to resist, by becoming 'empowered'.

As a result of these trends, teachers throughout Europe, North America, the Far East and in Australia and New Zealand are today working in conditions characterised by increased public scrutiny, more sophisticated techniques ensuring accountability and a myriad of strategies measuring student learning outcomes. Research by Hargreaves (reported in Wolf and Craig, 2004) in New York State and Ontario, Canada reports that as a result of these developments many teachers feel 'demeaned and degraded', 'unfairly criticised' and 'sick and tired of being asked to justify their existence' and of 'constant government put downs'. Delissovoy and McLaren (2007: 131) suggest that 'the growth of these policies, rules and regulations seem to be crowding out all else as they come to constitute a new industry, bureaucracy and language'.

This pressurised atmosphere is further heightened by a general distrust of teachers at political level and an instrumentalist attitude to education, or at least schooling in society at large (Thrupp and Wilmot 2003). This is evidenced by the demand for the publication of league tables of results and the 'naming and shaming' of under-performing schools and teachers. As Whitty et al observe (1998: 5),

whether or not what we are witnessing here is a struggle between a professionalising project and a deprofessionalising one, it is certainly a struggle

among different stakeholders over the definition of teacher professionalism and professionalism for the twenty-first century.

Examples of this push to itemise, define and control every aspect of teaching and learning can be found across the entire curriculum spectrum. These include ever more detailed definition of course content and required learning outcomes, 'foolproof' teaching methods for every occasion, standardised attainment measures and assessment models, and of course teacher and school appraisal and evaluation (Cochrane-Smith, 2005; Coolahan, 2005).

In each of these areas one could make a case similar to that which emerges in the rest of this study, namely, that policies and practices which impinge upon the professional autonomy of teachers are ultimately likely to be anti-educational, philosophically speaking, and self-defeating from a practical point of view. In making this argument, the researcher has chosen to concentrate on evaluation, firstly because he is an experienced educational evaluator, and has seen at first hand the damage superficial and ill thought out approaches to evaluation can cause; but secondly, and more importantly, because within the theory and practice of educational evaluation, there exists a strong tradition which stresses the importance of professional development, collegiality and respect for practitioner autonomy and independence. This tradition, although very much on the defensive in the age of evaluation remains a viable alternative to narrow, behaviourist and empiricist conceptions of evaluation. However, before turning to conceptualisations of evaluation specifically, it is necessary to consider the broader issue of the nature of educational evaluation research and its relationship to teacher autonomy and professionalism.

Evaluation and Teacher Professional Autonomy

Ángel Diaz Barriga (2003: 454) remarks in an essay entitled 'Curriculum Research: Evaluation and Outlook in Mexico' that 'evaluation has become one of the central subjects in the educational debate at the beginning of this century'. A glance through many of the other essays in the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, in which Diaz Barriga's essay appears, confirms this view. For those of us who, as it were, overlap the fields of curriculum development and curriculum evaluation it is clear that in recent years increasingly and overwhelmingly the latter has become the main

driver of the former. For example launching a recent collection of essays which he had edited on the National Curriculum in England and Wales, John White (2004) rather wryly suggested that as the work was largely theoretical and philosophical in nature it would lack the impact on decision makers of curriculum work grounded in evaluation research. Likewise it has been widely noted around the world that President Bush's educational legislation No Child Left Behind contains 110 references to the role of scientific research in curriculum reform and evaluation. Similarly in the European Union curriculum issues are being increasingly determined at continental, national and local levels by evaluations, a process which will undoubtedly be accelerated by the adoption of specific 'benchmarks and quality indicators for the improvement of education' by the European Commission in 2003. Yet another example of the dominance of curriculum evaluation in determining reform is the intense public interest generated by comparative evaluations of education systems such as the International School Effectiveness Project (ISEP), The Third Mathematics and Science Study (Timms) and most recently and influentially the Programme on Student Assessment Project (PISA). In summary, Christie (2003) suggests that concerns with standards in education and the associated ever-closer scrutiny of the performance of teachers have become 'a global obsession'.

In Ireland it has been largely the influence of European Union policy that has led to continuous programme and institutional evaluations. Boyle (1997:51) points out that EU evaluation requirements in relation to the spending of monies given to Ireland for various purposes has resulted in 'consistent and systematic evaluation procedures in many areas of the public service'. A similar point is made by Lenihan et al (2005:72) who argue that 'the increased impetus for evaluation in Ireland during the nineteen nineties was largely driven by the EU which emphasised the need to assure accountability and measure the impact of significant EU transfers. Importantly, for our purposes, even where EU evaluation requirements do not as yet impinge directly as, for example in 'mainstream' (as opposed to vocational) education, evaluation concepts, policies, systems and processes have tended to 'migrate'.

Interestingly, Boyle (1997:52), the most influential chronicler of the rise of evaluation in the Irish context, suggests that the phenomenon in Ireland has rather different roots or at least is strongly influenced by factors other than neo-liberalism and the new public

management. While Boyle (ibid 52) acknowledges the influence of the OECD and the EU in the form of 'a more results orientated approach to public service management, performance indicators and evaluation', he nonetheless goes on to suggest that the 'new public management is not a monolith...and the Irish experience is very different from Britain or New Zealand. There is little or any evidence, for example, of any great theoretical underpinning to the Irish public service reform programme. It does not draw significantly from public choice or agency theories...neither is there any significant ideological drive to recast the public sector'.

Be that as it may, the evaluation and quality assurance culture now firmly embedded within the EU (Lyon and Martin, 2006) has been gradually incorporated as a key element of the national social partnership agreements which have determined economic and social policy in Ireland. For example, in programmes such as *Work and Competitiveness 1998*, *Prosperity and Fairness 01*, *Sustaining Progress 03-05* and the current national agreement, *Towards 2016*, the terms 'efficiency', 'effective', 'performance', 'quality', 'flexibility', 'rationalisation' and 'evaluation' are mentioned throughout. This represents what Varone et al (2005: 55) describes as 'the institutionalisation of evaluation'. In consequence, recent legislation, including the 1997 Universities Act, the Education Act 1998 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, all have specific sections requiring evaluations of programmes and institutes. As a result, right across the education and training sector, new evaluation systems have been designed and rolled out in the past decade. This is the context within which the subject of this study, whole school evaluation in primary and post primary schools, has emerged. An important point to note is that all these social partnership agreements and subsequent actions, in terms of setting up evaluation structures, have been negotiated and agreed with the partners, including trade unions, and have been effectively paid for in the form of higher salaries.

The present author argues, therefore, that the corporatist approach adopted in Ireland, in the form of 'partnership' between the state and the 'social partners' such as the trade unions, has undoubtedly limited in practice the extent to which managerial notions such as performance related pay or stringent appraisal of work or performance can be employed. Paradoxically, therefore, while all these concepts, ideas and processes appear in the various agreements mentioned above, their implementation on the ground

is highly constrained by the partnership context and niceties. As Boyle goes on to argue, the Irish reform programme might better be seen as more akin to that pursued in other small European countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark. As in these countries, a corporatist type democracy exists which ensures that multi-party coalition and consensus rather than majority rule is the norm. Accommodation, compromise and consensus are key words in the political lexicon. A good example of this culture of compromise with regard to evaluation is provided by the emerging whole school evaluation process in Ireland. The Education Act describes the task of school inspection and whole school evaluation as being 'to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system' (Section 7(2)(b)). This terminology is closely aligned with neo-liberalist philosophy and EU/OECD policy, but as we shall see what has emerged in practice is considerably diluted. Flynn (2006) captures this dichotomy well when describing WSE in practice as 'answering the challenges of accountability in an Irish way rather than a European way'.

Therefore, while Boyle's analysis is largely correct, it is important perhaps not to overstate the case. Even if the context and politics are different, nonetheless a good deal of the neo-liberal agenda has found an echo in Ireland. Across the public sector and very strongly in education, the language of the new public management is in vogue, as are its outward and visible signs in the form of targets, standards, benchmarks, accountability, evaluation and so on. For example, the website of the Department of Education and Science now refers to parents and pupils as 'clients' and 'consumers'. Now schools must engage in 'evidence based quality assurance', 'school development planning' and 'whole school evaluation', and most educational programmes, projects and interventions are subject to regular evaluation. In fact in educational circles where the talk used to be of 'change fatigue' we have now complaints of 'evaluation fatigue'. Yet it is important to note that on the whole, in the area of educational evaluation, emerging policies and practices are to employ the now clichéd term, 'closer to Berlin than to Boston'. It is hard to envisage the application of the type of 'robust' school evaluation system introduced in England (now considerably diluted) being a practical proposition in the Irish context, at least for the moment. In fact, supporters of a more robust evaluation culture implicitly agree with this view. For example, Lenihan et al (2005) argue that there 'continues to be a poor evaluation culture in Ireland' while Ruane (2004) agrees and suggests that this is so because of 'a weak history of planning,

inclusive negotiated agreements which may lead to compromise solutions and a political tradition of client focus which may bias against economic rationality’.

The key point here is that commentators such as Boyle and Ruane see the current situation regarding evaluation as being in flux and highly contested. While there may be little ideological impetus driving low trust accountability policies in Ireland, nonetheless the influence of this agenda is steadily gaining ground under the impetus of EU and OECD pressure. How this contest will play out in the medium and longer term is at this stage unclear.

Given, then, the increasing role of evaluation in influencing educational decision making abroad and slowly but increasingly at home, one has to ask what challenges are posed for the teaching profession. The answer may be a dramatic one – influencing the philosophy of evaluation may become the key battleground for the future of teaching in the broadest sense. In essence, if school and teacher evaluation were to become ever more dominated by external monitoring and control and increasingly narrow concepts of what can be measured and therefore of what counts as being of educational value, the curriculum space so desperately needed for the consideration of issues of citizenship, globalisation, culture and spirituality may dwindle further. In tandem, the space for teachers to exercise their professional prerogative of autonomous judgement and decision-making will further narrow. On the other hand the defence of generously conceived concepts and traditions of educational evaluation may be the strongest weapon still available to progressive education since, as noted above by John White, the power of theory to influence policy and practice seems in decline. The importance of these battles around evaluation to the future of education is emphasised by Taylor Fitz-Gibbon: ‘fear does not promote quality, wherever there is fear we get the wrong figures...the system which introduces fear as in the publication of everything, is a system which corrupts...eastern Europe was full of development plans and targets’ (1996).

The next chapter will try to develop these arguments by analysing the currently competing evaluation philosophies and practices at work in education. It will be argued that both in the US and Europe, among a minority (but an increasingly vocal one) of educational evaluators, the efficacy and ethical justification of applying positivist

research principles to the evaluation of social processes such as education is being strongly challenged (Heywood Metz et al, 2002; McBeath, 1999; McNamara and O'Hara, 2004; McNiff 2002). Recent work in educational evaluation has tried to develop this challenge by moving the evaluation focus away from external judgement and towards understanding the impact of curricula on recipients (Kushner, 2000). However the dominant form of curriculum evaluation still involves judgements made through the eyes of external agencies and the connotation of curriculum evaluation as the external monitoring of professional performance and practice remains strong.

The next chapter suggests that hopes for genuine educational improvement are closely bound to a reversal of this trend – to the empowerment of autonomous self-evaluating teachers and schools capable of resisting 'academic researchers who use research to develop market scripted curricula that result in the de-skilling of practitioners' (Anderson, 2002: 24). This imperative was well understood in the past as the work of Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) and John Elliot (1991; 1998) to name but two curriculum scholars testifies. In more recent times it seems clear that the dominance of centralising political forces obsessed with control, standards and accountability achieved through measurable objectives and instrumental evaluation has gained sway. As a result what is at stake is the locus of power in curricular decision-making.

Livingstone and McCall (2005), in an interesting paper on the ever widening influence of evaluation in education, suggests that only local level school and practitioner self evaluation can hold up the seemingly inevitable impetus towards one size fits all solutions based on internationally and nationally formulated benchmarks and standards. In the Irish context, Boyle (2006: 37) makes a similar point calling for 'organisation based and bottom up initiatives to assess performance in public services'. Johannesson et al (2002:335), in an otherwise gloomy section of their paper entitled 'An Incurable Progress?' also argue that although school self-evaluation has become emphasised - 'mandated by law and as a discourse' - as an intrinsic component of neo-liberal governance, 'this term is one of the magic terms of restructuring'. What they are suggesting is that school self evaluation may provide, paradoxically, a real if rare opportunity for practitioners and schools to, as MacBeath (1996) puts it, 'speak for themselves'. This is because, although self evaluation may be mandated as part of the process of 'improvement', and schools and teachers required to internalise the norms

expected of them and oversee their own implementation of them without the costly external intervention of the state, yet at the same time the knowledge and skills acquired through self evaluation might well have the unintended side effect of empowering professionals and organisations to protect their autonomy and responsibility. This is a similar concept to the empowerment possibilities often suggested by the theorists of emancipatory action research (Carr and Kemmis, 1983), with the difference that as increasingly schools and teachers are mandated to conduct self evaluation, the sheer volume and depth of this activity will almost certainly move far beyond the rather small scale and individualistic nature of action research as it has developed in practice.

It will be suggested in later chapters that precisely as described above, the possibilities inherent in self-evaluation which rather surprisingly has become a central plank of the 'new management' of schools should and can be exploited by schools and teachers to inform their own decision making and enhance their professional autonomy. First, however, it is necessary to show why the drive to use externally imposed solutions to problems of practice derived from large scale quantitative systems-wide evaluative research is a misconceived and futile endeavour, and it is to this we now turn.

Chapter Three: Trusting the Teacher: the case for professional self-evaluation**The Limits of Evaluative Research in Education**

In recent years, the researchers experiences in his role as an education evaluator has led him increasingly to question both the wisdom and practicality of what Haywood Metz and Page (2002: 26) call the 'tendency to impose abstract findings on schools and teachers with little discussion of local variations and necessary adaptations'. The same authors go on to remind us (ibid, 27) that 'researchers may all too easily dismiss or ignore the non-linear character of schools reality, while practitioners must find a viable professional practice within it'.

Much of this 'tendency', it is alleged by the critics, emanates from those who wish to limit or eliminate the professional autonomy of teachers (Darling-Hammond and Youngs, 2002). It is argued (Clarke et al, 2000: 9) that a central tenet of the now dominant managerialism has been a concentrated effort to displace or subordinate the claims of professionalism, 'managerialism refutes the idea that professional knows best rather we are invited to accept that managers do the right thing and this legitimises and seeks to extend the right to manage'. Similarly, Power (1997: 97) suggests that the main objective of highly organised audits or evaluations is to 'challenge the organisational power or discretion' of relatively autonomous groups such as doctors and teachers by making these groups more publicly accountable for their performance. These developments, it is further argued, are leading to the de-skilling and disempowerment of teachers who are being increasingly cast in the role of technicians implementing 'teacher proof' curricula. These curricula are developed through self-styled rigorous experimental designs (Slavin, 2002) and are concerned increasingly with preset and supposedly easily measured attainment standards.

The strength of this obsession with uniformity, conformity, accountability and standards is evidenced in relation to the United States by Slavin (2002). Slavin points out that in President Bush's Education Act 'No Child Left Behind' there are 110 references to the centrality of 'scientifically based research' in formulating successful curricula. It is clear that Slavin strongly approves of this approach. He confidently writes about 'transforming educational practice and research' and refers with almost messianic

fervour to the value of 'experimental – control comparisons on standards-based measures'. These methods will, he assures us produce,

valid knowledge, through rigorous systematic and objective procedures, using experimental or quasi experimental designs, preferably with random assignments.

(2002: 16)

Equally, in the UK Geoff Whitty (2002) points out that while in theory the policy is one of decentralisation of power in many areas to schools, the reality is an increasing obsession with central control, measurable standards and diminution of teacher autonomy. The key figure of this movement in England was influential former advisor to the Government, David Hargreaves (1999). Hargreaves suggests that 'educational research should provide conclusive evidence that if teachers do x rather than y in their professional practice that there will be a significant and enduring improvement in outcomes' and that 'the future of educational research is more experimental studies and randomised controlled trials in search of what works in practice, actionable knowledge, to improve the performativity of teachers with respect to the measurable outcomes of their teaching'.

At one level it is hard to believe that this type of overstatement is still regarded as credible let alone effectively become the driver of educational policy in much of the English-speaking world. To paraphrase the philosopher Robin Barrow (Barrow and Woods 2005 : 132), these overly optimistic notions of the possibilities of social science research are like the 'undead' in the movies, regularly killed but refusing to lie down. As long ago as 1975 Cronbach described experimental research in the social sciences as 'a hall of mirrors that extends to infinity' (72). More recently, in one of the seminal works of our time, *After Virtue*, Alistair MacIntyre describes the predicament of the empiricist social scientist as follows,

if his predictions do not derive from a knowledge of law like generalisations the status of the social scientist as a predictor becomes endangered – as it turns out it ought to be for the record of social scientists as predictors is very bad indeed.

(1981: 22)

In a similarly devastating critique of the 'arrogance and presumption of the producers of certainties' in her own field of special needs education Deborah J Gallagher concludes that,

social science research at least in its present state of development does not appear to allow for the scientific findings that will lead to a robust technology of teaching and learning much less rival the technological advances that have occurred in many areas of the physical sciences – if the sciences that contribute to civil engineering were equally ambiguous, crossing the Severn Bridge or riding the lift to the top of the Sears Tower would be an exciting experience indeed.

(2004: 6)

Helen Simons remarks that three decades have passed since ‘quantitative methodology was found to be inadequate as the sole provider of knowledge for action in the sphere of public services’, yet ‘despite the rather obvious limitations we are now faced with a politically driven restoration of the numbers game (2004:416). Shadish et al (2005:97) make a similar argument, suggesting that behind the rhetoric of efficiency these policies signal a return to the oft criticised positivistic ideal of objective social knowledge. In the Swedish context, Bjorklund et al (2005) demonstrate that despite the fact that the relationship between family background and school performance has hardly budged since before the reforms were enacted. Pressure for further market oriented reforms in education remains intense.

Given these and any number of similar demolitions one can only wonder at the naivety of the empiricists in education still seeking unbiased certainty and scientific truth. But perhaps naivety has little to do with it? With his usual acuity Michael Apple suggests an alternative motive. Speaking specifically of external evaluation based on empiricist and behaviourist principles Apple notes that,

it is of also no help whatsoever in determining the difficult issue of whose knowledge should be taught and who should decide. It focuses instead on the methodological steps one should go through in selecting, organising and evaluating the curriculum – the ultimate effect is the elimination of political and cultural debate.

(2001:83)

As Apple implies here what may seem simplistic notions of ‘what works’ or ‘actionable knowledge’ may not be so simplistic at all. In emphasising the ‘performativity’ of teachers and thereby implying blame for the failures of the system politicians gain two useful advantages, namely an excuse to limit the role and autonomy of teachers while reducing curriculum debate to experiments about means rather than arguments about ends.

All this is not to argue that there is no place for 'scientific research' (in the sense meant by its proponents, namely quantitative experimental studies) in education but only that the role accorded to it and indeed claimed by it should be more modest (Nevo, 1995). Undoubtedly Simons is correct to suggest that while this type of research is relevant for many intervention studies, it falls far short of providing an adequate basis for professional practice, since it lacks 'the conceptualisation and understanding of personal experience' that is required in explaining educative practice. Such research of itself alone provides no credible basis on which to build, in the words of John Elliot, 'an unprecedented extension of the operation of political and bureaucratic power to regulate the pedagogical activities teachers engage their students in within classrooms' (1998). MacIntyre goes further when he argues that it amounts to 'an amazing misuse of power to impose such unreliable notions on schools and teachers' (1981:12). Remarkably, David Hargreaves, an influential advocate of scientific research in education also admits to some reservations – 'we are as keenly aware of the limitations of social science generalisations as you are' (1999:23). Richard Pring (2004: 212) as always strikes a sensible balance when arguing that the real danger lies 'in the imperialism of any one form of discourse together with its distinctive notion of evidence... leading to the false dualism between the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research'.

One symptom of the malaise of the dominance of scientific research in education (and indeed in other fields – healthcare being a good example (Dixon, Woods et al, 2004)) is that it entertains only certain types of evidence, largely quantitative, while qualitative evidence is marginalized. Moreover, quantitative research evidence is privileged as against that from other sources such as teacher knowledge, experience and intuition, or indeed ideas from the history and philosophy of education. Another problem is the unjustified expectation that such research can or does in any significant way impinge directly on practice or that certain research applications such as empirical external evaluation can make practice transparently accountable. Such 'knowledge' even if it were in any real sense valid and reliable is invariably far divorced from practice, overly theoretical and very difficult to disseminate.

A final and increasingly widely stated concern with the dominance of 'high stakes' evaluation, testing and so forth, is that, as Ball (2001) and Thrupp and Wilmot (2003: 41) put it, 'the pressure to perform leads to fabrication'. Ball (2001: 202) illustrates

many of the forms of fabrication that occur in ‘the performing school’ including ‘the manipulation of statistics and indicators, the stage management of events, hiding and sidelining under performing children and the kind of accounts that schools and individuals construct around themselves’. Moreover, recent research indicates that fabrication and cheating are highly symptomatic of the effects of low trust policies on professional practice. Brunson and Jacobson (2002) show the implementation of a set of standardised procedures in professional organisation often results in ‘unwanted and destructive consequences in relation to existing professional norms and values’.

It should be clear, therefore, that the value of empirical educational research should not be overplayed. It is one, but only one, of the influences that should inform the professional judgements and decisions of teachers. In the words of Martyn Hammersly,

The search for one size fits all solutions to complex questions around teachers and teaching is a futile enterprise – it offers a false hope of dramatic improvement in quality, while at the same time undermining the conditions necessary for professionalism to flourish.

(2004: 134)

It is to this last key point – the relationship between educational research and teacher professionalism – that we now turn our attention.

Trusting the Teacher: Practitioner Professionalism and Teacher Education

Against this very powerful anti-teacher tide voices are being raised which stress the centrality of the autonomous professional teacher to any generously conceived notion of what counts as education. For example John Elliot, as always a beacon of reason, argues that since,

human life is accompanied by a high degree of unpredictability as a condition... limiting the predictive power of social science generalisation...trusting teachers in their capacities to exercise wisdom and judgement...is the wise policy.

(2004 b:170)

Research on teacher autonomy seems to confirm this view. Pearson and Moomaw (2005: 45) suggest that the evidence demonstrates that as ‘general teacher autonomy increased, so did empowerment and professionalism’. They go on to argue that ‘empowering teachers is an appropriate place to begin in solving the problems of today’s schools’. They define the teacher empowerment process as, ‘like other

professionals, teachers must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students, as doctors and lawyers do for their patients and clients' (ibid. p 45).

Chief among the voices of resistance is the practitioner research movement seeking to empower teachers to develop and implement their own theories and practices of education through researching their own professional practice (McNiff, 2002 (a); Black and Delong, 2002). Anderson (2002: 24) well represents this view when arguing that through their own research teachers can refute politicians and corporate leaders who have made them the scapegoats for failed policies and practices.

Through research school practitioners can begin to talk back to those current school reform efforts. Practitioners can also use research to provide an analysis that runs counter to that of academic researchers who use research to develop market scripted curricula that result in the de-skilling of practitioners.

It is arguable that it is equally important that practitioners should also be at the heart of the evaluation of educational innovations. It is the making of educational judgements and curricular interpretations that should be at the core of teacher professionalism.

The notion of the primacy of the teacher in evaluating education would, however, find little favour with many in the world of evaluation. Despite the warnings of Denzin and Lincoln (2000:13) about 'the fallacy of objectivism' in social science research, antiquated but still dominant modes of evaluation remain strong. In practice the dominant strand in educational evaluation continues to be the instrumental one where the prime purpose is judgement 'to prove rather than improve' in the terms of the evaluation dichotomy described by Elliot Stern (2002). The fact that as the recent work of Stern (ibid) shows, very few evaluations in reality have a direct or immediate impact on policy does not appear to deter this approach.

However, in contrast there has been and continues to be a distinct strand of evaluation theory and practice which values incremental and professional development outcomes over short term instrumentalism. Currently fashionable but essentially simplistic notions of evaluation as being about generalisations and 'what works' hark back to early conceptualisations concerned with measuring behavioural objectives. Theoretically, this approach has been long superseded by more sophisticated models. These more recent conceptualisations of evaluation conceive of it as being about people working

collaboratively towards a common understanding of personal and interpersonal processes. In theory at least, evaluation has evolved in the social sciences from a method of legitimating the imposition of external frameworks of control to being about enabling collaborative change and improvement – in short the purpose of evaluation has developed ‘from social control to participative social evolution’ (McNiff, 2002b: 3).

Evaluators in this tradition described by Stern as the ‘processual’ tradition (Weiss, 1998; McDonald, 1998; Kushner, 2000) are aware that the implementation of change and improvement has more to do with mobilising the interest and support of those involved and contributing to the professional development and autonomy of practitioners than it has to do with rigorous experimental research designs. In consequence, since the 1970s, educational evaluation has shifted steadily away from experimental and objectives focussed, pre and post test research towards case study and participatory democratic methods concerned with situational understanding, context and professional learning. Stern (2002) completes his comparison of the instrumental and processual traditions in evaluation by concluding that the latter ‘may be more appropriate in educational and other social interactive discourses’.

Recent approaches to educational evaluation have sought to build on this ‘processual’ tradition (Stern, 2002) but take it a step further. The processual tradition may be more concerned with processes than products, with consensus building than judgement but is still driven by the figure of the external evaluator. Kushner (2000) for example seeks to personalise evaluation by concentrating on understanding the impact of programmes or innovations on their recipients, but this understanding is still to be achieved through the lens of the evaluator / researcher. McNiff (2002 b) in contrast suggests moving the practitioner to the centre of the evaluation process and in so doing emphasise teacher development and autonomy and recognise the responsibility and right of the teacher to make judgements about the value of educational innovations.

Inviting teachers to become the key evaluators of educational innovation as opposed to measuring the outcomes in some ‘external’ and ‘objective’ way is of course controversial. For example it can be argued that teachers cannot be objective evaluators as at one level it is their own work and effectiveness that is being evaluated. On this account evaluation must be primarily external.

However, herein lies the dilemma not just of evaluation but also of perceptions of teaching and learning and indeed curriculum. On the one hand, as has been argued, there is increasing pressure to reduce teaching to merely implementing a 'proven' programme of instruction. On the other hand the literature of school improvement has come increasingly to emphasise that the quality of pupil learning has to be seen in relation to the quality of teachers learning (MacBeath, 1999; Special Edition of the British Educational Research Journal, Sept 2001; Sachs 2003). This view of the teacher's professional learning emphasises that the quality of teaching is closely bound up with the capacity of teachers to make professional research based judgements on their own practice and on the programmes and methodologies they are being required to implement. This approach is coming to fruition in initiatives such as self-evaluation, peer review and peer observation of teaching, action research, reflective practice, practitioner-led research and whole school development planning. These developments although dating from 1970s have all become increasingly influential in pre-service teacher education and ongoing teacher professional development in the 1990s.

This generous conceptualisation of teachers and teaching is fundamentally at odds with the perception of the teacher as a piece of technology or a device for achieving pre-determined levels of outcomes. It is also at odds with a concept of evaluation as merely a test of effectiveness entirely related to reaching these outcomes. Few would deny that pupil achievement in this sense is a justifiable goal of teaching but it is not the only goal and in any genuinely conceived educational practice it cannot even be the most important goal. Genuinely educational practices, as Richard Pring (2004) reminds us, are or should be concerned with the intrinsic value of the pursuit in question, engaging with texts, becoming an autonomous and critical thinker, in short an educated person - in the words of Richard Peters, 'coming to care about an activity for what there is in it as distinct from what it may lead to' (1973:42). Standards, targets and benchmarks, narrow and mechanistic objectives, however amenable to easy measurement, have little to do with education in this sense, since they are extrinsic to it, a by-product as it were.

Recapturing this broader conceptualisation of education immediately challenges the notion of limiting teacher professional roles and autonomy. While a trainer or technician may well enable students to reach specified standards and targets, only a teacher can facilitate education understood in this way. Inevitably, therefore, reducing

teacher autonomy is likely to impoverish education and narrow the curriculum as experienced by students in schools. This is well understood by many influential curriculum theorists who movingly evoke the nature of teaching. For example, Slattery suggests that as education is, 'a contested terrain that challenges singular hermeneutic interpretations or methodologies, educators must enter the cultural and political debates with a commitment to justice, solidarity, compassion, liberation and ecological sustainability' (2003:657). He goes on, in a fine passage, to describe the uncertainty and challenges facing the educator.

An unexpected question triggers an exciting or provocative tangent, the changing moods and emotions of individuals create a unique and often perplexing life within the classroom, the same methodology is not always successful with every group of students. Teachers cannot predict the ambiguous and ironic nature of life in the classroom...all educational discourses reflect interpretative and hermeneutic endeavours.

(ibid. p 659)

In similar vein, Judith Sachs (2003) remarks that in the new world of accountability, 'what is often left out is a clear sense of the social and moral visions and missions which should underpin professional teaching' (p. 92). David Geoffrey Smith suggests that 'the teacher must be possessed of true hermeneutic skill to show the essential openness of life and its conversational character' (2003:43). Matus and McCarthy argue that 'the great task confronting teachers and educators as we move into the twenty-first century is to address the radical reconfiguration and cultural re-articulation taking place in educational and social life' (2002:73). The centrality of the skilled autonomous teacher to a genuinely educational practice appears therefore to be clearly understood. However, it may well be that the threat posed to this conceptualisation of teaching by managerialist bureaucracies wielding ill founded theories and generalisations is perhaps less so.

What is at stake here then is fundamentally the locus of power in educational decision-making. The currently dominant instrumental practices of educational research and particularly of evaluation are a factor in maintaining this locus as it is. Evaluation even where concerned primarily with social and educative processes still carries the connotation that an external observer is best placed to make judgements about the professional practice of practitioners. Some recent evaluation work (Kushner, 2000) promotes a shift in the locus of evaluation power to the 'recipients, end users, or victims'

of new programmes and innovations but as has been argued elsewhere the trend in educational evaluation is largely in the other direction (O'Hara and McNamara, 1999). The 'professionalisation' of evaluation, the dominance of the contract and terms of reference and the increasing use of consultants with little knowledge of the field in which they are trying to apply generic research methods are all likely to contribute to the legitimatisation of market driven innovations which deskill and disenfranchise practitioners.

Educational evaluation is not therefore an objective, external, value free process but rather is deeply influential in shaping educational philosophy and policy. The conceptual and ethical stance it adopts is influencing the educational environment and educational debates to a significant degree.

Of course empowering practitioners to evaluate innovation raises other issues. Among these is the status of practitioner-research in relation to other forms of 'scientific' inquiry, concerns relating to quality, rigor and legitimacy and of course arguments around the purpose and value of evaluative research. In relation to the status of practitioner and self-evaluation research, the argument has recently featured in the pages of *Educational Researcher*, the journal of the American Educational Research Association (see for example Vol. 31, No.7 and Vol. 31, No. 8). Despite a clear shift in the US in recent years back to systems wide experimental research programmes many educationalists are willing to argue for the legitimacy of practitioner research. This is in itself significant. Without revisiting all the arguments some key elements are summarised by Heywood Metz and Page (2002: 27) as follows:

Although research carries honorific status it has a questionable record in shaping practice, public understanding and policy. Developing diverse genres of educational inquiry, including practitioner inquiry, may be critically useful at a time when the complexity of schools is not well understood by outside decision makers who are increasingly making the decisions.

Specifically in relation to external evaluative research, issues regarding both the purpose and ultimate value of such research have become deeply contentious. The authors' experience of whole-school evaluation has led the researcher to wonder whether any such externally mandated exercise however benignly meant or conducted can yield significant positive outcomes.

Speaking of the UK Cullingford (1999: 13) has no doubt that,

there are certain factors which raise standards and others which do not.... Those factors that impede improvement are constant outside interference and detailed external control and inspection. Factors which help improve standards include teachers' feelings of ownership and responsibility over change, the sense of the school as a centre of change and changes that happen over time rather than at once.

W Norton Grubb (1999:140) in the same volume remarks that inspection, appraisal and evaluation have become 'stressful and punitive, its benefits only grudgingly admitted by teachers and administrators, are hardly worth the costs'. Carol Taylor-Fitzgibbon, one of the leading figures in educational evaluation research, remarks that 'it was predictable before any OFSTED inspector set foot in a school that their so called judgements would be inaccurate due to, among other things, inadequacy in sampling and the lack of established reliability in research methods used'. Christopher Winch (2001: 688) also suggests that 'OFSTED is unpopular because it is unfair' and describes why he believes this to be the case in a way that is relevant to the whole debate on school evaluation,

the quite erroneous assumption made by such a system is that failures are, in the end, individual failures of staff and governors and possibly of local education authorities and no one else. Seen in this light inspection can be perceived as a cynical exercise of putting the blame for the failures of the national system not on those who are ultimately responsible but on their subordinates.

(ibid 688)

Winch goes on to argue that unless an inspection system can intervene 'to improve school processes and disseminate principles underpinning best practices to the rest of the school system' then 'it will arouse fear without providing reassurance and support'. This is a key point to which we will return in chapter 6 when the emerging school evaluation system in Ireland is analysed in some detail.

In contrast the value and effectiveness of internal or self-evaluation based approaches to improvement is emphasised by many educational theorists. Early (1998: 74) suggests that 'evaluation is most effective when people internalise quality standards and apply them to themselves'. In the same vein MacBeath (1999: 90) argues for a model of evaluation in which 'external evaluation focuses primarily on the schools own approach to self evaluation'. He goes on to argue that external evaluation is unlikely to motivate teachers to achieve high standards and recommends 'a supportive, developmental, threat

free approach to quality improvement' since 'self evaluation is the crucial mechanism for achieving any kind of school improvement – underpinning everything are questions of ownership and empowerment'. Stoll and Fink (1996: 48) conclude similar lessons from their research.

While opening mandated doors will certainly get people's attention there is little evidence that it engenders commitment on the part of the people who have to implement the change - it is through opening as many internal doors as possible that authentic change occurs.

Nonetheless it is reasonable to ask questions about the quality of practitioner research and the role (if any) for 'professional' evaluators and researchers in a practice-led research environment. John Elliott (1995) notes, in examining why the teacher self-evaluation movement which was much in vogue in the late 1970s and 1980s eventually fell on 'stony ground', that neither training, experience or professional culture had allowed teachers to develop the 'discursive consciousness' necessary to become reflexive, self aware and thus able to self evaluate. Teachers, he argues, are 'methodologically adrift' unsure of what questions to ask, what kinds of data to collect by what methods and how to analyse it when it had been collected. More recently, the growing influence of Schon's (1983, 1988, 1995) concept of the reflective practitioner has resulted in much greater emphasis in pre and in-service teacher education on methodological competence. However, we are still quite a bit away from the goal of such competence being widespread among teachers. Progress both on the research skills side and more importantly in giving teachers a belief in self-evaluation and the confidence to engage in it is central to defending and enhancing the professional role of teachers. So far such progress has been slow and as we shall see problems in this regard emerge as the issue in effectively implementing the school evaluation system being developed in Ireland. Addressing this research skills and attitudes gap is the major concern of the work reported in Part 3 of this study.

Self-Evaluation as a Professional Prerogative

In describing her approach to educational evaluation the influential action research theorist Jean McNiff advocates an un-ashamedly teacher-centred approach. Urging that in the interests of the status of teaching and teachers that what counts as evaluation needs to be urgently addressed in educational debates she proceeds to outline a perspective very different to the dominant positivistic paradigm now in vogue.

I regard evaluation as a process of self-study in which people make claims, supported by evidence, to have improved the quality of their work in terms of their educative influence in the lives of others.

(2002 b: 2)

McNiff goes on to develop her ideas of evaluation as follows,

evaluation should be conducted participatively. Its epistemological base would be self-study and its methodology would be action research. In the school, teachers and principals would undertake their action research enquiry into their practice and produce accounts to show how they felt they were justified in claiming that they have improved the quality of educational experience for themselves and for the children in their schools.

(2002 b: 3)

McNiff, in espousing this view of evaluation, rejects external monitoring and control of teachers saying 'my own view is that people are capable of thinking, learning and acting for themselves' (ibid).

Perhaps surprisingly this conceptualisation of evaluation as being primarily concerned with self-evaluation for professional development has now become influential in project and school evaluation in Europe (including Scotland and Ireland, but less so yet increasingly in England and Wales). This owes much, as has been indicated, to the work of American scholars such as Michael Quinn Patton, Carol Weiss and Robert Stake, although oddly, as Scheerens notes, the concept of self-evaluation by schools and teachers is not widely known or practised in the US. Particularly influential has been the work of Donald Schon, whose concept of the reflective practitioner immersed in the 'swampy lowlands' of practice, far away from the clean, neat high ground of most quantitative research has focussed attention on teaching as a possible arena for practitioner led research such as self evaluation. Also influential was the work of Lawrence Stenhouse, who proposed more than thirty years ago that,

teachers can make use of evidence to inform their decisions, but to do this involves their adoption of a research stance towards their teaching, and the gathering of case study evidence about its effects.

(1975: 45)

Sceptics of course argue (Woodhead, 2003) that such notions are largely a way of avoiding the conflict inherent in 'real evaluation, leading to clear-cut judgements and firm interventions to bring about change'. However, it is clear that even in England, where this type of tough evaluation of schools and teachers was most entrenched, that the very ambiguous outcomes and undeniable side effects have given pause for thought.

It is now widely accepted that there is little evidence of external evaluation leading directly to clear unambiguous proof of improvement and considerable evidence of the damage that can be caused to professional autonomy and teacher moral (MacBeath, 2006). In consequence, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), the body responsible for school evaluation in England, now places noticeably more emphasis on school and teacher self evaluation, and while external monitoring remains a significant element of the system, the tone and substance has changed significantly. Throughout the rest of Europe, what one might describe as a spectrum of approaches to school evaluation exists, which largely runs from little or no external monitoring at one end (e.g. Finland) to self-evaluation systems with a significant degree of external inspection (e.g. Holland). The largely externally driven inspection system of England and Wales is unusual in Europe and has only been adopted in other English speaking countries notably New Zealand (MacBeath, 2006). Moreover, the influential theorist Andy Hargreaves in a recent interview (Wolf et al, 2004: 137) goes so far as to say that,

almost all English speaking countries are moving into what I call a post standardisation era. Putting paramount emphasis on measured achievement above anything else actually undermines learning, destroys creativity and reduces the likelihood of good people being attracted to and retained in the teaching profession. This over time depresses quality even further.

Another important caveat regarding self-evaluation is the extent to which it genuinely offers opportunity for practitioner empowerment or is simply imposed by outside authorities as a cheaper but fundamentally similar process to external evaluation. This point is well made by Hannson (2006: 163) who warns that the growing integration of evaluation into the process of management is 'a forceful demonstration of how evaluation is becoming an integrated part of the organisational environment under the new public management systems'. The point here is that despite rhetoric extolling the value of self-evaluation and practitioner empowerment, such systems may in practice simply require schools and teachers to research their own processes and practices according to externally imposed templates and methods. It is hard to argue that such systems constitute self-evaluation by any reasonable definition of the term – a point that will arise again in our examination of whole school evaluation in the Irish context.

Whether self-evaluation, understood as being related to professional autonomy and practitioner driven, will work any better as a method of enabling improvement and

empowering teachers remains to be seen, as its implementation on a systems wide basis is really only commencing in most countries. Evidence from particular projects and programmes where genuine practitioner led evaluation with some support from external agencies has taken place is very positive. Helen Simons, who has facilitated several such self-evaluations, concludes as follows.

When the motivation is intrinsic, schools respond...schools, teachers and administrators become their own best critics if they have control over the evaluation process, over the choice of issues to be evaluated, the methods and procedures to be employed and the audience to whom the results will be disseminated.

(2002: 33)

Simons goes on to summarise the case for self-evaluation for teachers and schools

- Teachers are in the best position to evaluate curriculum change
- The quality of education can best be improved by supporting the professional autonomy of teachers and schools
- This is best done by creating a collaborative, non-threatening professional culture in which work can be publicly discussed and evaluated.

Carol Taylor-Fitzgibbon, founder of the Centre for Curriculum Evaluation and Management (CEM) at Durham University, and a strong supporter of school self-evaluation based on good evidence, suggests that if schools have good self-evaluation systems, external evaluation should only need to be 'light touch', and she goes on as follows, 'UK schools currently lead the world in self-evaluation, demonstrating that teachers are quite willing to be accountable if the methods of assessment of their work are clear and believable' (1999: 16). Stevenson (2006) suggests that his work on the 'research engaged school' demonstrates the immense possibilities for development inherent in teacher enquiry, reflection and self-evaluation.

However, a somewhat less sanguine view of the perceived usefulness of self-evaluation to teachers themselves, let alone to policy makers and the public at large, is also to be found in the literature.

For example, Meuret and Morlaix, speaking of France, remarks that,

school self-evaluation is not common practice...the Ministry advises school to develop a culture of evaluation, and sends them indicators to assist them in that process, but these indicators are used by at best 5% of the schools.
(2003:70)

In relation to the European pilot project on school self-evaluation, involving 101 secondary schools throughout Europe, in which they were involved, Meuret and Morlaix note that 'school self-evaluation is not very popular among school staff...they were a little more inclined to appreciate self-evaluation as opposed to external evaluation, but only a third declared that it was 'liked by most staff' (and these schools were chosen for supposedly having positive attitudes to evaluation)(ibid p. 54).

Speaking of Iceland, Lisi and Davidsdottir (2005: 3) report that although schools have been mandated to conduct self-evaluation since 1996, few do so since 'all such ideas are met with distrust in the beginning, particularly as Icelanders are used to their independence and find it insulting that anyone would tinker with their freedom to do as they wish as teachers'.

A number of points are important here. One is that, as Fullan suggests, schools are hard to change,

we have an educational system which is fundamentally conservative. The way in which teachers are trained, the way in which schools are organised, the way that the educational hierarchy operates and the way that education is treated by policy makers, all result in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo than to change.

(2003:6)

Consequently, relatively new ideas must be strongly supported and be seen by teachers to be relevant to have a chance of becoming accepted and used. Understanding this, Carol Taylor-Fitzgibbon founded the CEM to provide usable and easily understood data to schools undertaking self-evaluation and over a thousand schools now take part voluntarily in the system. Meuret and Morlaix concludes their comments on the European school self-evaluation project by suggesting that the evidence indicates that to get teachers and schools on board,

the process of evaluation has to be a participatory one and not just a technical one, not only at the operational level but in its conception and monitoring. Data and indicators appear to be useful but they have to be user friendly in order to be

actually employed in discussion among the stakeholders and not just by the technocrats.

(2003:69)

In other words, it is clear enough that school and teacher self-evaluation systems which are just 'mandated' by bureaucrats but provide no convincing justification or rationale to schools and teachers and no support in providing either usable data or research training to enable schools to obtain and analyse their own evidence are most unlikely to have any impact. This, then, becomes one of the key indicators against which emerging school evaluation and self-evaluation schemes need to be judged. The point is emphasised by Barzano (2002: 84), who suggests that case studies undertaken in the EEDS school evaluation project, as well as analysis of the documentation from other projects, makes clear that the possibility of schools undertaking self-evaluation activities without support and training seems to be very limited. An approach to providing such support and training is the subject matter of Part Three of this study.

Conclusion

The central argument of this chapter is not that we should abandon large scale educational research, still less that we should ignore demands from the public, parents and politicians for schools to be evaluated in some way to ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities. The former has an important role to play in educational improvement while the latter are perfectly reasonable in a democratic society. However what is being argued is that these imperatives must be limited, balanced against the very important, central role of teachers in education. Anything that de – skills, de-professionalises and dis-empowers teachers will ultimately do a great deal of harm regardless of whatever short – term gains it may be hoped to achieve. It is being suggested that whether as deliberate policy or unintended side effect the current drive to apply entirely positivist notions of social science research to complex problems of curriculum, teaching and evaluation is having and will increasingly have these negative and regressive ramifications. This is both fundamentally anti-educational and in practice self-defeating since the effective implementation and mediation in the classroom of whatever new ideas emerge from research is entirely dependent on having the support and commitment of a teacher with the talent and skill to make it work.

In relation then to school evaluation as a field of study, the point of this chapter is that the status and role of the teacher must be researched, conceptualised and defended as an absolutely integral component of the remit of the discipline. The chapter represents a suggestion, perhaps unjustified, that the defence of teacher professional autonomy is not perceived as the priority it ought to be by many in the field. Certainly, influential voices – Linda Darling-Hammond in the US and John MacBeath and Michael Schratz in Europe, for example – have laboured hard to resist encroachment on the role of the teacher. Likewise wise words have been quoted from, Patrick Slattery and David Geoffrey Smith extolling the importance of teachers and teaching. However in the school and teacher evaluation literature in general issues around the relationship between research and evaluation and teachers and teaching receive surprisingly little consideration.

It has been argued throughout this chapter that antiquated but still dominant conceptualisations of educational research in general and teacher and school evaluation in particular pose a significant threat to the professional independence and freedom of educators. It seems perhaps that the fundamental connection between empowered teachers and a progressive and challenging curriculum for learners may not be fully appreciated but this relationship is in fact crucial.

Impositions and limitations upon teacher autonomy not only de-professionalise the teaching role but inexorably impoverish education and the curriculum. Increasingly the pressure to conform to allegedly scientifically proven notions of ‘what works’ results in forms of teaching where genuinely educational practice can hardly take place at all. In this context genuinely educational practice refers to the sustained immersion of the learner in the traditions, practices and procedures of the many fields of knowledge and endeavour that make up the human experience. Without this immersion the learner has little chance to in the words of the philosopher Gerry Gaden, ‘make his own of some aspect or part of this inheritance in the sense of coming to appreciate the intrinsic value of an activity or pursuit as opposed to using it to achieve some extrinsic goal’ (1983:53). These conceptualisations of learning and curriculum depend fundamentally on a perception of teaching that is not about the delivery of a product but is rather a two way transaction from which both learner and educator can profit and grow.

It is arguable therefore that as the role of the teacher is crucial to the curriculum, the field of evaluation studies must be more active in defending and supporting the professional role of teachers and teaching and in resisting ill-considered and poorly founded interference in their reasonable autonomy. In fact, as the next chapter argues, there are signs of the emergence of an approach to school and teacher evaluation which attempts to reflect these concerns and to respect professional autonomy while seeking to ensure a reasonable degree of public accountability. We now turn to the emerging systems of school and teacher evaluation, particularly in Europe, but with some reference to the wider world.

Chapter Four: The School Evaluation Spectrum – an emerging consensus?**Changing Perceptions of School and Teacher Evaluation**

Some time ago in a paper at the conference of the European Evaluation Society (McNamara and O'Hara, 2001) the researcher caused controversy by suggesting that an external yet collaborative and outwardly successful whole school evaluation process may have in fact caused more damage to the organisation than any benefit which accrued. The idea that a negotiated and largely sympathetic evaluation could be a bad thing seems absurd but in this case there was considerable evidence that it would have been better if it never had happened.

Subsequently therefore the suggestion by critics such as Cullingford (1999), Rosenthal, (2001) and Taylor Fitzgibbon, (1995, 1998, 19999, and 2001) that more intrusive evaluative interventions such as those of OFSTED in the UK may cause deep and lasting tensions came as no surprise to the researcher given the impact that relatively benign evaluations can have.

These concerns about best practice in the area of school evaluation, quality assurance, inspection and so on are becoming increasingly pressing and polarising. The debate to date has largely centred on inspection and evaluation and whether these are best seen as an internal school driven process or alternatively in the interests of accountability and quality enforced and monitored from the outside. Earley (1998: 168) describes the issues in the following terms:

The reality facing schools is that they must improve but the question is how? In simple terms the school improvement debate can be seen as being polarised between those who advocate either internal or external factors as the mechanism for change. The former stress the importance of school review, self- evaluation and school self- improvement all predominately internal mechanisms in which the school itself is seen as the main change agent. The latter point to the significance of external forces such as school inspection, appraisal or audit and see them as the main driving forces for school improvement.

This chapter will go on to suggest that for a variety of reasons and with considerable ambiguities and contradictions the emphasis in Europe in general has moved towards the former model described by Earley above, 'internal mechanisms' and away from the latter model, 'external control'. Not all specialists in the area would agree with this

view. Johansson et al, for example, in their study of developments in Iceland, Finland and Sweden, perceive a clear move towards 'the marketisation of education along the Anglo American / OECD line' and away from the more school-centred traditions of these countries. This is also the view of Soderburgh (2004), who in relation to developments in Sweden is of the view that 'an important trend throughout the nineties has been the successive introduction of market forces...as a result the number of independent schools has increased rapidly, a radical shift compared to the uniformity that was for a long time a distinguishing feature of Swedish educational policy'.

MacBeath, on the other hand, suggests that his work, *Schools Must Speak for Themselves*, has influenced many European countries in the direction of self-evaluation as the key mechanism in school evaluation (MacBeath and Sugimine, 2003: 2). This view was echoed in a recent address to the Irish inspectorate by Andy Hargreaves (2006), 'for all sorts of reasons partly to do with resources but as much to with concerns about teacher recruitment, morale and retention there is a discernable move away from external monitoring and towards internal quality assurance mechanisms in school systems virtually everywhere'.

MacBeath (2006:2) goes on to suggest, that the EU funded school self evaluation project which he jointly led and which was published as *Self Evaluation in European Schools* has given rise to what he describes as 'the European model of school evaluation' which 'continues to thrive'. 'School inspectors from across Europe', he adds, 'have acknowledged the significant influence of the European model in shaping policy in their countries'. MacBeath goes on to say that these European countries have now been joined by Canada, although he acknowledges that recent North American legislation is still primarily concerned with accountability and that trends in some Canadian provinces are also towards, 'hard-edged accountability'. These developments MacBeath argues, 'illustrate constraints which inhibit rather than promote school self-evaluation'.

MacBeath (ibid. p 2) is at pains to deny that self-evaluation is an easy option or that it excludes an accountability component,

inside the velvet glove of support and critical friendship is the fist of accountability, intolerant not only of low standards by also of self-delusion.

Self-evaluation must be owned by a school staff and is manifestly not a soft option. Schools have to prove their ability to know themselves with appeal to authoritative and verifiable evidence.

This 'European model' of school and teacher evaluation/inspection as defined by MacBeath contains 'certain essential ingredients which make it engaging and empowering'. These are listed as,

- The central involvement of key stakeholders in the process
- Identifying what matters most to teachers and school leaders in evaluating school quality and effectiveness
- The support and challenge of "critical friends" chosen by, or in consultation with, the schools
- The dialogue which flowed from the different viewpoints and the press for supporting evidence
- The repertoire of tools for use by teachers
- The simplicity and accessibility of the framework
- The focus on learning and support for teaching

(2003: 21)

Despite what he sees as the growing influence of the 'European model', MacBeath accepts that since each country has 'different accountability contexts' significant differences in approach and emphasis remain. Thus, within the overall 'European model' MacBeath identifies three sub models of inspection / evaluation which he defines as follows:

- Proportional: inspection takes the school's own data as its starting point; a high standard of self-evaluation should lead to a less intensive inspection. The Netherlands, Scotland, Portugal, Flanders, The Czech Republic, Ireland and England fall into this category.
- Ideal: inspectors report on the quality of self-evaluation and identify areas where improvement is needed. Northern Ireland, Austria and France are in this category.
- Supporting: the inspectorate provides support for schools in carrying out self-evaluation more effectively. Denmark and some German Lander fall into this category (ibid. p 21).

From an Irish perspective, the inclusion of Ireland in the same category as England would be a cause of some surprise and this may well illustrate the extent of the differences within the common European model alleged to exist by MacBeath. The English system known colloquially as OFSTED would be regarded in Ireland (among teachers) as a dangerously threatening, intrusive and demoralising approach to evaluation and inspection, involving punitive levels of stress and potential 'naming and shaming' of weak teachers and schools. Even in the context of the clear 'softening' of the OFSTED approach since as far back as 1998 (as exemplified by the increasing emphasis on self evaluation and the recent policy of the 'new relationship with schools' Milliband 2004) it seems reasonable to argue that there remains a significant gulf between the English approach and that emerging in Ireland. The English system is still primarily concerned with external inspection, is 'high stakes' in that interventions very damaging to schools and teachers may follow a negative inspection and has developed very extensive tools for gathering data to monitor school performance. The system emerging in Ireland is, as we shall see, quite different with an emphasis on self-evaluation, 'light touch' external inspection and very little emphasis on data or evidence to support findings.

This seems, perhaps, to somewhat invalidate the category structure proposed by MacBeath, since it demonstrates that systems placed in the same category are very different in practice. Part of the problem here is that the objectives and the language of different evaluation schemes may well look very similar on paper but their working out in practice is so constrained by national contexts that they become substantially different. For example, the significant difference in practice between the evaluation systems in Ireland and Britain has already been noted, although both are surprisingly similar on paper.

A different conceptual framework for categorising school evaluation systems in Europe is proposed by Meuret and Morlaix (2003: 55). Building on the work of Saunders (1999) they propose a two-category theory which they describe as the technical model and the participative model. The technical model they suggest rests on quantitative indicators which, 'are often imposed or strongly suggested by the authorities' while the participative model 'rests on school stakeholders judgements'. These models' (similar

to Saunders, 1999) categories, the 'English model' and the 'alternative model', are, suggest Meuret and Morlaix, 'opposite regarding their organisational and also political meaning' (ibid. p 56).

Importantly, however, Meuret and Morlaix go on to say that in fact ambiguities exist in these models, or at least in the way in which they are implemented, which makes the categorisation much looser in practice. For instance, they suggest that the participative model does not in fact rule out external authorities from having any role in the process since, in some self-evaluations the judgement is delivered by the school on itself but partly on the basis of criteria advised or data provided by external authorities.

Similarly, many 'participative' evaluations tend to make use of external agents in the form of critical friends' to guide and facilitate the process. It is arguable, therefore, that the level of overlap between these categories is so great that they are more or less meaningless as categories.

A third system for categorising school evaluation or accountability systems is proposed by Anderson (2005: 3). The categories she proposes are:

1. Compliance with regulations
2. Adherence to professional norms
3. Results driven.

The first category is described by Anderson as 'rooted in an industrial model of education' and involves compliance with a set of laws, criteria and regulations laid down by the authorities. The example she chooses of this model is OFSTED in England and she defines this category as follows: 'educators are accountable for adherence to rules and accountable to the bureaucracy'. Her second category is 'based on adherence to professional norms' which are usually neither 'mandated nor required' but often grew out of traditions or professional self-regulation. Anderson summarises this model as 'educators accountable for adherence to standards and accountable to their peers'. The third of Anderson's categories speaks for itself – evaluation of school and teacher performance – and is 'based upon results with results defined in terms of student learning'. Anderson sees this third category as one which is growing and becoming more widespread due to 'increasing political involvement in education'. She

summarises this third category as, ‘educators are accountable for student learning and accountable to the general public’.

However, as in the case of the two previous models of school evaluation that has been described above, those of MacBeath and Meuret/Morlaix, Anderson’s model is, arguably too rigid. Indeed, she somewhat acknowledges this herself when she remarks that ‘educators often find themselves responding to all three systems attempting to balance the requirements of each’. In fact, in the researchers view, the borderlines between Anderson’s categories are so fluid that they are hard to justify as separate categories. For example, the compliance’ system Anderson (2005) cites has in fact a very heavy emphasis on hard data, particularly pupil results, and thus could as easily fit into her third category. Equally, most professional norms have grown over time out of compliance systems, such as, for example, the regulation of teacher training requirements or fitness to practice criteria laid down by state teacher registration authorities or professional associations and therefore the border between these categories is also fluid.

There is in fact a remarkable range of other evaluation models suggested by various writers. For example, Scheerens (2002), in a summary paper on the area, places all these models of school evaluation into four broad categories which he describes as the human relations model, the internal process model, the open system model and the rational goal model. It would be pointless to attempt to analyse all these models in detail. Suffice it to say that they all suffer from a similar problem namely that of over-rigid theoretical categorisation which breaks down when the systems categorised are examined in their implementation.

In essence, therefore, the more these proposed models and categories of school evaluation were examined, the more convinced the researcher became that the best way of conceptualising the different approaches is as a spectrum rather than as distinct categories. In the following section, it is proposed that such a spectrum or perhaps a number of related parallel spectra of subtly graduated approaches is the best way of both conceptualising and visualising the field of school evaluation.

The Spectrum of School Evaluation

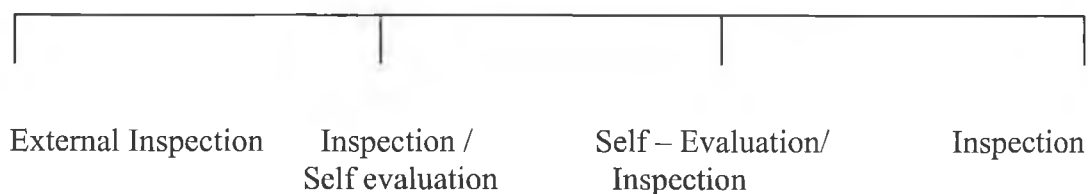
This conceptualisation of school evaluation is reinforced by the work of another highly influential theorist and practitioner in the area, David Nevo. Nevo's (2002) recent work brings together essays from ten countries (six in Europe, Israel, the US and Canada) around the theme of approaches to school evaluation and self-evaluation in each. As Nevo remarks in his introduction, 'these case studies...represent actual experience with school based evaluation in various educational and social contexts with a wide range of local constraints and reflecting multiple evaluation perspectives'. What emerges clearly represents a very broad range of different approaches with varying degrees of similarity and difference. For example, the essay on Canada (entitled 'School based evaluation and the neo-liberal agenda' (McLean 2002) argues that there is, in effect, no school evaluation remaining in Canada, as it has been destroyed by budget cuts and more and more external testing. In contrast, at the other end of the scale lies Germany where systematic evaluation or self-evaluation of schools is only now being seriously considered (ironically in the aftermath of national recriminations over the country's poor performance in the PISA international comparative achievement tests). Even within the examples drawn from Europe, the range of evaluation and self-evaluation methodologies is remarkably broad, extending from England with the imposition of formal external inspection (even if, as we have seen, increasingly tempered by an emphasis on systematic self-evaluation) to most of Scandinavia where there is even less tradition of systematic external or self-evaluation than in Germany (although, as Johannsson et al (2002: 12) argue, the 'mania of evaluation' is fast spreading in Scandinavia also, a point supported by recent publications of the Finnish National Board of Education (1999).

Based on these trends, it is proposed that the following is the case:

1. School evaluation mechanisms are being further refined or newly constituted in virtually every country
2. These mechanisms range from very 'hard-edged' evaluations, largely based on a student results model (mostly in North America) to a norms based approach founded on teacher compliance with general regulation and the 'norms of teacher professionalism' (as laid down through teacher training requirements or state regulation). The latter mode involves little or no systematic conduct of evaluation or self-evaluation and was

common in many parts of Europe particularly Scandinavia until very recently.

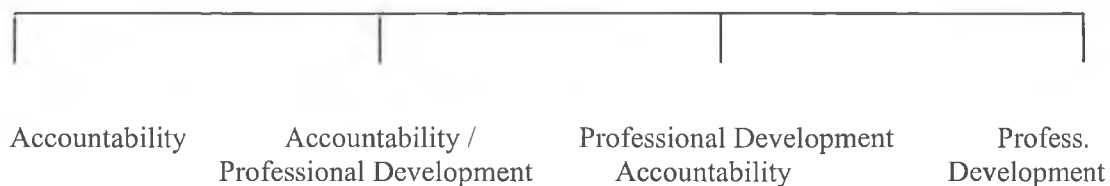
3. It is suggested that both models are in fact in decline and are being replaced by a standards-based model. This involves the definition of standards or performance indicators or themes for evaluation and self-evaluation. This is done either by schools themselves or by an external authority or a combination of the two. The standards are then enforced through a mixture of external inspection and internal self-evaluation based on the systematic collection of a range of data including but not confined to student attainment. The main variation within this model as increasingly applied in different jurisdictions is the relation ship between external monitoring and self-evaluation. This might be most usefully seen as a spectrum. The spectrum being proposed would look something like the following:



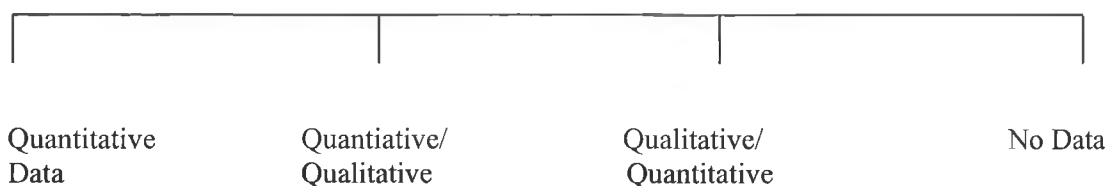
It is argued that there is significant evidence that slowly and tentatively a convergence is emerging towards one area of the above spectrum namely around self-evaluation with a light-touch external inspection component.

To further understand the direction that school evaluation is taking, it is suggested that two further parallel spectra to the one above need to be defined and explored. Since it is the view of this study that the consensus emerging as described above is closely connected to the shifting purposes for which school evaluation is being utilised, the first of these parallel spectra is called the accountability – teacher/school professional development spectrum. This ranges from the purpose of enforcing accountability at the

one end to the encouragement of school and teacher professional development and autonomy at the other.



The second parallel spectrum refers to data and evidence and ranges from systems where there is little or no systematic data collection for evaluation purposes to systems where the only data regarded as of value is pupil achievement scores.



When we put these three spectra together, the range of options, as it were, for school evaluation systems becomes clearer. In practice, since it is argued that these three spectra are linked, it is not simply a matter of choice for policy makers to choose different elements from each spectrum and combine them into one system. In fact the evidence indicates that choosing an approach on the first spectrum above effectively implies a parallel position on the other two. That is to say, that as self-evaluation becomes increasingly dominant it follows that on the accountability – professional development spectrum, the emphasis increasingly lies with professional development with limited concerns around accountability. Equally it follows that in terms of data/evidence the emphasis will increasingly be on mixed methodologies including qualitative data and stressing internal collection and analysis of evidence.

Given that much of this recent concern with school and teacher evaluation is alleged to be an outcome of neo-liberalism and the new public management, it may seem strange that such a consensual approach is emerging. However, it should be borne in mind that

in countries where the neo-liberal agenda is strongest, as in Bush era America, there are only limited, localised signs of this development. On the other hand, as Boyle points out, large swathes of Europe, including Ireland, have not been hugely influenced at all by neo-liberalist theory. Moreover, the EU, a driving force in the direction of standardisation, competencies, evaluation and so on, and as such often accused of being focussed on the neo-liberal agenda, has increasingly emphasised that its concern is essentially with compatibility of systems to facilitate the free market rather than as hard-nosed evaluation as such. In consequence, as we shall see, the theory and practice of quality assurance mechanisms including evaluation, which is emerging from developments in the EU, for example in the field of higher education, is very much in line with the moderate, cautious, consensus-driven self-evaluation model outlined above.

Even in England, where the neo-liberal agenda was strong, a move towards the centre of our proposed school evaluation spectrum is evident. A number of factors are influencing this trend. Firstly, evidence has emerged that ‘robust’ school evaluation policies, whatever their merits, have major downsides in terms of school and teacher morale and are very costly to implement and maintain. Moreover, it has become clear that schools like pupils can be ‘coached to the test’ and that therefore very widely spaced ‘snapshots’ of school or teacher performance may in fact tell us little about the day to day reality (MacBeath 2006). Undoubtedly the influence of seminal theorists of school and teacher evaluation, particularly John MacBeath, taken together with the apparently successful collaborative approach his work has bequeathed to Scotland, may have given pause for thought. At all events, and for whatever reasons, the OFSTED system in England has steadily inched across our spectrum, moving towards a greater concern with school and teacher self-evaluation and the associated elements of professional and organisational development and mixed methodology evaluative research techniques. A cursory glance at the school self-evaluation instruments developed and now widely used by OFSTED, confirms this trend.

This trend towards what one might call mixed theory and mixed method evaluation was predicted and even regarded as inevitable by Nevo (2002). Stating the dilemma that ‘everyone seems to hate external evaluation but nobody trusts internal evaluation’ (2002: 182). Nevo suggests that each is indispensable to the other.

Educational officials ask me sometimes “we believe in external evaluation and are spending a lot of money on implementing our national school evaluation system. Why should we waste money on internal evaluation” and my answer is: “if you can overcome the resistance to external evaluation and if you think that it is useful and being used don’t waste a penny on internal evaluation. But deep in your heart you know this is not the case”. And schoolteachers often ask me “we know that you are a strong believer in teacher professionalisation, in school autonomy and in self evaluation and reflection, then why do you agree with external self evaluation”, and my answer is “if you won’t respect the responsibility and authority of the ministry of education, and the right of parents to know about the schools their children go to, don’t expect them to respect your right for autonomy and reflection and to trust your judgement as a professional teacher.” (ibid 183)

In summary, then, it is argued in this chapter that as most school systems are in effect seeking a working compromise between external and internal evaluation and between school and teacher accountability and a reasonable degree of professional autonomy, a consensus around a particular approach to school evaluation is slowly but surely emerging, certainly in Europe. The framework of a model attempting to balance these seemingly irreconcilable objectives is becoming clearer. This model represents a series of compromises. Self-evaluation is prioritised but with a degree of external monitoring. School and teacher autonomy and professional development is emphasised but the system is also expected to provide a level of accountability. A wide range of data both quantitative and qualitative is to be used to generate evidence to support self-evaluation judgements and to justify these judgements to external stakeholders.

As a contribution to this development, Part two of this study analyses the emerging model of school evaluation in Ireland. This is not to suggest that this model could or should be applied in its entirety anywhere else, indeed there is a strong counter argument to be made. The main reason that school evaluation systems are best represented as a spectrum is that contextual and cultural conditions are central to the evaluation of schools and teachers and thus are not the same in any two places. Rather it is to place the emerging system in Ireland within the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter and to suggest ways in which shortfalls both in theory and emerging practice might be made good. This it is hoped will contribute not only to the further

improvement of the system in Ireland but also influence the school evaluation model as it is developing in other systems.

Part Two: Introduction

Schools and teachers in Ireland have a long history of being evaluated by a centralised inspectorate, a division of the Department of Education and Science. However, by the early 1990s this system had broken down to a significant degree. The inspection of primary schools had become sporadic and rather idiosyncratic but still existed. In secondary schools inspection had largely ceased entirely and in fact the largest teacher union supported its members in refusing to teach in front of an inspector. The reasons for this decline in inspection are varied and need not detain us here. What is interesting is that the impetus for a new approach to inspection and school evaluation in the mid 1990s came from external sources rather than from any pressing domestic demand. This is made clear in the source policy documents prepared by the Department of Education and Science to introduce the first Whole School Evaluation pilot project in 1996. For example, the introduction justifies the development of the WSE pilot scheme by noting ‘across the European Union a wide range of approaches is evident to the assessment and evaluation of schools’ (1999: 8). On page nine we read that ‘there is now a growing tendency across Europe to see external and internal school evaluation processes as being inextricably linked’. Later on the same page it is suggested that ‘there is an increasing effort to encourage schools to review their own progress in a formal way... to engage in their own development planning’.

The external influences made explicit in the above quotes show clearly that, as Boyle argues, EU policy in the direction of new public management systems such as strategic planning and systematic evaluation have been a key driver of change in the Irish context. As Boyle (1997, 2002) suggests, it was not so much any domestic policy or ideology that drove this process, but rather a migration of EU evaluation policy, together with a strong sense that, as these developments appeared to be happening everywhere else, it was potentially dangerous to lag behind. It is no coincidence that in other areas of education, particularly vocational, adult and higher education, health and other social services, and indeed across the public sector as a whole, that the late 1990s and early years of this century have witnessed similar developments to those described in the following three chapters.

However, as Boyle also points out, the implementation of these initiatives in Ireland has been strongly governed by the corporatist tradition of political and social partnership on

the one hand, and the lack of any significant ideological commitment on the other. These factors, combined with other contextual restraints, notably the strength of the trade unions, have strongly influenced the consensus approach to evaluation in general and particularly to school and teacher evaluation which have emerged in practice. The following three chapters chart these developments and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the system of evaluation now operational in all Irish schools. In chapter five, the early development of a school development planning and whole school evaluation approach is described and analysed. This took the form of a pilot project which ran from 1996 to 1999. In chapter six, the outcome of this experimental work in the form of a framework for school and teacher evaluation entitled *Looking At Our School*, which now forms the basis of a national system of school evaluation, is considered in detail. Finally in part two, chapter seven reports on research case studies conducted in 2005/06 in twenty-four schools from among the first cohort to undergo whole school evaluation.

Chapter Five: A Toe in the Water – ‘The Whole-School Evaluation Project’**Starting from Scratch – Developing a School Planning and Evaluation Framework**

This chapter analyses important interrelated developments in school development planning (SDP) and whole-school evaluation (WSE) in Ireland in the past decade. In particular, it examines the outcomes of a pilot project on whole-school evaluation conducted by the Department of Education and Science (DES). This project subsequently became the foundation for the national system of school and teacher evaluation which has emerged in Ireland since 2003. The chapter also is concerned to an extent with the school development planning framework which has emerged contemporaneously with WSE. This is because the DES sees both processes as closely linked forming between them a system of quality assurance for schools and teachers.

Traditionally, schools in the Irish education system and the teachers within them have not tended to engage in collaborative planning or evaluation processes (Lynch and O’Riordan, 1996). Moreover the implementation of these processes in other systems, or at least the way in which these experiences are often characterised, has resulted in considerable reluctance to engage in anything that smacks of appraisal, planning, target-setting, benchmarking and so on (O’Hara and McNamara, 1999).

In recent times, however, the trend towards openness and accountability in all public institutions and the increasing acceptance among educationalists that whole-school planning and evaluation are purposeful means of promoting school effectiveness and development (Hargreaves, 1994) have started to have an effect. In order to encourage these developments, the DES designed a WSE pilot project involving some 35 schools throughout Ireland. The project ran from 1996 to 1999. To evaluate this project, data of both a qualitative and quantitative nature were collected from each school in the project by the DES and used as the basis of a substantial government report (DES, 1999a).

At the same time, the DES has in recent years actively encouraged all schools to develop a school plan through a process of school development planning. In fact, the Education Act of 1998 made the development of such a plan compulsory. The Education Act (section 21) (1998) requires the following:

21. (1) A board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as 'the school plan') and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated.
- (2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.
- (3) The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.
- (4) A board shall make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patrons, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

Interestingly, all 35 schools in the WSE project had a school plan or were developing one, although this was not a requirement for inclusion. The results of the WSE project therefore allow us to examine the relationship between the process of evaluation as conceived and conducted in this project and the process of school development planning. The DES expresses the view in the WSE Report (DES 1999a: 16) that the two processes are inseparable, 'two sides of the same coin, complementing each other'. Yet while there is evidence that in some ways the relationship is a positive one, some of the project data appear to indicate that pressures and tensions also exist.

To appreciate the complexity of the whole-school evaluation/school development planning relationship it is necessary to see how these processes have been conceptualised in the Irish education context. This is particularly the case with WSE since the approach adopted in Ireland has been defined as 'consultative evolutionary evaluation' (McNamara and O'Hara, 2001:101) and is, to put it mildly, less threatening and intrusive than approaches taken elsewhere. This chapter therefore continues with a brief description of the emergence of the policy and practice of school development planning in the Irish context. It proceeds to look in more detail at the WSE pilot project and, finally, it attempts to isolate the positive and negative elements of the relationship between the two processes. The overall purpose is to contextualise how policy has developed as WSE and SDP have subsequently been 'mainstreamed' in tandem.

School Development Planning: A Key Reform Policy

Isolationism in schools, the egg crate structure as described by Lortie (1975), has been particularly prevalent in Ireland (Lynch and O’Riordan, 1996). These authors suggest a number of possible reasons for this; the willingness (or determination, depending on your point of view) of the members of religious orders to take upon themselves the management of schools (including middle management roles) and the resultant lack of opportunity for teachers to manage, plan and collaborate being probably the most convincing.

At all events, rapid change in the Irish education system, and influential research at home and abroad, have moved school development planning and school and teacher evaluation from the periphery to the centre of education policy in a very short time. As indicated above, the Education Act of 1998 in effect makes SDP and WSE compulsory, and very detailed frameworks and guidelines for conducting both procedures in schools have been issued by the DES (DES, 1999b; DES, 1999). The rationale underpinning SDP offered in these framework documents makes reference to the domestic and international research on the topic.

Particularly influential has been research in Ireland by Hannan et al. (1996), Devine and Swan (1997) and more recently by Smyth (1999), highlighting the importance of school climate in determining pupil outcomes including both academic and personal development. Variables identified in this regard include:

- The creation of an orderly learning environment for pupils along with the clear and consistent application and enforcement of school rules
- The quality of teacher-pupil relationships
- High expectations of pupils and staff
- A positive, caring culture which values, challenges and supports pupils, teachers and the school community
- A commitment to developing pupils’ personal and social development (in addition to their academic development) and providing the necessary supports for pupils with special learning need
- A shared collaborative approach to school development.

Devine and Swan (1997) in their research, as part of a larger international school effectiveness research project, suggest that the care exhibited in the formulation of the school plan was a characteristic of effectiveness in the case-study schools.

Equally the international literature on the subject suggests that a school climate which encourages discussion, review and revision is less likely to suffer the ravages of group think (Fullan, 1993) or what MacBeath (1999) calls the ostrich mentality, seeing problems as out there and hiding in the hope that they go away! A positive climate is often cited as a major feature of effective schools (Mortimore et al., 1988; Teddie and Springfield, 1993).

In line with this research the framework documents stress that collaboration is the key to effective SDP and WSE and emphasise that the planning and evaluation process is of more importance than the product. The view of Hargreaves and Hopkins (1993: 57) that 'internal conditions' are paramount in enabling effective change management in schools is fully endorsed.

The research on 'effective schools', both in the UK (Mortimore et al, 1988) and in the USA (Purkey and Smith, 1983), has found that certain internal conditions are typical in schools that achieve higher levels of outcomes for their students.

The 'internal conditions' referred to revolve around the capacity of each school to harness its own resources in the effective management of change. This in turn requires the 'empowerment' of the staff through shared 'ownership' of change and innovation in a framework enabling each staff member to take a much fuller role in self-evaluation, strategic planning and professional decision-making. The goal is to improve schools from within by employing teachers as active agents of change within their own organisations.

The emphasis on SDP as an entirely internal process centring on the school community and its stakeholders is fully followed through in defining the nature of the plan which it is hoped will emerge. The SDP framework envisages that the school plan, as a written document (the 'product which emanates from a shared collaborative process' (DES, 1999b: 6)), will primarily aim to facilitate coordinated development within the entire

school community. The school plan, it is suggested, should not be unwieldy tome of rules and procedures but,

rather, it should be flexible, responsive framework for collaborative activity and a powerful tool for the management of change. Such a document can only be arrived at by collaboration and dialogue within the school community.

(DES 1999b: 16).

So far so good, in the sense that SDP is clearly seen as an internal school process, which although a requirement does not demand particular goals, targets or outcomes and recognises that schools 'know their own strengths and the aspects of school life which require further development' (DES, 1999a: 13).

However, at the same time, the DES introduced the WSE pilot project and proposed like SDP to extend it to all schools eventually. Despite the conciliatory language of consultative evaluation referred to previously, evaluation by any reasonable definition suggests some form of measurement against objectives, aims, goals and targets and a concern with quality assurance and organisational and individual performance. It is clear immediately that there is a possibility for tensions between these two processes. Therefore an important question arises as to whether the relationship between collaborative planning in schools and evaluation designed to provide some degree of fuller accountability can be as uncomplicated and unproblematic as the DES suggest.

Whole-School Evaluation Irish Style

The potentially difficult relationship between planning and evaluation has been the subject of some comment in other countries. Hopkins and Lagerweij (1996: 83) summarise the emerging concept of school development planning and its relationship to evaluation as follows:

It (planning) provides a generic and paradigmatic process, combining as it does selected curriculum change with modifications to the school's management arrangements or organisation. As compared with school review, where evaluation is the initial step in the cycle, development planning emphasises evaluation occurring, often in different forms throughout the process.

As these approaches to change management have become more dominant, certain tensions have emerged. For example, there are contradictory pressures for centralised government control over policy and curricula on the one hand and decentralised

responsibility for implementation, resource management and evaluation at local level on the other. According to Hopkins et al. (1994: 68),

the key challenge, as a recent OECD report makes clear, is to find a balance between the increasing demands for centrally determined policy initiatives and quality control and the encouragement of locally developed school improvement efforts.

However, the rhetoric-reality gap between policy and practice is particularly hard to break down in relation to school planning when accompanied by evaluation. Teachers in Ireland, particularly second level teachers, have little or no experience of being evaluated or inspected. In fact, since the teacher unions effectively prohibited members from teaching in front of an inspector, most second level teachers proceeded through their careers without ever having experienced an externally controlled evaluation of their teaching. Moreover teachers continue to be suspicious of imposed or 'contrived' collegiality, particularly when accompanied by targets, performance criteria and appraisal systems. For example, research by Sugrue (1997), which sought the opinions of primary school principals and teachers on inspection and planning, found that most perceive it as a process over which teachers have little control, despite the rhetoric of collaboration. In this climate of suspicion the WSE project was designed with enormous care and the language used was designed to allay any suspicions that judgements were to be made or the work of individual teachers criticised.

WSE was developed by the DES as 'a developmental model to serve the Trinitarian purposes of school improvement, school development and school effectiveness' (DES, 1999a: 17). The model stressed that schools were at various stages on a continuum of effectiveness and that schools are 'more' or 'less' effective on the continuum, as opposed to being 'effective' or 'ineffective' in absolute terms. Considerable attention was given to developing an acceptable cultural and contextual language in which the model and its outcomes would be couched. Original documentation referred to the model as a 'whole school inspection (WSI)' using 'performance indicators (PIs)' with a specific focus on evaluating 'the quality of teaching and learning'. Subsequent wide-ranging consultation with the various 'education partners' (e.g. teacher unions, school governing body authorities and national parents' associations) yielded 'valuable insights' which contributed to 'useful amendments' to the original model. As implemented, WSI became known as whole-school evaluation (WSE), using evaluation

criteria (as opposed to performance indicators) to evaluate aspects of school life, including the quality of learning and teaching (as opposed to teaching and learning) (ibid. p17-18).

The WSE Pilot project reported on three features of life in the 35 schools:

- The quality of school planning
- The quality of learning and teaching
- The quality of school management.

At post-primary level, the pilot project examined the quality of learning and teaching in a selected number of subjects in each school while at primary level all teachers in the school were evaluated. The final phase of the planning work involved an exhaustive series of meetings between the 'education partners', beginning with a consultative conference attended by delegates from 19 organisations representing teachers, parents, management and trustees and the DES. Subsequent to the conference, which agreed in principle that a professional evaluation of schools was necessary (O'Dalaigh, 2000), long and tedious negotiations took place over the detail of implementation, and particularly the language of the evaluation criteria.

Eventually the general framework agreed stressed that the emphasis of the evaluation would be on the work of the school as a whole and that individual teachers would not be identified in the WSE reports. It was agreed that the data obtained during the WSE project (or elsewhere) would not be used to compare schools locally or nationally or to construct league tables of schools. As indicated above, great care was taken to develop non-threatening language in the design of the criteria to be used in evaluating each of the areas chosen. Finally it was agreed that the process would take into account the unique contextual factors of each school, specifically those factors relating to the socio-economic background of pupils, range of pupil ability and level of resources.

However, despite these concessions, WSE did maintain many of the key elements of the original proposal and resisted attempts to make the process one of entirely internal self-review or self-evaluation. The original concept had been that the evaluation process would be an, external validation of internal evaluation and was likened to holding up a

mirror to the life of a school (O'Dalaigh, 2000). It was envisaged that this would involve external evaluation conducted by the inspectorate. Surprisingly this version of WSE was largely agreed, as was, to the amazement of many observers, the proposal that the visiting inspectors could observe post primary teachers teaching and examine their students on their work. In the context of the Irish post-primary sector this represented a very major development (McNamara and O'Hara, 2001).

The bulk of the evaluation work took place in 1999 and the process used was as follows (DES, 2000a).

1. An initial meeting took place between the school principal and the relevant inspector. A second meeting was held with all staff members, followed by meetings with the teachers in the areas of the curriculum to be evaluated. A separate meeting was held with representatives of the board of management.
2. Following these meetings the WSE team of inspectors visited the school. The evaluation first focused on planning and management and these areas were discussed with relevant personnel and related documentation (such as the School Plan) was examined. Classroom visits by inspectors dealing with a particular subject area focused on evaluating the quality of learning and teaching in the context of the relevant curriculum. The inspectors observed the nature of teacher-pupil interactions and engaged with the class in a variety of ways, such as asking questions, giving a short written assignment, listening to oral reports of work completed or reviewing a sample of copybooks. When the inspector visit was completed, oral feedback and advice were given privately to each teacher concerned.
3. Shortly after the evaluation visits had been completed, post-evaluation meetings were arranged between the designated reporting inspector and the principal, the whole school staff and the staff members directly involved in the evaluation. The work of the school was discussed and the findings of the evaluation outlined. Strengths and areas for further development were also discussed. In most schools, a separate meeting was also held with representatives of the board of management at which findings of the evaluation were outlined.

4. Finally a whole-school evaluation report was given to each school. The reports completed by the inspectors discussed the operation of management and planning and the learning and teaching that was seen to take place. They focused on the work of the whole school and not on the work of individuals. There was particular emphasis on affirming positive elements of the school's work and suggesting lines for further curricular, managerial and organisational development. Since all aspects of the reports had been discussed previously at the post-evaluation meeting, the reports themselves were intended to act as a summary of findings of the evaluation in the school and as a basis for further in-school development planning.

Evaluating WSE

Information on how the WSE pilot project developed in practice was obtained from a series of questionnaires sent to all participating schools (principals and teachers) and to inspectors who conducted the evaluation in those schools. In addition, approximately one-third of the schools involved were chosen at random for a follow-up contact, during which principals were asked about their views on the process and its outcomes in their school.

In general the data indicate that WSE as a process in its own right and in tandem with SDP was seen in a largely positive light by principals, teachers, inspectors (although significantly more so by principals than teachers). Negative outcomes and possible seeds for future problems were also identified, but first the positive findings will be mentioned.

The evaluation report (DES, 1999a: 47) on the WSE pilot project concludes that WSE is a 'viable and effective approach to evaluating the functioning of schools' and was perceived positively by the schools and other parties involved. Unquestionably, the 'consultative evolutionary development of the model' paid valuable dividends (McNamara and O'Hara, 2001:104). A partnership approach, transparent and negotiable, was adopted by the DES at the very outset of the project. More importantly, consultation and discussion with the stakeholders (schools, managerial/governing authorities, religious denominational and other interest groups, parents and teacher

unions) were maintained throughout the various stages of the process (and indeed since the end of the pilot project).

The data also suggest that the WSE project succeeded to a considerable extent in generating a whole-school/wider community culture of quality assurance, shared by the key stakeholders (McNamara and O'Hara, 2001). This took much time, resources and an enormous investment of human commitment and goodwill. The buoyant economic climate has enabled a more substantial capital flow into education. In this context, the WSE pilot project was timely. Resources, both human and financial, necessary for its implementation and subsequent development, were not spared. This understandably served to bolster goodwill among members of the inspectorate, teacher unions and teachers but also raised major questions as to whether such an intensive and time-consuming initiative could in reality be spread across the entire school system.

Another positive outcome was the sense in which an interlinked process of planning and evaluation gained a foothold in the education system. It would seem that a more strategic, enlightened eye (Eisner, 1999) view of external school evaluation was potentially now in place in Ireland and that in tandem schools would at last be supported and 'scaffolded' following inspection in order to ensure improvement and development (Sugrue, 1997). School inspection was now clearly linked to capacity-building, enabling schools to identify their own needs, draft their own development/action plan, target their resources, and ultimately build a positive, reflective and collaborative culture of school self-review and consensus. The building of high consensus (Rosenholtz, 1989) schools in which there is an educative climate and agreement on institutional goals and strategies to realise these goals is the core to school improvement and development. Taken together these positive outcomes represent a considerable success. However, less encouraging outcomes can also be identified.

On the negative side it can be argued (as in a very critical *Irish Times* piece by columnist Fintan O'Toole) that the WSE project by the very nature of its collaborative and non-threatening posture lacked much credibility as an evaluation (as the term is widely understood). As such, O'Toole (2000) suggested, it did little service to any of the stakeholders and indicated a closed and defensive mentality among teachers. There is no doubt that, in making the process acceptable to teachers, the concerns of other

stakeholders were downplayed. For example, the concentration on whole school rather than individual teacher performance placed question marks over the future direction and credibility of WSE.

As a result one of the greatest challenges facing the adoption of WSE as a national model was the manner in which the evaluation criteria employed might be used in schools as a self-evaluation tool, tailored to meet the individual school's needs while at the same time meeting external expectations concerning accountability.

In addition, the absence of evaluation criteria for each specific curricular subject in the original WSE model needed to be addressed, if change was to be effective at classroom level. An increasing body of evidence (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997; Taylor Fitz-Gibbon, 1996) suggests that differential effectiveness exists in schools and that significant variance among pupils' achievements can be attributed more to differences at classroom rather than whole-school level. Furthermore there is a body of evidence from the school effectiveness research which suggests that students' performance may be high in one subject and low in another (Smyth 1999). How might a model such as WSE, dedicated to improving learning processes and outcomes at school level, accommodate the inherent challenge posed by such research? With its overriding emphasis on overall school performance, could WSE develop strategies to deal with ineffective subject departments and ineffective classroom teaching, particularly at second level?

A further issue arising from the WSE pilot project (which also relates to teacher sensitivities) concerned the commitment to the promotion of a democratic, inclusive approach to evaluation at school level. The views of pupils, as primary consumers of the teaching-learning process, were not sought during the pilot project. A token gesture of involvement was offered to the parent body (parent representatives on the school's governing body met with the inspectors) during the pilot project. What is worth fighting for in quality assurance? In a democratic, socially inclusive society as Ireland would purport to be, a widely held view is that schools must be enabled to speak for themselves (MacBeath: 1996, 1999). Accordingly, negotiating an appropriate role for the various stakeholders in WSE emerged as a thorny issue in the side of policy-makers, bearing in mind the volatile teacher union context. At the conclusion of the WSE project

it appeared certain, however, that national parent organisations, who have gained increased power in recent years, would demand that parents must play a more proactive role in national evaluation matters, including WSE. Equally, it seemed likely that increasing consciousness of their potential role would encourage students to seek a much greater voice in issues concerning their own education.

Another issue which emerged was unhappiness with the allegedly ‘softly softly’ approach. This is very clear from the research with principals and inspectors. Many principals pointedly noted that the WSE framework as tested in the pilot allowed for a detailed evaluation of school management planning, etc., but not for the evaluation of individual teachers. For this reason it is felt that the process was ‘largely an evaluation of management’ and that most critically, even where teacher weaknesses were identified, the existing situation where it is possible to do next to nothing about them remained unchallenged. In the words of one principal speaking for many, ‘WSE can make recommendations but in itself won’t cure weaknesses in any school’ (DES 1999a: 27).

Similar frustrations were echoed by many of the inspectors involved. Several remarked that, due to lack of regular testing in both primary and post primary education in Ireland, the ‘hard data’ on which to base ‘real’ judgements are not available – ‘access is required to better organised in-school data on pupil performance’ and the WSE process ‘should involve the collection of hard data’ (ibid. p 20). It became clear that key data which schools in theory possess such as drop-out rates, absenteeism and so on was not available in a usable accessible format. Likewise individual teachers or subject departments had little in the way of collected or collated information on pupil results, aptitudes or attitudes. In short no process that could be remotely be regarded as systematic evidence-based self-evaluation was occurring in schools. Since self-evaluation and the presentation of evidence to support judgements was in theory a foundation stone of WSE this outcome represented a major problem with the proposed system. The lack of usable data whether provided by the schools and teachers or by some other mechanism emerged clearly as a key weakness of WSE which would have to be addressed before the process was mainstream.

'Political sensitivities' to be respected in writing the final reports also irritated the inspectors and involved them in a workload which would be 'untenable if the project was mainstreamed' and resulted in reports which, in the caustic works of one inspector, 'invariably tended towards superficiality' (ibid. p 21).

Despite these reservations it must be noted that the data indicate an overwhelmingly positive response to WSE from both principals and inspectors. Moreover it also emerged that the care taken to allay fears paid dividends in that teachers ranked the improvement of the quality of their relationship with the inspectorate as the most positive outcome of the project. This is in stark contrast to the hostility to inspection that has characterised previous debate around the issue of evaluation.

Principals and inspectors were particularly positive about the relationship between SDP and WSE, suggesting in the words of one principal that both procedures combined 'served as a focal point through which we re-structured all our professional efforts in the school' (ibid. p 6). Moreover all categories of respondents tended to see SDP as a natural corollary of WSE in the sense of providing a vehicle through which change and improvement could be implemented when the 'snapshot' of WSE was completed.

A final positive and indeed remarkable outcome was that teachers agreed to be evaluated at all and moreover were then positive (if not as positive as other respondents) in their evaluations of the process. Here again there appears to be a clear link between SDP and WSE in the sense that the data suggest the experience of the former made teachers rather more confident and less defensive about the latter (McNamara and O'Hara, 2001).

After WSE - The Way Forward

Despite the reservations noted, the first efforts at both SDP and WSE must be regarded as a success, even if a somewhat surprising and unexpected success. The DES (2000b: 3) itself saw the WSE process being mainstreamed with the following improvements.

Feedback from participating stakeholders highlighted a number of lacunae in the pilot project model and illuminated a more inclusive, contextually sensitive model. Building on this feedback, the proposed WSE model for mainstreaming shortly will incorporate an evaluation of additional areas of school like, i.e. curriculum provision, school ethos and support for students. Upholding the principle of

transparency, evaluation criteria will be available to schools and all interested parties. School context variables which impact on learning will be taken into account during WSE e.g. pupil background factors, pupil ability levels and existing resources. Reporting on evaluation in schools will be based on fair, reliable evidence as opposed to impressionistic reportage. The primary focus of WSE will be on the functioning of the school as a whole. In accordance with national legislation the comparative performance of schools in the form of league tables will not be compiled.

The DES (2000b: 3) defined the future relationship between WSE and SDP as a 'twin track developmental approach which will be central to educational policy'. Alongside the conduct of external review by the inspectorate, schools it was envisaged would be increasingly encouraged to use the evaluation criteria as a tool for school self-evaluation. School improvement and quality assurance policy in Ireland was henceforth to be founded on a 'twin-track' approach with school self-evaluation running parallel to whole-school evaluation conducted by the inspectorate. This represented a degree of clarity about future directions which was certainly a new departure.

In addition, the DES suggested WSE would provide a 'stream of high quality data' for making policy decisions, and offer a 'feedback loop at system level on the overall quality of school provision in the country' (1999b: 12). These data would enable 'like to be compared with like allowing valid, full and reliable judgements in relation to quality assurance'.

At its completion in 1999 the WSE project had achieved a significant breakthrough. It had tested a functioning system of school and teacher evaluation which had by and large been positively received in the pilot schools and had aroused no serious opposition among the key stakeholders. On the other hand, fundamental problems with the proposed system had also emerged. Chief among these were a lack of data and evidence on which to base judgements and a very limited role for key stakeholders, particularly parents and pupils. However, these shortcomings were acknowledged in the WSE final project evaluation report and it was therefore reasonable to expect that they would be addressed in the context of the wider expansion of WSE to all schools. In the next chapter, we will examine the model of school evaluation that followed the pilot with a view not only to examining the impact of the WSE model on the final

framework but also to see in particular how the critical issues raised by stakeholders were addressed by the designers.

Chapter Six: Looking at Our Schools – an emerging evaluation framework**Policy Context**

In common with most European countries, Ireland has been attempting for some years to develop a system of school evaluation which balances external monitoring and inspection with internal autonomy and accountability (CERI, 1995; Nevo, 2002). The first iteration of this process was described in chapter five. It was a pilot project in thirty-five schools entitled Whole School Evaluation (WSE) was undertaken in the late 1990s and completed in 1999 (DES, 1999a; McNamara, O'Hara and Ní Aingléis, 2002). However, a series of rancorous industrial disputes rendered impossible any further mention of evaluation and inspection until 2003. In that year, a new framework for school evaluation building upon WSE entitled, *Looking at Our School (LAOS)*, was published by the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2003). The first evaluations of schools under this framework took place in 2004. The *LAOS* framework documents, which set out the new national process of school and teacher evaluation are analysed in this chapter. The implementation of the new evaluation scheme will be considered in the next chapter.

This chapter analyses the context of the evaluation framework which emerged into a difficult educational environment. Key interests, particularly teachers, are strongly resistant to what they perceive to be reductionist managerialist interference in their professional autonomy. Additionally, the current economic success of the country has been based on cooperation and negotiation between the social partners, a model which is perceived to preclude invasive inspection or appraisal of professionals in their workplace, and requires all change to proceed only after the achievement of consensus. However, other stakeholders, the EU, OECD, and, nearer home, parents, business interests and elements in the media are increasingly vocal in demanding that hard data about the performance of teachers and schools be made available in a transparent fashion. Likewise it is perceived that maintaining international competitiveness and attracting overseas investment requires evidence that the schools are as effective or more so than in competing countries (Sugrue, 2004). Moreover, it is clear that in one form or another, and whether for bureaucratic and managerialist reasons, or to enhance autonomy and decentralisation, most EU countries are seeking to implement a school evaluation system (Haug and Schwandt, 2003; Nevo, 2002; Scheerens et al, 1999;

Schollaert, 2000). Into this fraught scenario, a model of school evaluation (LAOS), based on the pilot project described in the last chapter, was introduced reluctantly and with great caution by the DES.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the educational policy context designed to make clear the sensitivities around introducing new approaches to evaluation. It continues with an analysis of the LAOS documentation which identifies the key elements of the framework and analyses some of its strengths and weaknesses. This analysis is conducted with particular regard to the extent to which the problems identified in the evaluation of the WSE pilot project are addressed in *LAOS*.

In May 2003, the DES in Ireland published twin documents entitled *Looking At Our School, an aid to self evaluation in primary schools* and *Looking At Our School, an aid to self evaluation in post primary schools* (DES, 2003) (these documents, although designed for different levels of the education system, are so similar in content that they can be treated as one in this paper and are referred to hereafter as *LAOS*). The publications contain a very detailed framework for the inspection and evaluation of schools and teachers, including one hundred and forty three 'themes for self-evaluation' which schools and teachers are invited to consider in preparation for an external evaluation by the inspectorate. The *LAOS* framework is built upon the outcomes the WSE pilot project which, as was discussed in the previous chapter, had concluded some three years earlier (DES, 1999a). WSE represented a first experiment, a toe in the water of school evaluation, in a system in which evaluation, inspection and appraisal are regarded as deeply controversial, especially by the powerful teacher unions.

The WSE project is described in chapter five, but in short it was designed with an emphasis on cooperation and partnership rather than monitoring and accountability. As we have seen this softly, softly approach was probably necessary in the context of a system in which the experience of external inspection had been very limited in the previous three decades. In the case of post primary schools, inspection had been virtually non-existent; while in primary schools, though inspection was more widespread, it was conducted in a very benign, irregular and idiosyncratic manner (Sanders and Greaney, 1986; Sugrue, 1999). This tradition of inspection, such as it was, left a legacy whereby most principals and teachers either had no experience at all of

evaluation or perceived it to be something external, done to them, rather than something which is part of their professional responsibility. Moreover this lack of experience of inspection and evaluation had been compounded by other factors tending to increase unease and resistance. These included the substantial power exercised by teacher unions, negative reports of school evaluation in other systems, particularly OFSTED in England, and the partnership framework through which public sector change must be negotiated and paid for (Boyle, 1993; Cullingford, 1999; Earley, 1998; Norton Grubb, 1999; OFSTED, 1998; Stoll and Fink, 1996). For all these reasons, despite promises to the contrary, there was little evident appetite to 'mainstream' the WSE pilot project which ended in 1999.

Despite a commitment in 2002 at the end of the pilot project to mainstream WSE, no further mention of inspection or evaluation took place until mid-2003. During this time, a rancorous and lengthy series of industrial disputes was perceived to have soured the climate in schools, particularly post primary schools. Such was the depth of animosity engendered by these disputes that it was widely felt that whole-school evaluation, or indeed any form of school evaluation or inspection, was a dead letter. Thus, an announcement rather out of the blue in late 2002 by the then Minister for Education and Science, to the effect that work on school evaluation was proceeding, and that he expected to see it operational in all schools in the near future, caused considerable surprise. Nonetheless the framework was published in 2003 (DES, 2003) and the first round of school evaluations began in late 2004.

Looking at Our Schools (LAOS)

In the *LAOS* documents an elaborate system of evaluation themes is outlined as the basis on which school management and staff can make 'professional judgements regarding the operation of the school' (DES, 2003, ix). The evaluation themes in *LAOS* are structured into 'areas' which are in turn made up of a number of 'aspects' each of which have a series of 'components' which in their turn have a series of 'themes for self-evaluation' attached to them (DES, 2003). It may be noteworthy that these terms, area, aspect and component, replace terms such as 'evaluation criteria' used in the WSE project - an indication perhaps of the immense sensitivity to anything smacking of evaluation in any form in the Irish education system. There are five 'areas' in total:

- Quality of learning and teaching in subjects

- Quality of support for students
- Quality of school management
- Quality of school planning
- Quality of curriculum provision

Each area has a number of aspects attached, each of which in turn has a number of components, for example:

Area: Quality of learning and teaching in subjects

Aspects: Planning and Preparation, Teaching and Learning and Assessment and Achievement

Components (of, for example, Planning and Preparation): Planning of Work and Planning of Resources.

Each of the 'components' has in turn attached to it a set of 'themes for self-evaluation' which the document suggests 'can be used by the school as a guide in judging or measuring its own performance'. For example the 'themes for self-evaluation' for the component 'planning of work' are as follows:

Component: Planning of Work

Themes for self-evaluation:

1. Long term planning for the teaching of the subject and its consistency with the school plan
2. The extent to which planning documents describe the work to be completed within the subject
3. The degree to which planning is in line with syllabus requirements and guidelines
4. The degree which planning provides for differential approaches to curriculum coverage in accordance with the spectrum of student ability, needs and interests
5. The extent to which provision for corrective action for learning problems or difficulties is an integral part of the planning of work in the subject.
6. Evidence of cross-curriculum planning and integration.
7. The provision for monitoring, review and evaluation of the planning of work in the subject.

The methodology suggested for using these themes 'while engaging in a self-evaluation exercise' is described as follows:

A school may decide to focus on an area, an aspect or a component. The school will gather information in relation to the theme or themes under evaluation. Having engaged in a process of collecting and analysing this information and evidence, the school will be in a position to make a statement or statements indicating its own performance in the relevant component, aspect or area (ibid. p x).

The type of statement regarding each area, aspect or component evaluated which schools are invited to make is described as 'a continuum consisting of a number of reference points representing stages of development in the improvement process' (ibid p x).

This continuum is to be represented for each item by describing the situation discovered by the self-evaluation as one of the following:

- Significant strengths (uniformly strong)
- Strengths outweigh weaknesses (more strengths than weaknesses)
- Weaknesses outweigh strengths (more weaknesses than strengths)
- Significant major weaknesses (uniformly weak)

This four level scale it is suggested will identify strengths but also the areas in which improvement is necessary.

In essence, four of the five 'areas' above are, as it were, concerned with whole school evaluation, while the fifth, 'quality of learning and teaching in subjects' represents the structure under which individual teachers and subject departments are to self evaluate and be inspected. The process of inspection of teachers and subjects as outlined in *LAOS* was further developed in a subsequent publication, *A Guide to Subject Inspection at Second Level*, (DES, 2004), supplemented by a series of leaflets on each individual subject area which are gradually appearing. However, as we shall see in chapter seven, lack of clarity regarding expectations of teachers and subject departments, and the process of providing feedback to them on their performance as perceived by the inspectors, represents a significant weakness in the system.

LAOS: A Documentary Analysis

At first glance the two *LAOS* documents maintain that rather uneasy co-existence of external evaluation by the Inspectorate and internal school self-evaluation which characterised the original WSE pilot project. For example in the joint foreword to the two documents, the Chief Inspector sets out the relationship as perceived by the DES between school development planning, school self-evaluation and external inspection (DES, 2003: v),

The School Development Planning Initiative provides support to schools in the process of internal review and in formulating their school plans. This set of themes for self-evaluation has been prepared by the Inspectorate to further assist school communities in fulfilling their quality assurance obligations. It will also provide a clear framework within which external evaluation of schools and centres of education by the Inspectorate will be carried out.

However as the two documents progress it is noticeable how the emphasis on internal self-evaluation looms increasingly larger and the role of the Inspectorate and external evaluation diminishes. In fact the documents only refer on one further occasion to external inspection (*ibid.* p viii),

Ireland is adopting a model of quality assurance that emphasises school development planning through internal school-review and self-evaluation, with the support of external evaluation carried out by the Inspectorate.

In contrast the emphasis on school development planning through internal school review and self-evaluation grows stronger throughout the documents - for example:

The centrality of the school's role with regard to evaluation and development is clear.

Schools themselves have the key role in the task of identifying existing good practice as well as areas for further development.

This document presents a set of themes through which a school may undertake a review and self-evaluation of its own performance.

These evaluation themes will be continually updated so as to be of assistance and relevance to schools in their review and self-evaluation activities as part of the school development and school improvement process.
(*ibid.* iii-x).

Analysing these documents, it seems reasonable to argue that the evolution of school evaluation in Ireland from WSE to *LAOS* features a degree of movement along the evaluation spectrum described in chapter four from external monitoring to internal review and self-evaluation. *LAOS* produces a template for schools undertaking self-evaluation and the role of external inspection in this process is significantly down played. The model which emerges is remarkably similar to the idea of MacBeath that the role of external evaluation and inspection is merely to ensure that internal systems of evaluation and self review are implemented effectively, 'a model in which external evaluation focuses primarily on the school's own approach to self-evaluation' (MacBeath, 1999: 152).

Insofar as evidence exists, it can be argued that the emerging approach is close to that favoured by Irish school principals. Five Irish second level schools took part in a European Union Pilot Project entitled Evaluating Quality in School Education at Second Level (1998-2000) (DES, 2000a). This project ran contemporaneously with the official Department of Education and Science pilot project, Whole-School Evaluation. The European project was very influenced by the work of John MacBeath and Michael Schratz and was strongly committed to internal self-evaluation (European Commission, 1997; MacBeath et al, 1999). The WSE project, while extremely cautious and non-confrontational, was nonetheless concerned to a greater extent with outside involvement, specifically the evaluation role of the Inspectorate. Two schools took part in both projects and in subsequent interviews with the present author the principals of both were significantly more supportive of the EU project than of WSE.

In both cases the principals expressed the view that any form of external evaluation was by its nature superficial, a snapshot, underestimated the achievements of schools other than academic success and tended to raise deep concerns among teachers. In contrast, self-evaluation with no external mandate or monitoring (as in the form of the EU project) was perceived as a major success. One principal stated that 'unlike evaluation by outside individuals, including Department of Education Inspectors, teachers were comfortable with the format and used it constructively'. The other principal expressed a very similar view, 'teachers are prepared to be self-critical and to ask themselves questions they might resent from others' (2000a: 5). In general therefore in the climate

prevailing in Ireland it may well be that the strong emphasis on self-evaluation in the emerging policy is perhaps the only realistic and achievable approach.

In most other aspects *LAOS* follows the pattern of the WSE pilot. This may be understandable since WSE was, to an extent, perceived to have been a success primarily because it raised no outright opposition from powerful vested interests. However as we have seen, major weaknesses in the WSE pilot were pinpointed in the final evaluation report of that project. Very significantly, *LAOS* does not refer to any of these issues. As a result a comparison of *LAOS* to the evaluation report of WSE shows continuity in the aspects that were successful but also no discernible attempt to address the significant reservations raised in the WSE evaluation.

In analysing *LAOS*, we will begin with the ways it builds on the successes of WSE. In many ways the evaluation of WSE was, as we have seen, very positive. The project was endorsed by principals, teachers and inspectors and there was a general perception that the process was workable for the future. Inspectors reported a high level of co-operation from the schools involved, principals saw WSE 'making a significant contribution to the planning processes in their schools' and teachers while significantly less enthusiastic than the other respondents found the process 'supportive and affirming'. Moreover potentially difficult developments such as inspector observation of post-primary teachers teaching and subsequent interaction with the pupils were successfully implemented. Final reports were well received with principals by and large of the view that they were 'a fair and objective picture of their school's key strengths and the aspects of its work requiring further development'. Finally each category of respondent felt that WSE had increased the feeling of 'ownership by the staff of the school of its provision and of responsibility for improving on that provision' (DES, 1999a: 25–30). In the light of these positives, the evaluation philosophy and framework outlined in *LAOS* is very much a continuation of that tested in the WSE pilot project.

Despite the positive evaluation findings outlined above serious flaws were also identified. The inspectors involved pointed out that the quality of data available in schools was very poor and that for 'political' reasons the reports they had ended up writing had been very general, 'tending towards superficiality'. Many principals involved felt that the emphasis on 'whole school' meant 'that it was the management

that was evaluated and that while the process might uncover certain issues and problems it did nothing to help schools deal with those problems'. It was also felt that the framework developed was too extensive and detailed to be easily used by schools, the workload imposed on schools and particularly on the inspectors was unrealistic and unsustainable and that key stakeholders particularly students and parents had largely been excluded. Finally the status and ownership of the inspectors' reports was unclear - it was left entirely to the schools to decide whether or not to make them available to parents and the public at large (ibid. pp 40–48). An analysis of the *LAOS* documents, it is argued, indicates very little attempt to remedy these deficiencies. The following sections illustrate this point.

What Data?

We have already quoted extensively from the *LAOS* framework documents describing how the process of self-evaluation is to work. Schools will 'engage in a process of collecting and analysing information' and on this evidence 'statements' will be made (DES, 2003: x). This sounds impressive until one realises firstly that these bland assertions ignore the fact that very little data is available about any facet of the operation of schools in Ireland, and secondly, no attempt is made to suggest who should 'collect and analyse' this information or how they should go about it.

This criticism of the original WSE project was flagged clearly in the evaluation report of that project (DES, 1999a). Inspectors involved noted the lack of 'hard data' on which to base reasonable judgements, 'schools need to present us with evidence oral and written in respect of their operations' and again 'access is needed to better organised in-school data on pupil performance' (ibid. p 28). The final section of this report suggested that these points had been taken seriously by the Department. Under the heading 'moving forward' (ibid. pp 47-48) we read about the need for better quantitative information:

both individual schools and the inspectors carrying out whole-school evaluation would derive considerable benefit from having access to a range of quantitative information, including statistical and other information, on patterns of early school leaving and pupil participation and on the catchment area from which the school draws its pupils. Information of this kind would greatly enrich the WSE process for the school and should form part of the preparation for the future whole school evaluation.

This section goes on to promise that WSE when fully implemented would yield ‘a stream of high quality data which will allow valid, full and reflective judgements in relation to quality assurance’ (ibid. p 45).

Interestingly, in the strict context of self-evaluation and for internal use only the gathering of potentially contentious data proved acceptable in the EU project, *Evaluating Quality in School Education at Second Level*, mentioned previously (DES, 2000). One of the self-evaluation instruments developed by schools in the project included a teacher self-evaluation toolbox including self-administered questionnaires. In this the teacher graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory his or her performance in areas such as ‘lesson preparation, delivery, class control and responding to pupil difficulties’ on a purely self-evaluation basis. This and similar approaches were widely used and it seems beneficially used in the work of the project.

Nonetheless despite the clear recommendations in the WSE project and again in the EU quality project, and despite what seems to be a clear commitment in the final sections of the WSE evaluation report, the *LAOS* documents are notable for the lack of any suggestions as to how schools should collect the data on which the effectiveness and credibility of the whole system must rest. Why is this? It certainly cannot be that the DES is ignorant of the fact that the education system as a whole, and individual schools in particular, produce extraordinarily little data. This is acknowledged in the quotation from the WSE project report given above in which the necessity for such data is emphasised.

Equally it cannot be that the ‘areas’, ‘aspects’ and ‘components’ in the new evaluation documents do not require significant data to enable sensible judgements to be made in relation to them. For example, component four, ‘overall student achievement in subject’, in aspect C ‘assessment and achievement’ has the following ‘themes for self-evaluation’.

Component: Overall student achievement in subject

Themes for Self-Evaluation:

1. The extent to which students’ results in regular assessments and/or examinations in the subject reflect levels of achievement commensurate with ability and general expectation
2. The extent to which student achievement in the subject is regularly evaluated in comparison with National norms (DES, 2003: 28)

Clearly any kind of sensible and useful judgements in these areas require data that in the present system simply does not exist. There is no data regarding the 'ability and general expectations of pupils', still less any 'national norms' of achievement with which comparisons can be made. In the latter case it might be argued that results of state examinations provide 'national norms'. However, a comparison with these results is useless to individual schools since it provides no evidence of the particular performance of a school in 'adding value' to pupil achievement. This is because there is no baseline data and the intake of schools differs enormously. This point is made by Smyth (1999: 208),

a particular school's average performance in "raw" data terms tells us little about the difference the school actually makes to its pupils. An above average ranking in these terms may merely reflect a selective pupil intake. In contrast another school may have lower exam results but its pupils may have made considerable academic progress relative to their initial ability levels.

Research instruments and tools which would allow schools to gather and analyse the required data exist. Smyth, mentioned above, used a variety of instruments to gather data for her influential work *Do schools differ?* and the EU project, *Evaluating Quality in School Education at Second Level*, already referred to, also developed a series of research instruments which schools could use in the process of self-evaluation. However none of this work is referred to in the bland statements in *LAOS* nor is it suggested how 'gathering and analysing information' across the very wide range of aspects, areas and components is to be done in practice.

An alternative strategy, still centred on school self-evaluation but yet enabling schools to generate the data necessary to make such evaluations more than merely impressionistic and unreliable guesswork, certainly exists. For example Smyth (1999: 226) concludes that 'schools could monitor their own attendance and dropout rates etc' but 'information collected at the school level is likely to be of limited utility without comparable information on the National context...providing value added analysis to schools would be worthwhile'. Such an approach would require information on pupil ability at the point of entry and additional information (through surveys for example) on pupil background. This information could be used by the school itself in setting targets for improvement and in monitoring the introduction of new programmes or teaching

methods.

Clearly without something along the lines suggested by Smyth there is no way in which schools can hope to obtain any significant data on current performance and therefore ways of improving. Equally nothing short of this can really be considered to be evaluation by any reasonable definition of the term. Evaluation whether external or internal, mandated or self-driven requires at a minimum the collection and analysis of real data on which firm conclusions can be based. There is no danger in this for schools and teachers, so long as the data is confidential to the schools, not permitted to be used for advertising and is concerned with school and teacher self-improvement and professional development.

Several schemes for school self-evaluation using teams of trained teachers to develop research instruments and collect and analyse data are reported in the literature (Nevo, 1999; Scheerens et al 1999; Simons, 2002). A somewhat different approach involving self-evaluation but with external collection and analysis of data is administered by the CEM centre at the University of Durham and attracts large numbers of schools in the UK on a volunteer basis (Tymms and Coe, 2003). Similar initiatives are underway in New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong and Estonia. In Estonia, it is the national Ministry of Education itself rather than a private agency which gathers data and feeds it to schools in a usable format for self-evaluation (Anton, 2005). In describing this system, Anton (a senior official of the Estonian education ministry) acknowledges a point that is often avoided, namely that in-depth external evaluation across an entire education system is logistically and in terms of resources likely to be impractical. Therefore, self-evaluation, but based on quality data, is the only realistic answer: 'in Estonia our strong emphasis on school self-evaluation as the way to improve is also in part to reduce expensive external evaluation'. These varying approaches to supporting self-evaluation through systematic research are considered in greater detail in Part Three of this study.

For the moment, it is worth noting two key concepts which appear particularly appropriate to the Irish context that underpin the work of these initiatives. The first of these is the concept of 'distributed research' meaning that the recipients of the feedback, namely schools and teachers, are themselves active partners in the process, analysing and interpreting the data, rather than simply passive participants (Tymms and Coe,

2003: 639). Related to the concept of distributed research is the very important distinction made by Tymms (1999: 85) between 'professional monitoring systems' in which the data are used by the workers themselves and 'official accountability systems' in which the data are used to hold those workers to account. Tymms stresses the role of the former in helping to find and solve problems in a climate free from fear.

Whether such a system might or might not prove ideal for the Irish context is as yet uncertain, although Part Three of this study describes the early stages of an initiative designed to enable self-evaluation in Irish schools. One thing that is certain however is that individual teachers, principals and schools cannot be expected to collect and analyse the data necessary to implement the evaluation system currently being suggested without a structured and well supported approach to self-evaluation being designed and implemented.

Whose Report and Who Is To Act on the Findings?

A second set of issues raised in the WSE evaluation but not tackled in *LAOS* concerns the ownership and use of the final inspection reports and the responsibility for improving shortcomings identified. In the case of the latter point principals involved in the WSE pilot were sceptical that change would follow the identification of problems – the following was a representative response, 'WSE can make recommendations but in itself won't cure weaknesses in any school' (DES, 1999a: 27). This issue is not referred to in *LAOS* but in a revealing response to a question at a conference of principals the Chief Inspector made it clear that as schools were self governing and self evaluating institutions it was a matter for themselves to address weaknesses identified during inspections. Since, as it was forcibly pointed out to the Chief Inspector, schools have little or no control over resourcing or over teacher tenure (subsequent to appointment) or conditions, it was clear that principals were less than satisfied with this position.

A related issue of vital importance to the accountability role of the new evaluation system is access to the final report. As indicated previously, some of the inspectors involved in the WSE project felt that due to the sensitivities involved the school reports tended to be rather bland. The DES position was that these reports were owned by the schools and it was left to them to decide whether to make them public or not. Once

again, in *LAOS*, no reference is made to this issue. However, the DES refused requests from the media for access to the first school reports carried out under the *LAOS* framework on the grounds that it was prohibited from publishing such reports by the section of the 1998 Education Act which prohibits providing information which could be used to compile league tables of schools. This decision was overturned by the Information Commissioner but was subsequently appealed by the principal of a primary school with the support of the primary teachers' union. A recent Supreme Court judgement (*Sheedy v the Information Commissioner*, 2005) upheld the school's position and it then appeared to be entirely a matter for school management to decide whether to release none, some or all of the inspection report. However, the Minister for Education and Science caused some surprise by announcing in late 2005 that, despite this judgement, she proposed to place completed evaluation reports on the DES website. Regardless of some union opposition she proceeded to do so, and since April 2006 whole school evaluation reports are available on the DES website. This development took place during the period of the research in schools reported on in the next chapter, and the evaluation reports, together with the early impact of their publication, is considered then.

Complexity and Resources

The WSE evaluation (DES, 1999a: 28) suggested that the evaluation framework piloted by that project was perhaps overly extensive and very wasteful of resources, particularly school and inspector time. However, as previously mentioned the *LAOS* framework was considerably more extensive than WSE, with some 143 themes for self-evaluation. Although it is proposed to employ a considerable number of new inspectors to speed up the process, and this has begun to happen, it would seem that the complexity of the system as it stands will limit evaluations to once every five years at best, and probably to longer intervals. This is perhaps another reason why the emphasis on self-evaluation in schools is stronger in *LAOS* than it was in WSE. Significantly, two later documents issued in 2006, *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Post Primary Schools* and *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Primary Schools* attempt to substantially streamline and clarify the inspection process. The long lists of 'themes for self-evaluation' of the *LAOS* documents are subsumed into a short paragraph under each of the five 'areas'. In addition, the evidence which schools were supposed to provide under *LAOS* to support their self-evaluative judgements become simply a required list

of school plans, policies and other similar documents. The overall effect appears to be a recognition that the original *LAOS* framework was over elaborate and more importantly that schools don't have and can't generate 'hard data' on their own performance. These new documents were issued during the school research phase of this work and their impact on the actual practice of school evaluation is considered in the next chapter.

Parents and Pupils

A final issue raised in the WSE project evaluation (DES, 1999a: 48) but not confronted in *LAOS* is the appropriate role of parents and teachers in the process. During the WSE pilot the inspectors did meet with parents (usually the parent representatives on the Board of Management) and with pupils (either from the school council where one existed or more usually chosen by the principal). This approach is endorsed in *LAOS* which makes no concessions to suggestions in the WSE evaluation that the views of parents and pupils should be ascertained in a formal and representative way through the use of questionnaires and interviews.

Conclusion

The above analysis of both the strengths and weaknesses of the new school evaluation system as it is outlined in the documentation was used to generate an interview schedule for research with a number of school principals and teachers whose institutions were among the first to be evaluated under the *LAOS* framework. It is to this research that we now turn our attention.

Chapter Seven: Looking at Our Schools – Stakeholders Respond**Whole School Evaluation: Processes and Procedures**

The key framework document for whole school evaluation in Ireland, *Looking at Our Schools* (DES, 2003), provided, as we have seen in the previous chapter, an extensive set of themes for self-evaluation, divided into five categories: management, planning, curriculum provision, teaching and learning, and student support. This framework, while designed to ‘facilitate self-evaluation as a central component of the continuous planning process’ was also to be utilised ‘by the inspectorate in conducting whole school evaluations and as a basis for other external evaluation of the work of schools’ (DES 2003:ii).

As indicated in the previous chapter, it was always unlikely that such a detailed framework could in fact be clearly followed for either of the above purposes and in fact a series of more manageable documents designed to clarify and streamline the process of whole school evaluation have been produced by the DES in the meantime. These begin with *The Professional Code of Practice on Evaluation and Reporting for the Inspectorate* (DES, 2003), *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Schools and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act 1998* (DES, 2003) and *Publication of School Inspection Reports, Guidelines* (DES, 2006).

The most significant of this series of documents however are *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2006) and *A Guide to Whole School Evaluation in Primary Schools* (DES, 2006). As with the original *LAOS* documents, these two publications are so similar that they can be considered as a single entity and they will be referred to hereafter as *Guide*. The *Guide*, although referring to *LAOS* as the key framework document, actually represents a considerable change of focus and policy. It appears to have been produced to meet criticisms that the inspection process, as outlined in *LAOS*, was over complex and did not make clear enough what was expected of schools and teachers. In consequence, in the *Guide*, the list of themes for self-evaluation under each of the five category areas is reduced to a very general paragraph, and there is no longer any mention of the school making judgements on its own performance in each area on a four point rating scale as suggested in *LAOS*. These changes would appear from this research in schools simply to reflect the reality of the

inspection process as it is being implemented. Even before the *Guide* was published in 2006, inspectors were not requiring schools to respond under all the themes laid down in *LAOS*, nor indeed do you come across a single instance where the rating scale is even mentioned. The *Guide* also clarifies (2006: 5) 'the WSE procedures and processes in considerable detail' (an omission from *LAOS*) and also very significantly spells out the policy documents and other information which schools (but not teachers) are required to present before and during WSE. This consists of a list of plans and policies which schools will be obliged to have prepared under various legislation and a 'WSE: School Information Form' which seeks basic information on pupil numbers, staffing etc and short, self-evaluatory comments under headings such as 'progress so far and future priorities for school development planning', and 'the supports provided for the inclusion of students from minority and disadvantaged groups'.

Although not specifically asking for evidence to support any claims or statements made, the *Guide* is in other respects not dissimilar to the 'Self Evaluation Form' used by OFSTED in England and may therefore represent a small beginning towards a more evidence based approach to evaluation.

This notion is reinforced by the inclusion in the *Guide* of the information that the inspection team will seek examination results for the school for the past four years from the State Examinations Commission, and that these may be discussed with school management and staff, although 'not presented in the WSE report' (ibid. p 25). Despite these developments, however, this research indicates that as yet there is very little indication that the inspection process is obliging schools to adopt more systematic forms of self evaluation or evidence based practice.

The *Guide* does not set out to clarify what is expected from individual teachers, both in terms of preparation in advance and during inspection. This is left to a series of guides to inspection in each subject area which are gradually being prepared and published by the DES. However, this research indicates that teachers, as opposed to subject departments where things are clearer, still perceive a very considerable lack of clarity regarding what is expected of them and the problems in this regard are among the chief issues with WSE discussed later in this chapter.

The *Guide* was issued in early 2006 in the middle of a series of school visits being undertaken by the researcher. It quickly became apparent that schools recognised and welcomed the simplification and clarification of the structures and processes of WSE and that the *Guide*, rather than *LAOS*, has effectively become the source document used by schools to prepare for inspection. Before examining the research case studies in the schools, we will briefly consider the research methodology employed.

Research Methodology

As indicated earlier *LAOS* has only begun to be implemented in schools relatively recently. There are more than 3000 primary schools and over 700 post primary schools in Ireland, but by mid 2006 only around 300 schools had been evaluated and, of these, around 170 had undergone single subject inspections rather than full evaluations. However despite the small number of schools evaluated to date, the researcher set out to investigate the implementation of the new evaluation system on the ground.

In designing this study, the researcher decided to focus primarily on what appeared to him to be the key emerging issue, namely the extent to which schools and teachers are producing or indeed capable of producing systematic research data to underpin self-evaluation or external evaluation judgements. This, after all, is the rationale on which the evaluation scheme is supposedly based. This does not mean that other issues were not considered in the research but only that priority was given to the research capacity available in schools since this, or the lack of it, is central to the credibility of school and teacher evaluation.

The research reported in this chapter, therefore, emphasises the extent to which the new evaluation system is both requiring and supporting schools and teachers in developing systematic self-evaluation research methodologies. It is for this reason that the school case studies reported here confine themselves to teachers and school leaders (principals and deputy principals) and did not include other key stakeholders such as parents, pupils, members of boards of management or indeed the inspectorate, or indeed the general public.

The chief methodology used in this phase of the research was semi-structured interviews. Based on the analysis of the *LAOS* framework documents reported in

chapter six, two interview schedules were developed. These were piloted with the principal and a teacher in each of two schools; one primary and one post primary. The interview schedules were revised slightly in light of the pilot, and were then used in case studies of some 24 schools, 12 primary and 12 post primary. The schools were situated in the greater Dublin area and throughout the rest of Leinster and were chosen from among those which had already had undergone a full whole school evaluation. The sample was not stratified since there was no indication that size, location, gender or other variables would influence the response to whole-school evaluation. However the pilot did indicate that schools classed as disadvantaged might have a different perspective on WSE and five such schools were included in the case studies.

The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that the same question schedule was followed in each case (see Appendix M) but supplementary questions were asked as and when interesting responses could be further explored. In the 24 schools studied a total of 28 school leaders were interviewed since in some cases although either was sufficient for the research both principal and deputy principal volunteered to take part. It had been hoped to interview at least one recently inspected teacher in each school but in five schools this was not possible for various reasons. In all 20 interviews with teachers were conducted drawn from 18 schools, two schools each providing two interviews and the remainder one each.

The interviews were conducted in the schools except for four interviews with principals held in the University and three teacher interviews conducted by phone. The question list was sent to all respondents in advance and all interviews were recorded. The interviews ranged in duration from 15 to 90 minutes with the average interview lasting 35 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO data analysis package.

Two other significant sources were also used in this phase of the research. The first is the final evaluation reports of the schools case studied. The second is a piece of research conducted by MORI Ireland for the DES on schools responses to whole-school evaluation (DES, 2005). This work, hereafter referred to as '*Customer Survey*', involved a questionnaire sent to some 150 schools which had undergone WSE.

Whole-School Evaluation: Research Findings

The findings which emerged from this research, are explored below in the following sections:

- Whole School Evaluation: Processes and Procedures
- Whole School Evaluation: Positive Responses
 1. Happy 'Customers'
 2. Comprehensive
 3. Collegiality
 4. Impact on Improvement
 5. 'Worth Doing'
- Whole School Evaluation: Negative Responses
 1. 'Evidence-Free Evaluation'
 2. Feedback to Schools and Teachers
 3. Evaluation Reports, 'From Effusive to Merely Positive'
 4. The Role of Stakeholders

Whole School Evaluation: Processes and Procedures

Schools report that the *Guide* (DES, 2006) sets out very clearly the processes and procedures of WSE from 'notification of inspection' through to 'publication of the report and school response'. The process as outlined is divided into three distinct phases, pre-evaluation, in-school evaluation and post-evaluation. In each phase the steps involved are clearly described and this research confirms the findings of the DES *Customer Survey* (2005) with regard to the positive view of these procedures taken by schools. For example, more than 83% of those polled in *Customer Survey* (2005:14) agreed or strongly agreed that 'appropriate notice was given of the general inspection visit and all the meetings were agreed in advance'. A small number of these interviews did throw up criticisms of aspects of the procedures, for example, a short lead-in time, compelling schools (usually the principal) to 'burn the midnight oil', getting 'the mountain of documents' required into readiness. A more common criticism referred to, sometimes prolonged periods between the in-school phase and the final report. Comments here included 'the enthusiasm which had built up was allowed to dissipate', or more prosaically, 'people had long forgotten the whole thing'. In general, however, it appears that the administrative and procedural elements of WSE are widely regarded

as satisfactory.

Whole School Evaluation: Positive Responses

1. Happy 'Customers'

It will be remembered that the analysis of *LAOS* documents outlined in the previous chapter suggested that the process in action might display both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side it was suggested that the framework developed as it was through long and detailed negotiations with the stakeholders and stressing the centrality of school improvement through self-evaluation, would be received positively by schools and teachers. The research evidence bears out this expectation.

All the respondents indicated in one way or another that despite considerable fear and trepidation in advance (schools researched received on average about three weeks notice of the inspection) their schools found the process to be 'positive, affirming and renewing'. The professional, collegial and non-threatening approach of the inspectors was stressed time and time again. The initial phase of the inspection involves preparatory meetings between the inspection team and school management. The next phase involves the team of inspectors (in most cases three or four but in one large post primary school five) conducting the evaluation (over a three or four day period). The inspection itself breaks down into two almost separate processes: whole-school and department/subject inspection. The latter consists of meetings with subject teachers, examination of plans and schemes of work, classroom observation, and looking at pupil work. In the case of the primary schools all or most teachers received classroom visits from inspectors while in the post primary schools three (or in one case four) subjects were evaluated. With regard to whole school evaluation, the process is primarily one of meetings with the board of management, senior management, middle management, all staff and particular groups of teachers such as special needs, guidance and so on and meetings with pupil and parent representatives. These meetings are described as largely being about the school producing and explaining policy documents which it is required to have in relation to such areas as admissions, guidance, discipline, bullying and so forth. The final phase of the process involves discussion between the leading inspector and the principal about the content of the final report, a draft of which is given to the school for comment before issue of the final version. Almost without exception the respondents indicated that the inspection teams managed this potentially fraught process

in such a way that their schools while relieved to have it over regarded it as a positive and worthwhile experience. This interpretation is confirmed by the *Customer Survey* (2006: 12), which reports overwhelmingly positive responses from both teachers and principals to statements about WSE such as 'inspectors adopted a professional approach in their interactions with me' and 'inspectors were courteous and respectful of my professionalism'. Overall, all the evidence suggests that the schools evaluated to date can be regarded as happy customers.

2. Comprehensive

The majority of schools also felt that the framework, by covering such a wide set of 'themes for self-evaluation' was able to obtain a comprehensive picture of all the schools' activities and not just academic outcomes, 'the framework is very broad, reflecting the wide role of schools and this is as it should be as schooling is about more than skills' was a typical comment. This point was particularly stressed by respondents from the schools designated disadvantaged who felt very strongly that the 'affirmation of good practice' provided by the inspectors was of 'extraordinary importance to teachers in disadvantaged schools who rarely feel valued or supported'. These schools stated that the final reports did manage to capture, 'the context and the problems in which these schools and teachers work'. This finding is again confirmed by the *Customer Survey* (2006: 14) which reports that close to ninety per cent of teachers supported or strongly supported the view that 'inspectors took account of school/class context factors during the evaluation process'. Likewise it was felt by many respondents that as the framework was so extensive it could be used as a 'scaffolding' for improvement strategies. One principal suggested that WSE creates 'a template under so many headings of where we are trying to go' and is 'an excellent start, heading in the right direction'. However, the very extensive nature of the evaluation framework also drew criticism which will be reported later in the chapter.

3. Collegiality

Respondents also repeatedly stated that the WSE process brought staff together to prepare and gave them a new sense of focus and collegiality. Comments here included 'a lot of staff learned what others are actually doing', 'the big advantage is it gets teachers to cooperate' and 'the focus of the entire school was on getting ready, it really brought us together'. In each of the post primary schools only perhaps three or four

specific subject areas were included. Principals remarked on how the rest of the staff rallied around to help the ‘unfortunate ones’. Interestingly one principal claimed that so ‘positive’ and ‘affirming’ and ‘helpful’ were the subject inspections that by the end of the process those who had ‘escaped’ were sorry not to be included! Similarly with the ‘whole-school’ aspects of the evaluation respondents were grateful and indeed a little surprised that more junior staff gave a great deal of help in preparing the ‘mountain of paperwork’ required. Several respondents suggested that by far the greatest benefit for the school of *LAOS* was the way in which it tended to get the staff working together, although there were suggestions that for various reasons this might be a short term gain, ‘but in the long term it is unrealistic because there is so little time available’.

4. Impact on Improvement

Although, as we shall see, both teachers and school leaders tended to be sceptical about the longer term impact of WSE, nonetheless many instances of positive change, at least in the short term, resulting from the process were mentioned. Particularly interesting is the perception of many respondents that these improvements were connected to an ‘agenda’, being ‘pushed’ by the inspectors, to which schools and teachers felt constrained to respond. For example, planning at subject department level was high on this alleged agenda and thus, one school reported, ‘we now have a lot of subject meetings, common exam papers and sharing of resources’, and another stated that ‘subject teachers are now meeting more regularly and we are now big on collaborative work in subjects’. One principal summarised it as ‘it certainly helps you to get the teachers to plan – some have not really thought about what they do for twenty or twenty five years’.

More use of IT was also seen as being high on the inspectorial wish list and the purchase and use of laptops and data projectors seems to have moved up the agenda of many schools as a result. Predictably, perhaps, this also brought criticism of the fact that limited resources, both in terms of the timetabling of meetings and the purchase of IT equipment, were conveniently ignored in the inspection reports.

Somewhat more controversially, many schools felt that the inspectors’ agenda was opposed to banding and streaming and in favour of mixed ability teaching, and that WSE was being used to push this policy. Comments here included, ‘they were against

our banding system and we now have a task group looking at it' and they were very concerned about ethos, how the kids are treated and pro mixed ability teaching, we may have to change but it will be a big culture shock for staff and parents. Another principal remarked that, like the inspectors, she was against the streaming system in her school but would not have raised it but for WSE, 'the report gives you the authority to do things'.

Other examples of the alleged agenda being pursued by the inspectorate which came up regularly were concern about adequate provision in the related areas of pastoral care, guidance, and social, personal and health education. Schools were questioned closely on these areas, and a number were warned to increase timetable provision which was judged to be below required levels in these areas.

Pursuing these issues through the WSE process may in time prove increasingly controversial since several of them relate to key issues of 'ethos' which schools regard as primarily internal.

5. 'Worth Doing'

To sum up, the consensus was that the *LAOS* framework as implemented by the inspectors, was 'worth doing', had 'affirmed teachers and schools', dispelled fear of evaluation and convinced school staffs that 'this is the way to do it'. At times, endorsement was rather lukewarm, 'every so often it is good to have a spring clean' (teacher) and 'no harm to get policies up to date' (principal), but on the whole more fulsome complements were common, 'made us totally think through all our priorities'. This had been achieved, it was by and large agreed, by taking a softly, softly approach and by downplaying inspection and up-playing school self-evaluation. Predictably therefore perhaps, given the care and caution of its construction and execution, *LAOS*, in the opening iteration, has been positively received, regarded (to an extent, as we shall see) as worthwhile and become, at least so far, an accepted addition to school life. The latter alone is a considerable achievement in an educational community deeply suspicious of evaluation, inspection and appraisal.

Whole-School Evaluation – Negative Responses

1. ‘Evidence-free Evaluation’

A particularly interesting outcome of this research was the extent to which the respondents alluded to *LAOS* as a once-off event to be prepared for and gotten over. It became very clear that the central idea of the *LAOS* framework, namely that self-evaluation would be an ongoing process between inspections, had failed to take hold. Questions about plans to continue the process of self-evaluation after *LAOS* were met with puzzlement. Further probing elicited the clear perception that insofar as it had been considered at all it was assumed that the school development planning process (SDP), which is also a statutory requirement of schools, would be the vehicle for ongoing development/improvement work (DES, 1999b). The clear implication here is that significant reconsideration may have to be given to the relationship between SDP, ongoing self-evaluation and evaluation by the Inspectorate. It may well be that these frameworks are far too extensive (the SDP framework is as complex as *LAOS*) and similar to exist side by side (O’Dalaigh, 2000; Simons, 2002). Moreover the two frameworks show the same strengths and weaknesses in that both contain comprehensive definitions of the areas to be planned or evaluated but little in the way of criteria against which to make judgments or research methodology to gather evidence. Based on this small sample, a strong case for the rationalisation and integration of these two processes appears to exist, although rationalisation in itself is unlikely to encourage evidence-based practice.

Like the response to the questions concerning ongoing self-evaluation, those asked about data collected and evidence generated in preparation for *LAOS* largely evoked puzzlement. It became clear that although ‘endless meetings’ were held and a ‘mountain of paperwork’ was prepared for both subject and whole-school evaluation, this consisted almost entirely of bringing together and updating existing planning and policy documents – class plans, homework policy, school plan, discipline code, admittance procedures and so on. The only exception to this was some additional material in the form of class tests in some subjects and pupil copybooks. The concept that the success or failure of, for example, the discipline code might be evaluated through some process of data collection and analysis was completely alien. Further probing in this area resulted in some interesting new thinking. One principal remarked

'I suppose when you think about it, it is not evaluation really, it is just impressionistic'. Another stated: 'we do have lots of data – absence and late lists and so on – but is never analysed and used – it would be a big job'. In the same vein another principal remarked that 'schools have evidence yes, but it is not joined-up evidence' and went on, 'I suppose what this really is, is evidence-free evaluation'. A theme that emerged in these responses was that such data might well be useful and desirable but schools were not equipped, nor staff trained to do it. 'Is the balance correct? The *LAOS* framework is good but we need training to make it work' and, again, 'we are not good at knowing how we are doing, we concentrate on inputs'.

A minority view, very negative about any idea that evaluation needed to be based on more systematic research, was also evident – 'in teaching much of what we do is not measurable, giving pupils a sense of belief, hope, helping emotional needs, social work, and we should not try to measure it'. On the other hand, there were examples of schools which were engaging in more systematic forms of self-evaluation and evidence collection. These respondents were very critical of the WSE process and the inspection teams, alleging that, not only were schools not encouraged to rigorously self-evaluate, but where they had done so, no interest was shown in the evidence produced. One principal remarked that 'they (the inspectors) were afraid to make use of it, they only judged the structures, no evaluation of implementation or outcomes'. In another school the principal said that the literacy scheme for less able pupils was not achieving its targets but, 'we got a glowing report because we have a team and regular meetings, but we have huge problems – they did not want to know.' Another principal remarked: 'how well are you evaluating yourself, they say, but they do not want to see any evidence, all they want to see is the processes we have in place for homework or discipline or whatever – nothing re outputs'.

Several teachers expressed a similar viewpoint, saying that no internalisation or adoption of the process was taking place, and this was at least partly because there was so little inspectorial interest in evidence or self-evaluation data. Comments here included, 'no interest in the teacher-researcher idea' and 'they never ask for evidence if they wanted to they could say 'what is your evidence for doing it that way', but they never do'.

Evidence from another source which supports the notion that a lack of school-based research is a major issue at the heart of school planning and evaluation. The DES recently published *An Evaluation of Planning in Thirty Primary Schools* and noted that only 20% of schools could be considered 'good' in the area of using evidence to track improved school attainment. The few schools that showed good practice in this area are described in the following terms:

A comprehensive policy on assessment, measuring attainment systematically, devising formats for plotting progress and monitoring improvements in attendance...evidence of change of pupils' behaviour and improved attendance. (2006: 73)

What is interesting here is two-fold. Firstly, this research shows that, where the schools and teachers studied had gathered evidence, little interest was shown by the inspectors, and moreover schools and teachers are not aware that such evidence gathering is required, expected or even welcomed. At the same time, it seems clear from the above quote that the DES wishes schools to gather systematic data and evidence but yet has done absolutely nothing to support, encourage or train schools and teachers to respond. Somehow, the 20% of good practice mentioned above has emerged as it were of its own accord, but this research implies that this is a rare phenomenon. It seems clear, therefore, that the empowerment of schools and teachers to self-evaluate will have to come from sources other than the DES, and the research reported in Section Three of this study is one effort to begin that process.

2. Feedback

The second major negative finding in this research can be summarised as 'poor feedback', and was a common theme in the interviews with both principals, deputy principals and teachers.

Principals tended to have two major criticisms concerning feedback, one being the general and/or impractical nature of advice given and the second more strident, the lack of any mechanism or indeed responsibility being provided by the DES to follow up problems identified during WSE.

In the case of the former, there was considerable annoyance along the following lines 'they put in recommendations when they know there are no resources to do the things

suggested' or, again, 'they said a bigger library and more IT, but we have no money, so it's all just forgotten about now'. Other suggestions made in inspection reports were regarded with open cynicism, particularly relating to posts of responsibility, a subject which came up regularly, 'they feel they have to say that but they know reorganising posts of responsibility is a very touchy IR issue which is not really on'. Equally, with regard to another regular recommendation, more subject team meetings, many school leaders made clear the difficulties involved. The following was a common response, 'they know I cannot timetable meetings as most teachers are on full hours, so it's just goodwill, and that will not last'.

Ironically, in light of the above, even greater annoyance was caused by things not said in the final reports. By far the most common complaint from school leaders in the course of these interviews refers to 'the elephant in the room', dealing with poor teaching and under performing teachers. This topic, alleged many principals, is 'avoided like the plague' since 'despite WSE, there is still no mechanism to deal with a weak teacher'. One principal remarked, 'if this system is about accountability at all, it is about management accountability, certainly not teacher accountability'.

This attitude among principals seems at odds with evidence mentioned in previous chapters, that Irish school leaders favour internal evaluation over external inspection. What may be happening here, though, is that, given that such a resource intensive system of evaluation has been put in place, principals feel that it should, in order to justify itself, be able to deliver tangible results on key issues such as increased resource allocation and tackling poor teaching. With regard to feedback, a somewhat similar view can be traced in the interviews with teachers.

Similar to the interviews with principals, a high level of dissatisfaction with the level and quality of the feedback received after inspection was uncovered. It must be acknowledged that this finding is at odds with the *Customer Survey* (2003:15), which found that 77.4% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'inspectors provided opportunities for me to discuss their observations and listen to my viewpoint' (it may be significant that over 21% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, by far the highest negative response in the *Customer Survey*). At all events, in the interviews, teachers reported feeling 'demeaned', 'upset' and 'amazed' at the haphazard

nature of the subject inspections and feedback. Among the comments made were the following:

Very badly informed in advance

No clear indication what they wanted to see

Advice very general, of no real use

Nothing given in writing

Wrote all the time in my class on green and red sheets – I suppose green good and red bad, but did not show them to me or refer to them afterwards

Ten minutes in the corridor after the class, very unprofessional

A key issue of regret expressed regularly by teachers was that no reference was made by inspectors to good practice or ideas from elsewhere, ‘no real advice on methods and no sense of telling you that there is good practice elsewhere and bringing it to you’.

Another teacher remarked, ‘not worth it – nothing new, exciting or challenging’.

Overall, the sense that comes across from teacher interviews on this area is that, while the process is very stressful, ‘no other profession would put up with it’, it might still be regarded as ‘worth it’ if the quality of feedback were higher. In summary, the findings in relation to teacher feedback in WSE are as follows:

- A need for more time for class teachers to have discussions with inspectors
- A need for more specific recommendations, whether criticisms were offered or not.

A final point relating to feedback made by both principals and teachers was that what they perceived to be the determination of the inspectors to stick to a ‘very rigid’, ‘very

inflexible' approach to their work inhibited any spontaneity which might have helped to improve the quality of advice and support.

Would not deviate from the structure laid down for them

Would not go into other areas

Had to do everything in a certain order at a certain time, in order, they said, to be the same everywhere – why, when no comparisons are made?

3. Evaluation Reports: 'From Effusive to Merely Positive'

Another recurring theme in the interviews conducted is the nature of the reports produced by the team of inspectors after the external phase of the evaluation and the follow up of issues and problems identified. A document outlining the reporting process which was called *Publication of School Inspection Reports, Guidelines*, was published in 2006 (DES, 2006). Under these *Guidelines*, a draft version of the final evaluation report is sent to the schools for comment before it is finally issued. School leaders found this re-assuring and amongst the schools researched there was a unanimous view that the draft report (positive in each case) was a fair reflection of the evaluation and indeed of the work of the school. (This is not, however, always the case in that it is understood that a number of schools evaluated to date have used the mechanism of appeal to the Chief Inspector against the report, which is part of the process.) On the other hand among those interviewed for this research there was a clear sense of doubt and scepticism that the evaluation report would ever be critical regardless of the reality of the situation, 'we do not have a concept of positive criticism here and it is just as well the report is very softly, softly'. Or again 'there is no sign that we will get any help (from the DES) to deal with under performing teachers so it is just as well that these reports don't go down that route'. This last point, the question of pursuing issues raised by *LAOS*, is, as has already been indicated, another theme that continually recurs. Among comments here were the following: 'if problems are identified schools will be left to their own devices', or, again, 'no one believes the DES will intervene and of course schools can't solve all problems themselves in-house, that is a fiction'.

As previously explained, the question of the right of access to the inspection reports was

before the Courts when this research commenced. Most of the early respondents felt that the decision on what groups should have access to the reports should be left to each individual school although all but one claimed that they would favour full publication of the report on their own school when it arrived. Although the Courts found in favour of schools themselves deciding on the question of publication, the Minister for Education and Science decided that all evaluation reports should be published on the DES website, and this has been the case since April, 2006 (DES 2006)

As part of this research, an analysis of these reports pertaining to the schools studied was undertaken. It is hard to disagree with one principal who remarked that the reports seemed to 'from effusive to merely positive', even perhaps with the response in the national newspapers, well represented by the heading and sub heading in the *Evening Herald* (22 June, 2006), 'Whitewash – Sea Views, Praise for Science Classes, But Where Are the Hard Facts, Minister?' More nuanced was the *Irish Times* (23 June, 2006), which headed its piece, 'Minister denies reports are bland' and carried a column by Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly which, under the heading, 'A first small step in the right direction', speaks of 'beginning to peel back the curtain of secrecy in education'.

These negative views of the utility of final evaluation reports was widely echoed in the research interviews:

- ' Nothing dynamic to enthuse and challenge'
- ' Written in a way that the ordinary person would and could read'
- ' Recommendations very superficial,
- ' Pretty predictable stuff-all very general, superficial, following a formula,

However some perceptive critics suggested that on closer scrutiny there might be more to the reports than meets the eye:

- ' Very little criticism – but you have to learn how to read them'
- ' Very bland but because of that any specifics are noticeable'

This notion of 'learning to read' the reports or 'reading between the lines' became clear to the researcher as more reports were analysed. Bit by bit in a sea of supportive affirmation nuggets of critical advice emerged in a small number of the reports studied. For example in one school a particular subject department was told that ' some students

get good feedback and correction'. In another school the level of absenteeism was commented on unfavourably while other schools and departments were gently chided on a lack of planning, limited use of varied methodologies, lack of student work displayed on the walls and so on.

Overall it seems fair to say that despite the publication of the inspection reports, those, particularly in the media demanding accountability, clear definitive judgements and the 'outing of weak teachers' are doomed to disappointment. However, this, as has essentially been argued throughout this study, is likely to be a good thing rather than the reverse. These rather gentle, rambling reports may not set the pulses racing, but they may form the basis for some improvements and reforms and, more importantly, are unlikely in their present form to damage school and teacher morale. Nonetheless, given the resources committed to WSE, it may well be that better school based research, improved feedback and more substantive reports could all contribute to getting substantially more developmental gain out of the system without damaging its essential character.

4. The Role of Stakeholders and the Question of Resources

Finally it is worth referring briefly to a number of other issues which arose in the course of this research. Firstly, it was suggested in the analysis of the *LAOS* framework that the vast number of 'aspects', 'components' and 'themes' was unrealistic and that no school or inspection team could deal with them all. In fact this seems to have been recognised in practice and the schools researched report that the inspection team tackled the various areas 'generally' and made no attempt to 'checklist' or 'tick off' each theme for self-evaluation. As has previously been noted, this de facto situation was recognised by the DES when it issued the greatly simplified *Guide* (DES, 2006). This outcome seems to have satisfied the schools but in effect it renders the apparent comprehensiveness and exactitude of the *LAOS* framework fairly meaningless and surely supports the argument that a much reduced and more focused framework would be more conducive to a meaningful evaluation.

The second area defined as one of potential difficulty, but which only emerges fleetingly in this research is the role of parents and students in the evaluation process. The final report of the WSE pilot project (DES, 1999a) suggested that more account

would have to be taken of the rights of key stakeholders such as parents and pupils to an input into the school evaluation. However, there was no reference to these stakeholders in the *LAOS* documents, in fact if anything the emphasis was greater than ever on management and staff. However, none of the interviewees in the present research reported any issues raised by parents or students and neither the parent or student representative bodies nationally have made any statements in relation to *LAOS*. In the interviews conducted for this work it was reported that the evaluating inspectors did 'speak to parents' (usually the representatives on the Board of Management) and 'students on an ad hoc basis'. No question of any structured research to ascertain the views of the broad body of parents or students appears to have arisen.

A third issue, that of resources, particularly time implications for schools, did arise but not as strongly as might have been expected. What emerged here and has been noted earlier, was the tendency to see WSE as a once-off chore, to be prepared for and gotten through. Both principals and teachers spoke of many meetings and long nights updating documents, plans and policies. One principal described this period as 'us against them, working together to defeat the invader'. However, when asked in general terms if WSE was worth the expenditure of effort and resources, responses ranged from 'definitely' to 'I suppose so', or 'just about', with the majority in the middle somewhere. Perhaps tellingly, however, when the question was more specific, such as, 'would you spend the resources going into WSE on it or on, for example, more money for special needs or ICT, none of the respondents opted for WSE.

Filling the Gaps in WSE

As we have seen, the *LAOS* framework for school evaluation and self-evaluation was developed, in theory at least, with the insights generated by the original WSE pilot at the forefront of everyone's mind. Despite, or perhaps because of this, the *LAOS* document is very long and detailed containing five areas of evaluation, sub-divided into 143 themes for self-evaluation. As has been discussed, the emphasis in the framework is very much on self-evaluation. Schools are required in theory to gather evidence and then to make judgments about their own performance on a four part rating scale in respect of each theme for self-evaluation. This process of self-evaluation is then to inform the work of a visiting team of inspectors which would carry out a whole-school evaluation at unspecified intervals, probably not less than every five years.

Chapter six set out to analyse the *LAOS* framework in the context of the outcomes of the WSE pilot project which proceeded it. The researcher suggests that *LAOS* places greater emphasis on school self-evaluation than did WSE and significantly down plays the external inspectorial evaluation. It is also suggested that the language of *LAOS*, for example replacing the ‘evaluation criteria’ of WSE with ‘themes for self-evaluation’ further demonstrates that the acceptability of the process to schools and teachers is the central concern of the DES.

For similar reasons the researcher also suggests that weaknesses identified in the WSE report are not tackled to any degree in *LAOS*. Key among these issues are: the unrealistic extent of the framework itself (subsequently simplified by the publication of the *Guide* in 2006); the lack of required data collection and evidence generation to support schools’ statements about their strengths and weaknesses; lack of quality and depth in feedback both to schools and to individual teachers, and related concerns about the insubstantial nature of the final reports; lack of clarity about responsibility for following up issues identified; and, finally, the role of the key stakeholders particularly parents and students in the process. In order to examine the implementation of the new evaluation framework, in practice case study interviews with school leaders and teachers were conducted in twenty-four schools.

The outcome of this research indicates a mixed response to the WSE system. The experience of the schools is described as extremely positive, affirming and supportive. Senior staff reports that the process provided a focus for schools as they prepared for it and had benefits in terms of increased cohesion and collegiality. The work of the inspection teams is invariably described as professional and supportive and the draft final reports were well received (to an extent) and perceived as fair and somewhat helpful. No negative feeling (rather than pre-evaluation nerves) or reservations is reported.

As against these positives several negatives also emerge. It is clear that the wide-ranging nature of the framework means that a great deal is not specifically considered during the evaluation. It is also evident that the concept of ongoing self-evaluation has not taken hold in schools and that there is a great deal of overlap between the *LAOS* framework and that of school development planning. An integration and rationalisation

of these two policies will need to be considered urgently. It also emerges that there is no concept in schools of collecting and analysing data to build evidence on which to base evaluation judgments. Most of what counted as evidence in the schools visited consisted of professional judgments by staff and inspectors largely using existing paperwork such as school policies and plans (this is not to say that such judgments do not count as valuable evidence, only that they are but one of many possible sources of evidence (McNamara and O'Hara, 2004; Thomas and Pring, 2004). The lack of any guidelines in LAOS as to criteria or research methods that might inform judgments has led to what amounts to 'data free evaluation' in practice. Moreover it is clear that without such guidelines and the provision of training and research support for schools, the situation is not likely to change.

A second key problem identified in the research was the quality and usefulness of the advice and feedback given by the inspectors during and after WSE. By and large, both principals and teachers felt that the feedback was either somewhat cynical (suggesting things that could not be done, whether for resource or 'political' reasons, or bland and superficial). In particular, teachers appeared hungry for good advice and ideas. This, as Winch (2001) points out, is a key marker of a good inspection/evaluation system – the extent to which developmental, professional gains outweigh the negatives inherent in all such systems, including teacher stress and damage to autonomy and morale. High quality feedback is the key to this and the current research indicates major shortcomings in this area.

In the case of both these negative outcomes, low levels of school and teacher internal research and self-evaluation, and poor feedback, it seems to us that significant improvements could be made to WSE without impairing its widespread acceptance. In fact, it seems clear to us from this research that greater clarity and support in both these areas would be welcomed by schools and teachers. Moreover, since as this chapter demonstrates vividly, many principals and teachers are sceptical, or at least not fully convinced of the benefits of WSE, overcoming these feelings would be crucial to the future of the process. As Leithwood et al (2004, 4) put it,

the chance of any reform improving student learning is remote unless...schoolteachers agree with its purpose and appreciate what is required to make it work. Local leaders must, for example, be able to help their colleagues understand how the externally initiated reform might be integrated into local

improvement efforts, provide the necessary support for those whose practices must change, and must win the cooperation and support of parents and others in the local community.

Other negatives also emerge from this research, but are perhaps not as problematic as the above, in that they could, arguably, be tackled in the context of increasing the self-evaluation capacity of schools, including generating more and better evidence from a wide variety of sources. For example, the very limited role for parents and students contained in the LAOS framework has not as yet resulted in much negative comment and a greater role for key stakeholders would surely emerge in the context of more systematic school self-evaluation. Equally, among the schools researched there is deep scepticism regarding the extent of any remedial action being taken by the DES in cases where the evaluation indicates problems, and final evaluation reports are regarded as positive but superficial. Again, however, it could hardly be otherwise when there is so little research data available in schools on which to base more in-depth reporting and recommend credible remedial interventions.

This research indicates that LAOS is very much a process still developing and evolving. It is clear that the first priority of the DES is to establish it as an acceptable part of the system by proceeding with extreme caution and stressing the co-operation, partnership and self-evaluation aspects. Whether, as time goes by, the rigour and quality of the research underpinning the process can be raised to a level where the judgments made are regarded as robust enough to support follow-up remediation remains to be seen. What does seem beyond doubt is that schools, to paraphrase John MacBeath, are not in a position to speak for themselves in that there is little evidence of any self-evaluation capacity in the system. Unless the situation can be improved, it is hard to see how WSE can deliver on its very considerable potential as a tool to enhance school and teacher development. There is consequently a significant danger that external forces may use this lack of internal capacity to impose narrow and reductionist forms of evaluation and appraisal on schools and teachers. It seems, therefore, a priority to work towards the development of teachers and schools with the self-evaluative mindset and the skills necessary to undertake internal evaluation. Part Three of this work will concern itself with developing an approach to this difficult task.

Part Three: Introduction

In the opening two sections of this work, an overview of the international and domestic origins and current operation of the Irish school evaluation system was presented. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the extensive consultation that took place prior to its introduction, many of the trends that emerge in the international research on the area of school and teacher evaluation have been replicated within the Irish system. One of the most interesting of these themes is the ongoing debate as to whether it is possible for an externally mandated, accountability focused and inspectorate led system of school evaluation to successfully engage with and indeed nurture a culture of internally mandated, improvement focused and teacher led self-evaluation? It has been suggested that internationally reconciling these imperatives has become the goal of most school evaluation systems with what degree of success it is perhaps too early to say. In the Irish context what has become clear is that in theory at least, this is precisely the type of system that the Department of Education and Science is seeking to champion.

However what the research in schools demonstrates is that, as yet, the concept of the school and teacher as self-evaluating agents has failed to take hold. This cannot be regarded as surprising since other than rhetoric and exhortation little or no support or guidance has been given to empower such a development. Given that the whole WSE process is effectively built on this foundation it seems timely to engage with the concept of the self-evaluating teacher and school.

In this section an account will be given of how an Education Department in an Irish University sought to design a programme that would prepare a diverse group of teachers at various stages of their professional careers to engage with this emerging system of evaluation in Irish schools. Because, at a rhetorical level at least, the Irish approach to school evaluation seeks to build on evaluation work supposedly already being undertaken by school communities the programme developed had to prepare teachers to actively undertake this work. This meant not only providing them with the essential research skills to engage in a self-evaluation process but also to putting in place the structural support necessary to allow them continue this engagement over an extended period of time. This

was particularly important for the teachers taking part in this study for, unlike many of the groups mentioned in the international literature, these teachers do not come from one or even a related cluster of individual school communities (Neil et al 2001; Leimu 1998; Simons 2002). Therefore rather than having the school group as the locus of the self evaluation training process in this study the individual teacher working with a broader community of likeminded professionals becomes the centre of the training.

A further complicating factor was the reality that the system of evaluation being proposed for Ireland was only being rolled out piecemeal at the time that this research was being conducted. This meant that while there was some clarity at a documentary level as to what was expected from teachers engaging with the system, little information was available as to the practical requirements imposed on teachers and schools undergoing inspection. For this reason it was decided to design the training programme in an iterative fashion, experimenting with different elements over a three year cycle with a view to producing a final programme that was culturally and systemically relevant.

The section begins with an in-depth analysis of how the focus of evaluation systems has changed in recent years and explores in some detail how other education systems have supported the development of self-evaluation skills at a range of levels. It continues with an analysis of how the insights generated by this work were used to design the programme of training under discussion. An outline of the different stages of the programme developed is then provided with a discussion as to the reasons for the inclusion of different aspects. It then goes on to provide a detailed analysis of the data generated in the course of the implementation of the training programme paying particular attention to its success as a method for helping professional educators develop self-evaluation skills. The section finally concludes by providing an overview of the study and some suggestions as to possible future developments in Irish school and teacher evaluation.

Chapter Eight: Supporting Educational Self-Evaluation – the European Experience

Quite an amount of time has been spent in this study charting the journey of the concept of the self-evaluating teacher from the periphery of systems of educational evaluation to their centre. This chapter continues this analysis and takes it one stage further, examining not only the increasing acceptance of self-evaluation at an official level but also exploring what this means in practice in a range of educational settings. The chapter begins with an analysis of the reasons behind the increased acceptance of the notion of self-evaluation, concentrating on a series of robust models generated in the late 1990's by a number of European researchers. It goes on to explore the practical implications of this acceptance at both a general European level and also at a local systems level in a number of EU countries. Considerable attention is paid to the way in which individual education systems have sought to support the development of a culture of self-evaluation and in particular a detailed analysis of the recent English experience is provided. The chapter concludes with a detailed examination of a trans-European evaluation training project which, somewhat unusually, focused on the development of a network of committed individuals as the chosen method for ensuring the spread of self-evaluation skills in a range of educational settings.

The Triumph of the Self-Evaluation?

In a recent work on school evaluation, Professor John MacBeath states that, 'self-evaluation is now seen as a matter of priority in most economically advanced countries of the world' (2003:2). Given MacBeath's championing of the concept of self-evaluation over a number of decades, it might be possible to dismiss this statement as the analysis of a partisan voice in an increasingly passionate debate. However MacBeath's statement has been echoed by a range of commentators from all sides of the school evaluation debate. At a European level, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council on European Cooperation in Quality Evaluation in School Education (2001) clearly argues that improvements in European school evaluation provision are dependent on the enhancement of schools' abilities to evaluate themselves. Specifically the Recommendation calls on Member States of the EU to 'encourage school self-evaluation as a method of creating learning and improving schools' (2001). This analysis is echoed in the recent highly influential OECD

report on the future of the teaching profession, *Teachers Matter* (2005). This report sees the development of self-evaluation skills within the education system as being a critical component of the drive to improve educational provision within the OECD region.

Perhaps most surprisingly of all, the system of school evaluation most often associated with externally imposed, low trust accountability, the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in England has recently decided to make school self-evaluation a central plank of its approach to monitoring educational quality. So radical has the change been, in a recent article MacBeath speaks of, 'The New Relationship in England' (2006:5). Official documents now state that 'self evaluation evidence (is) at the heart of inspection' (Milliband 2004 cited in Swaffield and MacBeath 2005:6). The newly produced Self-Evaluation Form is to be considered 'the most crucial piece of evidence available to the inspection team' (OFSTED 2004: 24). Indeed the British government minister with responsibility for the area, David Milliband, publicly celebrated the emergence of a new 'simplified school improvement focus, where every school uses robust self-evaluation to drive improvement' (Milliband 2004:3). Official OFSTED documents now state that,

Intelligent accountability should be founded on the school's own views of how well it is serving its pupils and its priorities for improvement. This is what is meant by school self-evaluation. (OFSTED 2004: 7)

To get a sense of the radical shift in emphasis these statements represent one need only refer back to public statements by the former Chief Inspector of English schools who attacked a number of teacher unions for 'promoting something as subversive as self-evaluation' (McAvoy, 2004: 19).

So, are we now entering into the era of self-evaluation where divisive, intrusive and ultimately destructive forms of externally imposed accountability are a thing of the past? Perhaps not. While the rhetoric of school evaluation now officially celebrates the role of self-evaluation this is nearly always presented within a context where an external, inspectorate led accountability structure is still in place. This can perhaps be best seen by continuing the quotations provided above. After celebrating the triumph of self-evaluation in economically advanced countries MacBeath goes on to say that, 'In most of these

countries there is a concern to align it more closely with external inspection' (MacBeath 2003: 2). The European parliament goes on to argue in Recommendation 1e that Member States must 'clarify the purpose and the conditions for school self-evaluation, and to ensure that the approach to self-evaluation is consistent with other forms of regulation' (2001: Recommendation 1e). Finally, Milliband having celebrated the centrality of self-evaluation argues that it should be seen as being part of 'an accountability framework, which puts a premium on ensuring effective and ongoing self-evaluation in every school combined with more focused external inspection' (Milliband 2004:11).

It is arguable that what we have seen emerge in recent years, as exemplified by the above quotations, is a re-framing of the debate surrounding the relationship between internal modes of school improvement and external forms of accountability. There is, to quote Nevo (1995), a growing realisation that the relationship between school communities and inspectorates should be based on 'dialogue' rather than conflict. Of course the concept of dialogue is a little nebulous in itself. Questions as to who participates in the dialogue, their relationship, the format that the dialogue is to take and the hoped for results are often posed (Nevo 1995, 2002, 2006). Notwithstanding these caveats, the move towards acknowledging the centrality of self-evaluation is an important one and it has led to a number of attempts to develop a comprehensive framework of school evaluation that includes all elements of the emerging dialogue in a structure that demonstrates their relationship. Perhaps the most detailed of these frameworks is the one developed by MacBeath in collaboration with Schratz and others over the past decade (1999, 2000, 2003) and it is to this that we will now turn.

Allowing Schools to Speak

Initially produced as part of the, 'Schools Must Speak for Themselves' and 'Evaluating Quality in School Education' research projects, MacBeath et al designed a model which sought to provide a multi dimensional view of school development and evaluation. The framework developed was entitled 'The Cube Model of Evaluation' (MacBeath and Schratz et al 2000: 93). A simpler version of the model, drawing from the work of Schratz and Austrian colleagues, was published in 1999 (see Figure 8.1).

It suggests that there are three dimensions involved in school evaluation, the top down/ bottom up, the external/ internal and the support/ pressure. The explanations of these dimensions are fairly self-evident. The internal/ external dimension 'represents a continuum from self-evaluation to evaluation from an outside source' (MacBeath and Schratz 1999: 2). The pressure/ support dimension relates to individuals or schools perception of the amount of assistance or coercion they experience in the course of the evaluation. The top down/ bottom up axis,

represents how a system sees and implements change. At one extreme it is delivered from above, by dictat, by legislation, by national structures. Alternatively it can come entirely from below, from class teachers, from pupils and parents, building on day-to-day school and classroom practice.

(MacBeath and Schratz 1999: 3)

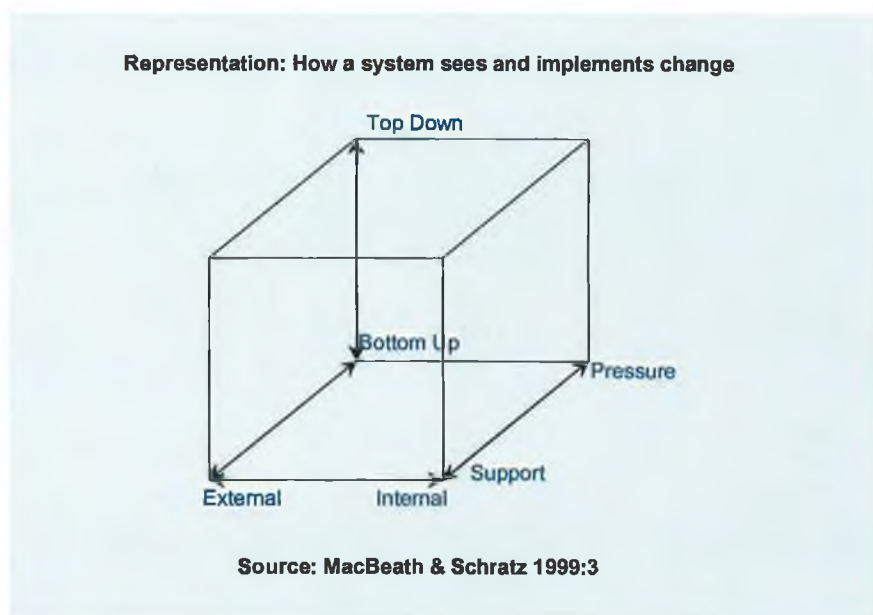


Figure 8.1: *The initial cube model of evaluation*

The model was updated somewhat in 2000 with the addition of references to internal and external evaluation, self-evaluation and development and accountability (see Figure 8.2).

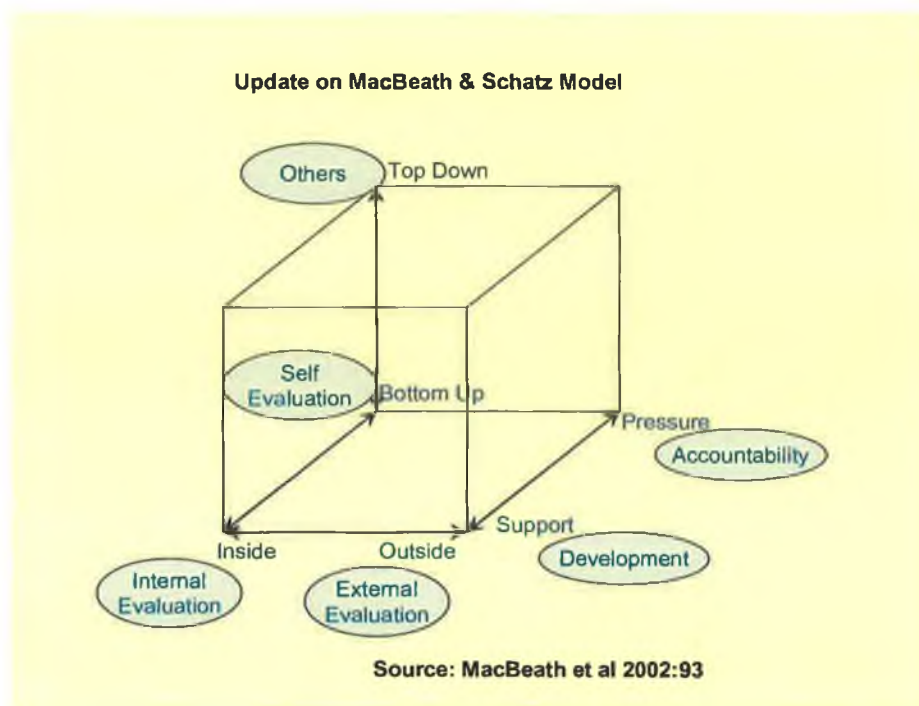


Figure 8.2: The *Updated Cube Model of Evaluation*

In essence what the revised model argues is that within the three dimensions outlined that there is a 'particular point that defines the nature and describes the process of evaluation' (MacBeath et al 2000: 93). Naturally identifying this point is a difficult process, as each of the 'corners' of the cube model identified seek to exert influence and pull the focus of the evaluation in their particular direction.

However what is of equal importance in this model is the emphasis on the dynamic relationship between all of the elements included. Altering one element of the model will have an impact on all other elements and it will change the location of that 'particular point' mentioned above.

This conceptualisation of the interconnectedness of a number of elements in school evaluation systems is an interesting one and MacBeath et al seek to tease them out. They argue that if we accept this way of looking at evaluation then we must be willing to acknowledge that 'top-down approaches need bottom up responses. External expectations

have to meet internal needs, and pressure will not work without the push of some internal direction or vision' (2000:93).

Thus a system of evaluation that now seeks to emphasise the importance of self-evaluation will have to consider, amongst other things, how:

- The internal priorities of the school community engaging in an evaluative process can be matched with the external requirements of a publicly accountable inspectorate system?
- A culture of school improvement which seeks to emphasise reflection, development and trust can interact with a system of school accountability which seeks to prioritise measurement, standards and at times sanction?
- The need for objective 'snapshot' of the quality of work being undertaken by a school can be met by the data produced by the school community themselves?

These and similar questions have been posed with increasing frequency at number of different levels within European education systems in recent years. While the focus of many of the answers has been at a systemic level, for example the re-structuring of the OFSTED system in England and the development of the Looking at Our Schools (LAOS) system in Ireland, some of the other interventions have sought to tease out the implications of the questions at a schools level. The schools based research reported in the previous section seems to support the absolute necessity of focusing on school and teacher self-evaluation if systemic reforms are to have any chance of succeeding in practice. It is to this group of interventions that we will now turn and in particular to the range of initiatives that have tried to enhance the ability of individual teachers and school communities to engage in the oft cited 'dialogue' that is considered to be at the heart of successful self-evaluation on a more or less equal footing with other key stakeholders (Nevo 2002).

Supporting the Self-Evaluating Teacher: The Broader European Experience

The year 2004 saw the publication of perhaps the most comprehensive comparative study of evaluation systems within the European Union (EU). Entitled *Evaluation of Schools providing Compulsory Education in Europe* and published by Eurydice under the auspices

of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, the report sought to provide a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted 'approaches to the evaluation of schools providing compulsory education' within the EU (2004:9). In the context of this study, one of the most interesting sections of the report is that dealing with so-called 'supporting measures' (2004:122) provided for internal evaluators of schools. The following table, taken from the report, provides some indication of the comprehensive nature of these supporting measures available at the time that the primary research for the work was undertaken in 2001 (see Table 8.1). Given the growth in interest in self-evaluation methodologies outlined earlier in this chapter, it is safe to assume that the range of supports now available to the self-evaluating school within the European Union have been significantly enhanced.

Even the most cursory glance at the table below indicates that while very few EU countries have all of the supports offered nearly all have some support built into their system of evaluation. In terms of popularity, the provision of training and resource persons are the most popular interventions across the countries surveyed closely followed by the production of evaluation frameworks and indicators. In commenting on this hierarchy in popularity of support measures the reports writers suggest that, 'turning to support and training personnel ...reflects a long-term investment' (2004:126). This is an interesting insight as it suggests that the creation of genuinely self-evaluating schools is not something that can be done overnight. Rather, there should be a concentration on enhancing the skills of the school communities seeking to engage in evaluation over an extended period of time. This process will require governments, education departments and other support agencies to offer 'human, financial and (and) material resources' (Eurydice 2004:126) if it is to succeed. It is to a range of these resources that we will now turn with a view to explaining the type of support that has emerged for the self-evaluating school and teacher in recent years.

	Be	Be	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	UK SC	IS	LI	NO	BG	CZ	EE	CY	LV	LT	HU	MT	PL	RO	SI
A	x	x		x		x		x			x		x		x	x	x		x					x		x	x	x	x	x
B		x				x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x					x									
C		x		x				x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x								x
D				x			x						x	x	x	x			x				x				x			
E		x								x			x		x	x									x			x		
F		x						x			x			x	x	x	x		x									x		
G								x			x		x	x	x	x			x		x									
H		x				x	x			x					x	x						x								x
I													x	x	x		x		x						x					
J		x				x									x															
K		x						x		x			x		x															

Table 8.1: Supporting Measures Available to Internal Evaluation of Schools, Compulsory Education 2001-

2002

A= Training

B= Evaluation Framework and Models

C= Resource Person

D= Indicators on the education system (including results)

E= Research and other publications on evaluation

F= Guidelines and Manuals

G= Website

H= Criteria, indicators and procedures used in external evaluation

I= Exchange of Experience / sharing good practice

J = EFQM Good practice model

K = Financial support

(Eurydice 2004: 124)

Supporting the Self-Evaluating Teacher: Models of Best Practice

The last number of years have seen a range of resources produced at local, national and trans-national levels aimed at supporting schools and individual teachers who wish to engage in a process of self-evaluation. While it would be impractical to provide a comprehensive list of all of these interventions, it is possible to take a representative sample of the support mechanisms available and provide some contextual information that could throw some light on the type of evaluation system within which they are designed to operate. At the risk of over simplification, it is possible to categorise the support mechanisms under three broad headings:

1. Supports designed to facilitate the collection of information for centrally mandated self-evaluation systems.
2. Supports designed to engage teachers with the theory and practice of school evaluation theory with a view to their developing their own contextually sensitive models of evaluation.
3. Supports designed to collect and analyse data independently for schools

As with all attempts to categorise discrete interventions the above classification is somewhat crude however it does serve to highlight some of the fault lines that exist in terms of the culture of school evaluation that currently exists in Europe. As an interesting aside, it is possible to draw up an alternative classification based on the work of Alvik (1996) as cited by Swaffield and MacBeath (2005). He sought to define the relationship between models of self-evaluation and external evaluation at a policy level. He argues that there are three broad types of interaction between external evaluation and self-evaluation. They are:

1. Parallel: in which the two systems run side by side each with their own criteria and protocols
2. Sequential: in which external bodies follow on from a school's own evaluation and use that as a focus of their quality assurance system.

3. Cooperative: in which external agencies cooperate with schools to develop a common approach to evaluation (2005:240).

When trying to classify support mechanisms, it is possible to view them through the lens of the policy context in which they work and as such the work of Alvik is comparatively useful as a classification system. Having said that, there is sufficient diversity within the types of support offered to warrant an original division of type and for this reason it is proposed to adopt the initial classification detailed above.

Supports Designed to Facilitate the Collection of Information for Centrally Mandated Self-Evaluation Systems

As we have already seen in the earlier part of this chapter, one of the more interesting recent developments in school evaluation has been the extent to which systems that traditionally had concentrated on emphasising the centrality of 'objective' external evaluation have now begun to trumpet the necessity of internal or self-evaluation in any comprehensive system for measuring quality in schools. Some authors, most notably MacBeath (2003, 2005) Simons (2002) and Scheerens (2002) would question whether centrally mandated self-evaluation can properly be identified with the developmental, improvement focused forms of self-evaluation. However at a rhetorical level at least there is a strong commitment to,

introducing a new inspection system which puts more onus on a school to demonstrate that it can diagnose where its strengths and weaknesses are and do something about improving and developing them (OFSTED 2005: 1).

Without seeking to distance ourselves too much from the debate regarding the reasons for the emergence of this commitment to self-evaluation, the fact that it has happened in the UK has resulted in an interesting range of support mechanisms emerging. The next section of this chapter will deal specifically with the innovations of this sort that have been developed in English settings. This is not to suggest that this is the only system that is attempting to grapple with the implications of changing approaches to school evaluation. Rather it is an acknowledgment of the high degree of innovation that has been engendered

by the comparatively rapid change over from a centralised approach to school evaluation to a more localised, teacher centred approach. This alteration in focus allows us witness the practical implications of systemic change at a micro as well as a macro level and as such the English experience has implications and practical applications across the EU. In a later part of this chapter some of these implications will be teased out in the context of trans-national research programmes undertaken within the broader EU educational community.

Centrally Mandated Self-Evaluation: The Revised OFSTED Approach and the Self-Evaluation Form

We have dealt in some detail in an earlier sections of this work with the transformation of the English approach to school evaluation. At the centre of this change in focus is promotion of the use of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) (Appendix A). Its champions in OFSTED claim that using the SEF can enable it to,

focus its inspections on your evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses which helps to make inspection sharper and more helpful while still providing evaluations against a national framework. At the same time, we can lighten the burden of inspection on you (OFSTED 2005:1).

There is now a commitment at all levels of OFSTED to use the SEF to encourage schools 'to develop their own process of self-evaluation and to fit the completion of the SEF into their core systems as best suits them' (OFSTED 2004:7). This is an interesting approach to mandated self-evaluation. The central authority does not provide a prescribed methodology for producing data on which judgments will be made but it does insist that all data produced must fit into a template designed externally to the schools. In addition, OFSTED is clear about the elements that make up an effective evaluation. According to their publications, there are six acid tests of effective self-evaluation:

- It asks the most important questions about pupils' learning, achievements and development
- It uses a range of telling evidence to answer these questions
- It benchmarks the school's and pupils' performance against the best comparable schools
- It involves staff, pupils, parents and governors at all level

- It is integral to the school's central systems for assessing and developing pupils and for managing and developing staff
- It leads to action (OFSTED 2004: 7)

What this means in practice is that the SEF asks schools:

- To evaluate their progress against an inspection schedule
- To set out the main evidence on which this evaluation is based
- To identify strengths and weaknesses
- To explain the action the school is taking to remedy the weaknesses and develop the strengths (OFSTED 2005: 1)

The form seeks to provide contextual information on the school, cover all relevant aspects of the schools work and perhaps most importantly to fulfil statutory requirements. It is envisaged that the SEF be filled out prior to the beginning of the school inspection and used as a basis for that inspection although it is not compulsory for schools to use it. This latter point is emphasised throughout the document and there is considerable pressure put on schools to view this as a critically important document. The instructions on the form make this quite explicit when it states,

The SEF is intended to record the outcomes of your self-evaluation. As such, it should be an accurate diagnostic document with all conclusions fully supported by the evidence. It should indicate key strengths and weaknesses, and what needs to be tackled to effect improvement. Inspectors will make considerable use of the SEF when discussing their arrangements for inspection. The impact of your self-evaluation in helping to bring about improvement will be a major factor in their judgments about the effectiveness of your leadership and management and your capacity to improve in the future. (OFSTED 2006: 3)

It is unlikely that any school community reading this would misunderstand the extreme importance placed on the accurate completion of this document by the English inspectorate.

The form itself is approximately 37 pages long and is divided into three sections:

- Part A dealing with self-evaluation
- Part B dealing with factual information about the school

- Part C dealing with information about compliance with statutory requirements (Appendix A)

It is designed to provide a set of indicators which seek to assess the quality of the school under a range of headings which include the following (see Table 8.2).

The Whole School
Teaching and Learning
Pupil Guidance and support
Leadership and management
Pupil Achievement
Curriculum
The school in the community

Table 8.2: *SEF Headings*

Staff are expected to rate the school on a four point scale:

- Inadequate
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Outstanding

One of the innovative aspects of the SEF is the facility provided by OFSTED that allows schools to enter the material online and provides a range of reporting and editing functions that should, in theory at least, enable the school awaiting inspection to tailor their data to the requirements of the visiting team.

There is some lack of clarity as to whether this is actually a form to encourage self-evaluation or whether it is simply a summary of existing data (MacBeath 2003). Also, because of the central importance of the SEF to the overall judgement made about

individual schools there are serious questions as to whether schools will actually include all relevant information as is recommended in improvement focused self-evaluation (Hofman, Dukstra and Hofman 2005) or whether the useful information will be cherry picked and included in an attempt to present the school in the best possible light. To a number of writers, MacBeath being the most vocal, this type of evaluation is more accurately described as 'self-inspection' rather than proper self-evaluation insofar as it could be argued that it is 'simply doing the inspectors job for them' (2004: 4). This reality is further emphasised by the inspectorate's maintenance of their position as the ultimate arbiters of quality in the school. While they might 'take into account' the schools own analysis of its work, the final decision still rests with them. As MacBeath points out, 'there is no pretence that this is an equal partnership' (2006: 7).

Whatever about its actual status as a instigator of valid self-evaluation, its very complexity has resulted in the development of a series of support materials, both on paper and online, which seek to enhance the usage made by schools of the document. These support materials can be divided into two main types, those which seek to explain the SEF and assist in its completion and those which seek to complement the SEF and offer 'complementary processes which schools can use on an ongoing basis rather than simply for review' (MacBeath 2005:2).

Explaining the Self-Evaluation Form

When faced with the requirement to complete a 37 page long, complex and vitally important document that could have a profound influence on the future of their school, many Principals asked for help. Indeed OFSTED themselves explicitly acknowledge the need for this help when engaging in this type of high stakes reporting when they state that they are encouraging a number of external stakeholders 'to develop a range of tools, aids and training in self-evaluation which schools can pick and choose from' (OFSTED 2004: 7).

Among the most common types of help offered is that provided by Bristol Children and Young People's Services (Appendix B). This type of support consists of an explanatory document that seeks to provide advice and suggestions for the completion of each part of the SEF. The document emphasises that these suggestions 'are not part of the SEF and have been drawn together as an aid' (Bristol Guide, 2005). What is interesting about this is not only the fact that a local authority feels the need to provide such a guide but also that quite subtly it is beginning to influence the manner in which the SEF is completed. The provision of 'suggestions that are not part of the SEF' while not binding, is naturally going to influence what is included in the final report. Many other Local Education Authorities (see for example Hertfordshire, Sheffield) have developed similar tools and models to act as evidence gathering templates for schools.

This type of editorialising is even more explicit in the second part of the Bristol document where schools are provided with detailed information on how to rate their organisation using the four-point scale provided. What is fascinating about this section is the decision by the authors to enhance the schools understanding of the four point scale by providing detailed descriptors of two scale points, those of outstanding and satisfactory, which were not present in the August 2005 version of the guide to inspection. While these are provided 'as an aid and are not part of the new Inspection Framework' (2005: Bristol Guide) it does not take an enormous leap of the imagination to see how the information detailed here will have an impact on the type and quality of the judgments made by individual schools.

In practice, the guide offers a 29-page commentary on the completion of a 37-page form. As can be seen from the examples below (Figures 8.3 and 8.4) the commentary provided is useful insofar as it points schools to the resources needed to successfully complete the different sections of the form. Given the complexity and range of sources cited in the commentary once again, it is possible to detect a guiding hand in a process that in theory at least is seeking to provide a school with an opportunity to tell its own story.

<p style="text-align: center;">PART A: SELF-EVALUATION</p> <p>1. CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUR SCHOOL What are the main characteristics of your school?</p> <p><i>Drawing on Section B and C of this form and other relevant data, write a brief description of its features.</i></p> <p><i>(Please note that this is an opportunity for a brief summary of the main characteristics of the school and it is not necessary to repeat tables of data.)</i></p> <p>1a Please outline the main characteristics of the learners, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - their attainment on entry and how you know this; - their social and economic backgrounds, indicating the level of prosperity or deprivation.
--

Figure 8.3: Question 1 Part A SEF for Secondary Schools

The guidance document from Bristol seeks to provide the necessary information on how to successfully answer in the above extract. At the level of a simple numerical analysis, one question results in ten prompts for possible answers. Here then we see an explanation and clarification document encouraging yet more complexity and the provision of more and more detailed information on the school (Figure 8.4)

Overall then what this type of support is seeking to do is to make it easier for schools to complete a high stakes document in such a way as to present the best possible face to the visiting team of inspectors. As a methodology for ensuring this, it is undoubtedly a useful one. Having said that, serious questions must be raised about whether this is actually an example of self-evaluation. It is arguable that it is more akin to what Davis and Rudd term 'a limited preliminary inspection process' (2000:5) which prepares schools to face the more daunting external examination. We do not really see a 'bottom-up' approach in which the school seeks to tell its own story using its own words and highlighting its own concerns.

PART A: SELF-EVALUATION

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUR SCHOOL

What are the main characteristics of your school?

Drawing on Section B and C of this form and other relevant data, write a brief description of its features.

(Please note that this is an opportunity for a brief summary of the main characteristics of the school and it is not necessary to repeat tables of data.)

1a Please outline the main characteristics of the learners, including:

- **their attainment on entry and how you know this;**
- **their social and economic backgrounds, indicating the level of prosperity or deprivation.**

Advice and Prompts

- *Refer to KS2 attainment evidence against national attainment at KS2 – state which areas are lower/higher – what does this say about the strengths and weaknesses of your pupils and indicate any significant trends?*
- *Refer to any analysis of the Level of Social Deprivation, based on the Ward Level indices of Deprivation 2000, Sure Start local programmes data and January PLASC Postcode Data and PANDA information and comment on*
 - *A breakdown of the wards where pupils live*
 - *Educational background of parents*
 - *Employment domain*
- *Comment on parental aspirations.*
- *Comment on number of free school meals, falling or rising.*
- *Comment on numbers on SEN register, falling or rising, numbers of statements*
- *Comment on ethnicity of pupils (see PLASC, include Traveller information here)/EAL information/information on any Asylum Seeking families.*
- *Comment on Looked After Children/children at risk if appropriate.*
- *Comment on pupil mobility and patterns.*
- *Comment on significant changes affecting the school or its locality e.g. establishment of temporary housing and accommodation in local are, changes in Council Housing patterns.*
- *Comment on progression post 16 and post 18 where appropriate*

You need to convey clearly the impact of the above on your school, the provision you make and pupil outcomes. This is also an opportunity to talk about the indicators positively, expressing high expectations as well as those indicators which the school has to address in order to achieve high standards.

Figure 8.4: *Explaining the self-evaluation form*

Rather we are presented with a mechanism that encourages a school to design a narrative, using documentation provided by an external agency, highlighting issues that may or may not be of interest to the school and using a format that might not adequately allow them to tell their story. As a method for producing an impressive, lengthy and detailed report this

has much to recommend it. It is however arguable as to whether it is a methodology that actually allows schools tell the truth about themselves.

Moving Beyond the SEF - Self-Evaluation, Planning and Improvement

As the requirement to self-evaluate at a schools level has become more common within a range of European education systems, a number of support mechanisms designed to help the schools in question derive maximum benefit from the process have emerged. The 'conversion' of the English system to self-evaluation has seen the rapid growth of these support mechanisms in recent years. Some, like the Bristol example discussed above seek to assist in the completion of critical pieces of paperwork such as the SEF. Other interventions, while recognising the centrality of self-evaluation to the growth of the school, seek to present it in a wider context. One of the most interesting of these interventions is the Matrix jointly designed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in the UK and the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) (see Appendix C). Designed to support self-evaluation and action planning as well as offering access to online resources, this web based tool allows schools to assess their current position in a range of areas by asking them to review their practice against a set of levelled statements. Schools are subsequently provided with an action plan which draws from their own analysis of their current practice.

Somewhat confusingly for the novice user, the two sponsoring organisations use different sets of terminology when describing their processes of self-evaluation. The NCSL choose to use the term Matrix to define the individual areas for self-evaluation. Each of these matrices has three levels, a Matrix, a category and an aspect. BECTA in contrast chooses to speak of Frameworks which also have three levels, the element, the strand and the aspect. While there are undoubtedly valid reasons for choosing to engage in this terminological confusion, it seems a little redundant particularly as the process for judging value in each of the cases is almost identical. In order to lessen the need for duplication, the rest of this section will deal with an example drawn from the NCSL Matrix.

To begin the process, the user – either an individual teacher, group of teachers or management group – chooses to enter any one of thirteen individual areas (see Figure 8.5). Each of these areas contains a number of individual matrices. Users are asked to choose a matrix and to begin the process of assessing the quality of their schools work in the particular area under discussion.

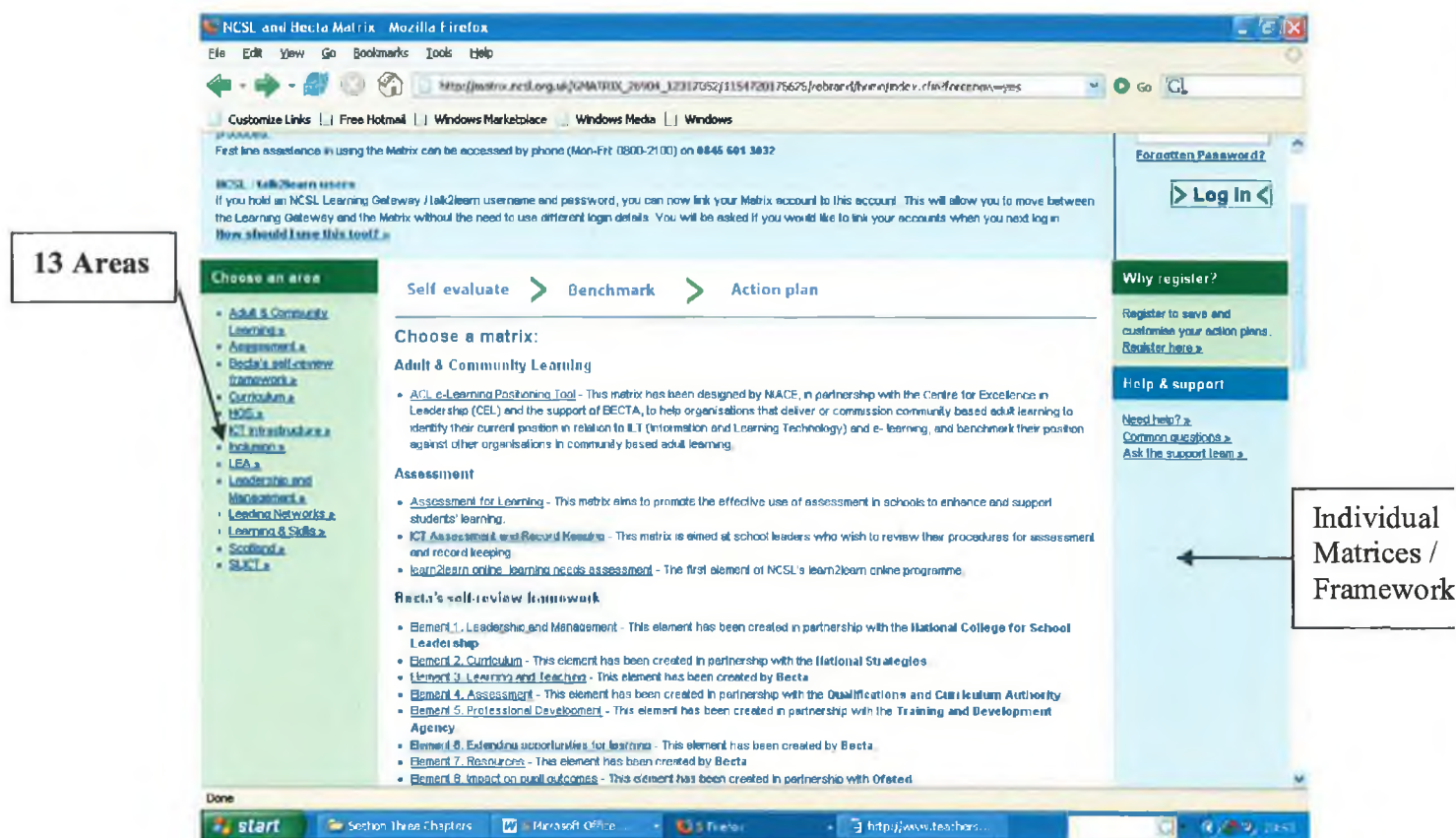


Figure 8.5: NCSL/ BECTA Matrix areas

Having entered into an individual matrix users are asked to make a judgment relating to the quality of their schools work in this particular area against a series of five levelled statements. The levels are labelled not applicable, pre-emergent, emergent, established and advanced. Given the non-intuitive titles given to the levels the fact that each of these statements has an explanation as to what that level actually means in practice printed beside it is to be welcomed. Users are asked to choose the one that most accurately describes the current reality of their school in this area. An opportunity is also given for the user to enter

independent comments and perhaps most importantly statements of evidence (see figure 8.6).

The screenshot displays the NCSL Matrix web application in a Mozilla Firefox browser. The page title is 'NCSL and Beta Matrix - Mozilla Firefox'. The address bar shows the URL: http://matrix.ncsl.org.uk/GMATRIX_26904_12317052/1154723532046/rebrand/matrix/evaluate.cfm?catid=400&catindex=. The page features a navigation bar with tabs: 'Overview', 'Self evaluate', 'Discover', and 'Action plan'. The 'Self evaluate' tab is selected. Below the navigation bar, there is a section titled '1a. Feedback'. It includes a sub-header 'Need help? Read the guide to this category >' and a prompt 'Please select one of the following position statements:'. There are five radio button options: 'Not applicable', 'Pre-emergent', 'Emergent', 'Established', and 'Advanced'. Each option has a corresponding description and a link to 'See an example >'. Below these options is a text area labeled 'Comments and evidence' with a note 'Please enter no more than 500 characters.' On the right side of the page, there is a login section with fields for 'Username' and 'Password', a 'Forgot Password?' link, and a 'Log in <' button. Below the login section, there are links for 'Help & support' (Need help? >, Common questions >, Ask the support team >) and 'Why register?' (Register to save and customise your action plans. Register here >). The bottom of the page shows a Windows taskbar with various open applications, including 'Section Three Chapters', 'Microsoft Office', and 'Firefox'.

Figure 8.6: NCSL Matrix Statements and Evidence

Having completed a rough average of about twelve of these sections the matrix is considered complete. The next stage is the automatic generation of an action plan using the responses provided. This is accompanied by a series of recommendations and advice as to how they might best be carried out. One of the key aspects of the action plan is that it can be edited and therefore can take account of the priorities and insights of the team or individual (see figure 8.7). Finally schools are led to specific online resources that might assist them in following through on the action plan decided.

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled 'NCSL and Becla Matrix - Mozilla Firefox'. The address bar shows a URL from ncsl.org.uk. The main content area displays 'Action planner for: 2. Assessment across the school' and '2a. Planning for assessment'. It includes fields for 'Current level' (Emergent), 'Description', and 'Comments and evidence'. Below this is a green box labeled 'Actions' with the text: 'Examine each scheme of work and identify where a range of assessment tasks can be well-used to inform judgements. Develop a whole school policy for assessment. Look at QCA which gives advice.' Another section, 'Making assessment judgements', also has an 'Actions' box with the text: 'Establish a common data set - what information do people want and need within school? Work with colleagues to moderate standardised judgements.' A box on the left labeled 'Recommended Actions' has arrows pointing to these two 'Actions' boxes. On the right, there is a login section with fields for 'Username', 'Password', and 'Forgot Password?', a 'Log in' button, and a 'Help & support' section with links like 'Need help?', 'Common questions', and 'Ask the support team'. At the bottom, there is a section for '2c. Assessment record systems'.

Figure 8.7: NCSL Matrix Recommend Actions

What is particularly interesting about this methodology for supporting the self-evaluation process is that it clearly links the concept of self-evaluation with that of action planning and improvement. This latter point is critical in an organisations understanding of the purpose of self-evaluation. Nevo (2002) and Scheerens (2002) emphasise the need to clearly identify the concept of self-evaluation in schools with that of ongoing improvement rather than seeing its sole purpose as being one linked to an external accountability framework. In practice this is what seems to happen. Data provided on the BECTA site indicates that 67% of respondents believed that use of The Matrix would help them quite significantly to deliver continuous improvement in their schools (BECTA 2006). Other research reports discussing practical implementation case studies of the matrix describe its use as a focus for internal dialogue between different groupings within schools. One such report, produced

by the University of Southampton, suggest that a scenario be established which would encourage,

Staff and senior management to work through some of the matrices separately.
Then they could compare their assessments with the other group and discuss the
suggested action plans together (Hanlan et al 2006:4)

Here then is a clear example of the use of a support mechanism as a methodology for encouraging internal dialogue with a view to improving both the quality of communication within a school as well as providing the school with the necessary data to base any improvement strategies on. The school is to a large extent responsible for the generation of the data as well as for the future steps taken as a result of this process. The fact that much of this data could also be useful when trying to complete the SEF is an incidental but welcome side effect.

The NCSL/ BECTA matrix is just one of a number of such support mechanisms that have emerged in recent years designed to enhance the quality of evaluation taking place in schools. Others, such as the Transforming Learning programme developed by the Hay Group (2006) allows key stakeholders in schools to evaluate important aspects of the school and classroom environment. Based on research conducted by the Hay McBear group into teacher effectiveness, the online facility seeks to provide, amongst other things, 'anonymous aggregate data on classroom climate, indicating trends across the school' (Hay Group 2006). The data is sourced from all levels of the school organisation, including pupils, and is used to provide tailored advice and action plans for individual teachers, subject departments and schools as a whole.

A similar, though more OFSTED focused support system is provided by Cambridge Education (School Centre.net: 2006). In essence this is a compilation mechanism where schools are given an opportunity to produce a self-evaluation plan drawn from an evidence base that can be attached to the final document. Staff are encouraged to interact with the material being gathered with a view to developing 'organic plans' that evolve over time. Again these plans can be focused at a range of levels from that of the individual teacher

through the school as a whole. At the whole school level, an explicit acknowledgement of the complexity of even the new self-evaluation OFSTED focus is the fact that one of the key selling points of this system is the fact that it includes the SEF form and submits it automatically to OFSTED for the school!

The examples provided above indicate that there has undoubtedly been a huge growth in the provision of support mechanisms for schools in the English system who are seeking to move to a more self-evaluation focused approach to school accountability. What is interesting in the context of the debate about the nature of school evaluation discussed earlier in this chapter is the type of support offered. Here, for the most part, with the exception of CEM clients, schools and teachers are being offered methodologies for recording their own data and arenas for presenting their own evidence. However they are also being asked to use frameworks, formulae, matrices and forms designed by some other group, normally external consultants, to gather and present that data. For this reason, it is possible to argue that this is a form of school evaluation that is being guided from outside rather than growing organically from within. Despite the many claims about organic growth, school led and improvement focused intervention, it is still somebody else who is guiding the process. In the next section we will look at systems that have emerged from the 'bottom up' to facilitate schools telling their own story, using their own resources and developing their own mechanisms for drawing together and validating data.

Supports Designed to Engage Teachers with the Theory and Practice of School Evaluation Theory With a View to Their Developing Their own Contextually Sensitive Models of Evaluation

As we have seen in earlier sections of this work, the concept of self-evaluation is one that has been discussed in educational literature for a number of decades. The work of Elliot (1995) is a good example of an earlier attempt to examine the implications of transferring responsibility for the public presentation of a narrative regarding the quality of educational provision from a centralised bureaucracy to individual school units. While Elliot would argue that this effort to create a schools focused, self-evaluation culture was ultimately unsuccessful, his location of this emerging strand of evaluation within the practitioner

research movement is an interesting one. The primacy of the needs and insights of the local over and above the demands and impositions of the national is a constant theme throughout much practitioner research. This form of research, far from disappearing from the late 1970's as its self-evaluation component seemed to, has emerged as one of the strongest streams within educational discourse in the latter years of the 20th and first years of the 21st centuries (Schon 1983; Silverman 2004, 2005; Gorard with Taylor 2004). Given its increasing popularity and emerging strength it is perhaps inevitable that practitioner led research into the potential role to be played by self-evaluation in the future of school evaluation systems would re-emerge.

In this section, we will examine two projects which were designed to draw on schools knowledge of assessing quality with a view to producing a model for evaluating what happens in schools in a sensitive and realistic way. The first of the projects, *Schools Must Speak for Themselves*, was a UK project which ran from the late 1990's to the early 2000's. It sought, in the words of one of its sponsoring organisations, to provide a 'bottom-up model for teachers and other school communities to gain information and a picture of their own schools which they could act on' (McAvoy 2004: 19).

The second project under discussion is the *School Self Evaluation Towards a European Dimension* project funded by the EU as a Comenius project. Where the previous project was a macro level project seeking to investigate the role of self-evaluation at a national level, this was very much a micro project which sought to examine different methodologies for training individuals to take part in self-evaluation in schools. To some extent these projects represent the two ends of the scale of 'bottom up' research in the area of self-evaluation and for this reason it is valuable to examine them both in some detail.

Schools Must Speak for Themselves: Giving a Voice to the School Community

The research that was eventually to lead to the publication of the highly influential *Schools Must Speak for Themselves* in the year 2000 (MacBeath) began life in the mid 1990's. In 1994, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in Britain commissioned a study from Strathclyde University into self-evaluation in primary and secondary. This study resulted

in an initial report entitled, 'Schools Speak for Themselves'(MacBeath et al 1996) which was published in January 1996 and distributed to every primary and secondary school in England and Wales. A follow up study conducted by the same researchers on the impact of the initial report on school evaluation practices resulted in the 2000 publication.

Although beginning life as a UK project, it has been highly influential not least in its contribution to the Evaluating Quality in School Education Socrates project which involved 101 schools in 18 countries (MacBeath et al 2000). In addition, the methodology proposed by the project has been adapted and adopted by other European countries perhaps the most significant of these being Greece which launched its own version of it in 2001.

As a project it provides an interesting counterpoint to the type of top down, imposed system of school evaluation that was being implemented in England and Wales during the period in which the research was taking place. From the outset MacBeath was clear about the reasons why he argues that schools must have a voice in the self-evaluation debate. He opens the book by stating that,

Schools speak for themselves. They sometimes do so unconsciously, conveying implicit messages about their priorities and values. Some schools are able to speak for themselves with a higher degree of self-awareness and self-assurance. They know their strengths and are secure enough to acknowledge their weaknesses
(MacBeath 1999:1)

Thus in MacBeath's understanding of evaluation, all schools have a voice in the debate as to quality, accountability, judgment and value in education it is just that some are more able or more aware of how to use that voice. A critical element of the research underpinning this work is the idea that schools must be facilitated to find a way of presenting their views on all of the key questions relating to school evaluation to a wider public. MacBeath sees this as being a critical aspect of any workable system of school evaluation. He argues that,

There is an emerging consensus and body of wisdom about what a healthy system of school evaluation looks like. Its primary goal is to help schools to maintain and improve through critical self-reflection. It is concerned to equip teachers with the know-how to evaluate the quality of learning in their classrooms so that they do not have to rely on an external view, yet welcome such a perspective because it can enhance and strengthen good practice.
(MacBeath 1999:1)

Here then is a blueprint for what evaluation should entail. It should:

- Facilitate improvement through critical self-reflection
- Equip teachers to make judgments about quality and remove the need for reliance on an external view
- Develop a confidence in teachers to engage with and see the value in an external perspective on their work

While not revolutionary, these ideas flew in the face of an educational establishment that, at the time at least, celebrated the primacy of the external view of the inspectorate over the internal opinion of teachers and anecdotally at least perceived a system that sought to prioritise the views of teachers working in the system as being in some way seditious (McAvoy 2004:19).

It is important to emphasise that what was produced both from the initial *Schools Speak for Themselves* report and the subsequent research that went into *Schools Must Speak for Themselves* was not a dry analysis of the potential of self-evaluation in schools. While there was undoubtedly a deal of advocacy for the principle of self-evaluation, there was also a commitment to providing practical advice for schools and teachers seeking to engage in self-evaluation. Thus the initial 1995 research resulted in the production of a Framework for self-evaluation which could be used by schools and authorities for quality assurance and school improvement (MacBeath 1999: 104). What is important about this framework is not just its existence but also the philosophy underpinning it. MacBeath (1999: 104) is able to state that ‘they are an end point rather than a starting point. They evolve from discrete parts into a coherent whole and it is this process of evolution that gives them meaning’.

By emphasising their iterative nature, he is explicitly acknowledging the critical role of the individual teacher and school community in shaping and applying the framework for their own needs. What both publications provide then are, ‘guiding principles’ rather than ‘neat and tidy set(s) of prescriptive steps’ (ibid. p 104). The initial publication is even clearer

about the necessity of seeing the proposed framework as a flexible entity. The authors argue that while,

It would not make sense for every school to invent its own framework from scratch, neither would it be realistic to expect a single, national framework to be equally applicable to all schools across the country and across sectors. Research has consistently shown that 'ownership' of the criteria and of the process is crucial if lasting and sustainable improvement is to occur as a result of such self-evaluation.

(MacBeath et al 1996: 72)

The challenge to researchers like MacBeath and his colleagues was to create a framework that makes their approach to self-evaluation based on empowerment, ownership and sustainability. The framework developed in the course of the late 1990's claims to be such an approach. In practice therefore the framework developed consists of four key elements:

- An overarching philosophy
- Procedural guidelines
- A set of criteria or indicators
- A tool kit

Many of these elements are common to other approaches to self-evaluation (Eurydice 2004). However what is interesting about this approach to developing capacity in teachers and schools is the order in which they are presented.

By choosing to begin with what is essentially an explanation of the principles underpinning the framework *Schools Must Speak for Themselves* clearly seeks to engage teachers from the outset. This is in keeping with a view of teachers and other stakeholders as active determinants of the success or otherwise of any model of school evaluation. Teachers must believe that their opinions are valued, that the methodology for making decisions about what happens in their school is relevant and that any framework for valuing the quality of work is based in the real world. If this does not happen, the critical sense of ownership mentioned in so much of the literature on self-evaluation is virtually impossible to achieve.

It is only when there is a level of conceptual commitment to the idea of self-evaluation that it is possible to establish procedures and practical steps that will allow the vision implicit in

the approach to evaluation be realised. The initial framework suggests five key steps at this stage. They are:

1. Start with the end in mind – be aware of where the evaluation will lead and what it will achieve for all of the key stakeholders
2. Create the climate- self-evaluation needs a climate of trust, collegiality and openness to succeed. The creation of climate, while potentially time consuming, is critical to the implementation of the framework
3. Promise confidentiality – because of the perceived career challenging element to any form of evaluation, it is critically important that participant's feel free to be open when engaging with the framework. One way of doing this is to promise confidentiality and non-disclosure of identifying details when presenting data about the school.
4. Take a risk- engaging in self evaluation can be risky and this must be acknowledged. Stakeholders should be encouraged to assess these risks and to ensure that they fully understand that not all they discover in the course of the evaluation process may be to their liking, The critical factor of course is to convince them that the end product will make the initial challenges and difficulties worthwhile.
5. Engage a critical friend- because of the potentially threatening reality underpinning the honest analysis of an organisation, it is advisable in the view of MacBeath, to appoint an external person who can act as a sounding board, facilitator and supporter. Given the title of 'critical friend' this individual is potentially critical to the success or otherwise of the self-evaluation endeavour in any particular school.

The next stage of the self-evaluation process suggested by this project is the establishment of criteria, 'the yardsticks for what self-evaluation measures' (MacBeath 2003:5). There are two possible ways of generating criteria:

1. Adapt the extensive range of sources available for the particular context faced by the school

2. Through a process of dialogue and reflection within the organisation, develop a set of criteria that accurately reflect the interests, abilities and concerns of all stakeholders involved.

While the former might be viewed as a quicker and less resource intensive process, the latter is seen as guaranteeing a far greater sense of ownership of the final product. This in turn, it is suggested, will ultimately lead to a greater cohesion and commitment within the organisation. The original Schools Speak for Themselves research gives an example of the type of criteria that might be developed by a school in the course of a reflective dialogue in preparation for self-evaluation. These criteria, developed in the course of the research, seek to provide an indication of what is to be measured, the type of evidence that might be amassed, and the methods for uncovering this evidence. The structure is simple, practical and accessible (see Figure 8.8).

The final stage of the model of self-evaluation proposed by MacBeath and colleagues involves the design of suitable tools for gathering useful and relevant data. A range of practical and realistic advice is offered, particularly when attempting to deal with what should be measured. The suggestion that it is 'important not to be tempted into measuring only what is easily measurable' is added to a warning that schools should 'not yield to the temptation of using tools most immediately to hand'. Indeed schools are warned that, 'the things that are most important to you are likely to be the hardest to measure' (MacBeath 1999:112).

School communities are encouraged to develop or use tools that will give them the information that they want. The key here is the provision of usable, understandable data that will allow schools to examine their own performance.

Indicator: There is a shared sense of teamwork among all staff

Quantitative evidence: Opportunities for joint staff working within the timetable. Participation in school committees and working parties. Incidence of shared planning/teaching.

Qualitative evidence: Staff feel that their views are valued. Staff seek out colleagues for support. Staff feel ownership of policies. Staff value use of INSET. Staff offer constructive criticism or advice.

Methods/Instruments: Survey of uses of staff time. Review of school documentation. Staff feedback forms e.g. evaluation forms after INSET. Peer observation/feedback.

(MacBeath et al 1996: 98):

Figure 8.8: *Sample Schools Speak for Themselves criteria*

In line with this, there is a strong recommendation to be circumspect when choosing what to measure. Rather than attempting to measure everything schools are encouraged to concentrate on what is important to them at a particular time and measure that well.

Here then is the philosophy of the approach to self-evaluation writ large. Instead of a quick fix methodology, which seeks to provide banks of easily digestible data of questionable value, there is a commitment to developing a philosophy of evaluating that will become part of the schools daily life. The approach to evaluation which seeks to convince of its value before even contemplating asking questions about what is to be examined is in direct contrast to the type of top down approaches favoured by many governmental and non-governmental bodies at the time. There is also a subtle though significant critique of the type of support mechanisms discussed in the previous section of this chapter. It is possible to argue that these methodologies are designed to explain rather to engender commitment,

to provide a structure rather than helping schools to develop a structure and to encourage commitment to an external set of values and criteria rather than encouraging schools to develop their own.

In the final analysis MacBeath is not afraid to explore the broader policy implications of this philosophy of evaluation. He is fully prepared to acknowledge the challenge they pose not only to modes of evaluation current in many EU and OECD countries but also to the very question of how we value and judge education. In the final section of the 1999 publication he argues that the public debate on education must, as a result of this study, ask the following questions:

- What are schools for and who are they for?
- What counts as important and what makes for improvement?
- How should success and improvement be measured?

(MacBeath 1999: 150)

He suggests at the end of the book that there are four key priorities that flow from this four-year study. They are:

- Self-evaluation should be central in any national approach to school improvement.
- Accountability and self-improvement should be seen as two strands of a single interrelated strategy.
- Provision of time and resources has to feature as a key issue in school improvement.
- School inspection should continue to be a feature of the drive towards school-improvement, but as part of a collaborative strategy with schools and local authorities.

(MacBeath 1999: 150)

As well as being significant in themselves what is interesting about the above list of priorities is how subsequently they have moved into the mainstream of most official and academic discourse about school evaluation. Even the most cursory review of the material

presented in the earlier parts of this work will give a sense of the how much of what MacBeath proposed has become accepted wisdom in many European education systems.

It would of course be incorrect to ascribe the rise of official acceptance of self-evaluation in the broader EU educational community and beyond to the work of one set of writers and one series of reports. Other writers such as McLaughlin (1991), Mueret and Morlaix (2003), Nevo (1995, 2002) and Scheerens (2002) to name but a few were making much the same arguments. However what is incontestable is the amount of official notice taken of the outcomes of this work. We have already seen that the Greek ministry for education chose to adapt it for use in their system, as has that of Hong Kong. Perhaps more important is its general influence on the Evaluating Quality in School Education – A European Pilot Project. This project is widely recognised as being one of the most important to have been undertaken in the area of school evaluation and its outcomes have been referenced in a number of studies since its completion in 1999. One of the most significant references to its importance came in the 2001 report written by Standaert on behalf of the Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectors in Education (SICI) which acknowledged that it was, to use Rudduck's phrase "engaging and empowering" (1996:84). MacBeath, when seeking to assess the elements from the studies which had the most impact, suggests that they include:

- The central involvement of the key stakeholders in the process
- Identifying what matters most to teachers and school leaders in evaluating school quality and effectiveness
- The support and challenge of 'critical friends' chosen by, or in consultation with schools
- The dialogue which flowed from the different viewpoints and the press for supporting evidence
- The repertoire of tools for use by teachers
- The simplicity and accessibility of the framework
- The focus on learning and the support for teaching.

(2004:21)

In the context of this study then what is important about this rich seam of research is the way it has impacted on how self-evaluation is viewed within the EU and many other countries. By choosing to emphasise the importance of ownership, commitment, respect and value to a school community when examining evaluation processes MacBeath and colleagues have helped re-frame much of the official dialogue about the role of evaluation in schools. They were however successful in developing a workable, realistic and popular methodology of self-evaluation that allowed schools amass information about what they felt was important in their everyday work. As such, they empowered schools and allowed them to see themselves as partners in the evaluation process rather than victims of an over mighty inspectorate.

This research also demonstrates how insights generated in one education system, in this case that of England, can have a significant impact in others. The transition of this research from a publication by a sectoral stakeholder to a touchstone of official reports on the future of school evaluation is an interesting one. It might also be seen as serving as a model for other innovations in the field, including those discussed earlier in this section. This transfer of ideas from the local to the national and transnational has the potential to become far more common in an era where the maintenance of standards and the assurance of quality in education is increasingly being seen as a key factor in ensuring the economic health of existing nation states and trading blocks (OECD 2005, EC 2002).

It is precisely this transnational aspect of the evaluation process that the second support methodology for evaluation to be investigated sought to enhance and we will now examine it in some detail.

School Self Evaluation Towards a European Dimension – Training Individuals to Self-Evaluate

The School Self Evaluation Towards a European Dimension project was a Comenius funded research intervention which sought to examine the potential impact of the emerging concentration on self-evaluation in a European context. Specifically, the project sought to design and implement a training programme for school leaders who had an interest in or

experience of self-evaluation. As such the project is of particular interest to individuals or groups who are seeking to prepare networks of teachers to begin the process of evaluating their own work prior to the adoption of this methodology by a whole school community. This focus should be viewed in the context of the projects discussed earlier in this chapter. It is clear from the support mechanisms discussed that the majority assume the school to be the basic unit of intervention when seeking to embed a culture of self-evaluation. What the 'Towards a European Dimension' project and indeed the research conducted in the course of the study being reported in this publication suggests is that quite often it is the individual teacher or school leader who develops an early interest in self-evaluation. While there are a range of reasons for the development of this interest, including their own private study and formalised continuous professional development (CPD) interventions, what they have in common is a need for support in the early stages of their development as self-evaluators.

One of the key emphases of the 'Towards a European Dimension' study was the creation of a transnational network of practitioners willing to share experiences relating to self-evaluation. The chosen mechanism for achieving this was the design and delivery of an intensive twelve unit training programme on the principles and practical application of self-evaluation in a European school setting. Of course, there was an awareness of the fact that evaluation does not take place in a vacuum and even programmes designed to enhance the skills of individuals have to be cognizant of the context in which the evaluation will take place, namely the school. For this reason, the training programme developed in the course of the project was specifically designed to provide participants with the tools to enable them initiate self-evaluation processes within their own schools.

From the outset of the project, there was a clear focus on combining the practical with the theoretical with a view to producing something usable for school leaders from a range of educational settings. Thus the initial proposal set itself the task of creating a CPD course that would:

- a) Provide a European overview of evaluation systems of schools,
- b) Encourage an exchange of experiences,
- c) Increase awareness of self-evaluation techniques,

- d) Train participants in the use of self-evaluation instruments and
- e) Design training materials and tools useful for future activities also through open and distance learning (ODL)

(ISOC: 2006)

By the time of the projects completion, the co-coordinators chose to summarise the courses outcomes by stating that inputs were provided on:

- Context and principles influencing external evaluation and self-evaluation programmes in the European educational context;
- Origins of school self evaluation, definitions, approaches, methods and implementation issues;
- The instruments used to gather information on school self-evaluation;
- The use of the information gathered.

(Barzano 2002: 84)

While there is a great deal of similarity between the two lists, it is interesting to note in the light of the heavy use of online support in later UK projects mentioned earlier that the commitment to using ODL to make training modules available seems to have disappeared.

The course itself was designed over a two-year period and was eventually presented to twenty-one head teachers from twelve different European countries. As has been mentioned earlier, the course was subdivided into twelve workshop units which were presented over the course of a week. While many of the workshop units were specific to the particular group undertaking the course there were a number of core modules which could be seen as having wider application (see table 8.3).

Unit 1: Introduction to course	Unit 2: Self Evaluation and External Evaluation: an international perspective
Unit 3: School self-evaluation: origins, definitions, approaches, methods and implementation issues	Unit 4: Presentation of a range of instruments
Unit 5: Data analysis and introduction to group work	Unit 6: Use of information gathered
Unit 7: Presentation of key elements of Italian education system	Unit 8: Fieldwork in school visits
Unit 9: Preparation for final 'consortium'	Unit 10: Course evaluation
Unit 11: Final Consortium	Unit 12: Poster session

Table 8.3: *Training Programme designed by The School Self Evaluation Towards a European Dimension Project*

In the course as outlined it could be argued that Units 2-6 would probably form the basis of any serious attempt to examine the role of self-evaluation in any education system. It is also possible to make the case for the other units included, particularly those devoted to the creation of a group dynamic and the encouragement of the public communication of ideas generated by groups. These latter tasks are centrally important to any attempt to create a wider network of education professionals interested in embedding self-evaluation in their own particular organisations.

As is the norm with Comenius projects, there was an extensive evaluation of the course undertaken which was used to assess the participants' opinions. In general there was a welcome for the course with particular attention being paid to,

- The quality of the organisation
- The usefulness of the experience – particularly the mixture of theory and practice
- The opportunities to share experiences with practitioners from other educational contexts

(Barzano 2002: 94-95)

The latter point was seen as being significant with an acknowledgement that sharing these experiences allowed individuals broaden 'personal and national context(s) and providing suggestions for 'possibly avoiding the pitfalls discovered by others' (ibid. p 95).

Given the centrality of the transnational networking aspect of the research, it is not surprising that this specific aspect was evaluated. A number of interesting findings emerged which emphasised the generally positive responses to the establishment of this type of network. In particular participants highlighted a number of important aspects which allowed them develop a genuinely interactive network. They included:

- The development of a common language when dealing with self-evaluation, which allowed them to transcend the terminological difficulties which almost inevitably emerge whenever individuals working in different educational settings begin to communicate.
- The intercultural aspect of the interactions. Individuals were introduced to the realities of other approaches to self-evaluation which were influenced by specific national and regional contexts.
- The creation of personal relationships and the development of plans for future collaboration
- The enormous benefit to be derived from belonging to a dynamic, engaged and international group of professionals with similar interests.

(ibid. p 95)

There were of course some suggestions for improvement, which while being important for the particular group, tended to deal for the most part with organisational issues. However some of the more widely focused suggestions included:

- Greater terminological clarity when discussing evaluation in an international context
- The need for a comprehensive framework when discussing self-evaluation in a transnational setting

Perhaps the greatest testament to the success of this project as an instigator of international partnerships was the decision of a number of key partners to continue their research relationship in a subsequent Comenius 3 project. Entitled, *Developing European Schools into Learning Organisations (DESLO)*, this project sought to incorporate the insights generated during the 'Towards a European Dimension' study into a project with an organisation development focus. Specifically it sought 'to develop and/or highlight within schools key approaches which contribute to the setting up of a learning organisation such as self-evaluation' (DESLO 2006)

In general terms what research interventions like the 'Towards a European Dimension' study represent are support mechanisms for the development of self-evaluation that choose to focus on the enhancement of the skills of key individuals in school communities. The type of programme developed, while similar in content to many other training programmes, has an additional aspect that is critical to the success of interventions targeted at the individual. This aspect is the creation of a network capable of supporting, challenging, engaging and enabling the individual self-evaluator. This particular study is important in that its support network was transnational and involved the development of relationships between educators that took them beyond the confines of their own contexts. It is possible to see how a similar dynamic might be created between individuals working within the same national but different sectoral contexts with much the same results. What is important in the creation of such networks is:

1. The development of a common language for explaining what actually happens in the course of a self-evaluation process
2. The provision of a safe, encouraging space for the development of network relationships
3. Clear, focused and useful inputs designed to stimulate discussion and future work
4. The provision of an opportunity to engage in practical activities related to self-evaluation in real educational settings.

While the creation of the conditions outlined above is challenging it is not impossible and later sections of this work will outline one particular attempt to do exactly that.

Supports designed to collect and analyse data independently for schools

In addition the two major models of evaluation support discussed a third almost hybrid system has been pioneered by the Curriculum, Evaluation and Management Centre (CEM) at the University of Durham. The CEM centre was mentioned briefly in chapter six of this study and in particular its central concept of 'distributed research' was investigated as a possible theoretical basis for the self-evaluation programme under discussion in the section. In practice what the CEM centre offers is a methodology of self-evaluation whereby data is collected from schools by an external body, analysed and fed back to the school. What makes the model interesting is that at all times the data remains the property of the education community from which it is drawn and they alone can decide what to do with it. At no stage does CEM offer the data to any external body and even goes so far as to forbid participating schools from using its information for comparative publicity purposes. In an attempt to summarise what CEM seeks to achieve, Coe and Tymms provide the following statement

The CEM Centre's work seeks to improve the educational system within which it finds itself, rather than simply to research them from the outside... The CEM Centre has always sought to value evidence rather than authority, solve problems rather than blame, to generate high quality data and to promote randomized controlled trials and efficiency. (2003:639)

The essential philosophy of this type of support system is summed up by the paragraph above. It is

- Located within the community
- Data led
- Organisationally empowering
- Solution not blame focused

As mentioned previously, CEM chose to use the term 'distributed research' (Fitz-Gibbon 1996) to encapsulate this philosophy. Coe and Tymms suggest that at the core of this concept is the

idea that the recipients of the feedback (i.e. teachers in schools and colleges) are themselves active researchers in the process, analysing and interpreting the data, rather than simply passive recipients. The research is seen as a collaborative process (2003:641)

The central argument is that CEM and the schools form a partnership to produce and analyse data which can be used to investigate key aspects of the schools performance. While it is a partnership, it is a partnership with clearly defined roles. CEM records, produces and analyses the data while the school interprets and uses it in a way that it sees fit. This is a very particular type of collaboration however it is one that CEM rightly points out provides a strong 'evidence base' (ibid. p 649) from which to make decisions.

The process of generating the evidence that is at the heart of the CEM approach relies almost exclusively on the application of a series of 'information systems' (CEM:2006). Each of these systems covers a set period of schooling of between one and four years in length. The process begins with the collection of a baseline assessment and finishes with the recording of an outcome measurement. (Table 8.4) The next stage involves

Residual gains (being) calculated between the two, allowing students' achievements on the outcome measure to be compared with the achievements of a national sample of students who started from the same point

(Coe and Tymms 2004: 643)

CEM Information Systems		
System	Age Range	Description
ALIS – A Level Information System	16-19	Measures value added at A-level using GCSE as baseline. Also gathers attitudinal data on teaching
YELLIS – Year 11 Information System	14-16	Baseline fro GCSE grades examining maths, vocabulary and perceptual reasoning
MidYIS – Middle Years Information System	11-16	Curriculum free assessment to generate baseline for value added measures
PIPS- Performance indicators in primary schools	5-12, Infant and Junior	Baseline data generated at all stages of primary school. Also looks at attitudinal and self-esteem data
PIPS- Performance indicators in primary schools	4-5. On-entry baseline and follow up	Assesses baseline entry data for students
ASPECTS – Assessment Profile on entry for Children and toddlers	3-4	Gathers information from home and pre-school to feed into schools and PIPS

Table 8.4: CEM Major Information Systems

Alongside the statistical data other contextual and attitudinal material is collected which can add to the depth and quality of the overall analysis provided.

What is immediately noticeable about the system is its comprehensive nature. Every stage of a school child's life, at least in the UK setting, is covered by a sophisticated and apparently contextually and chronologically appropriate instrument. This information is tailored in a majority of cases to tie in with the state mandated measurement stages such as

Key Stage tests and other national tests including GCSE and A-level (CEM 2006). In addition, there is a pronounced concentration on the measurement of the individual student performance not only against a national norm but also against their own potential performance as indicated by their baseline scores. This latter measurement, known as the value added dimension, produces some useful and at times challenging data for parents, pupils and teachers (FitzGibbon 2000).

The CEM instruments can also be used as a methodology for evaluating the quality of data being generated and used by external bodies such as Departments of Education. Here the independent nature of the Centre becomes a vital part in the process. They have both the ability and the standing to allow them take government data and critique it both methodologically and conceptually. A recent research report commissioned by the English National Association of Head Teachers used the CEM expertise to critique the English Key Stage approach to value added. As well as providing a comprehensive report, Tymms and Dean were able to make the statement that

although value-added information is an essential tool for professionals, the publishing of value-added indicators in their current form is misleading and should be discontinued.

(2004: 5)

Here we see an independent evaluation unit using their data generating and analysis reputation of enter into the policy making arena in order to facilitate a genuine dialogue between schools and external stakeholders.

As well as specific examples such as the one above, Tymms and Coe (2004) suggest that the availability of independent data has resulted in significant strides being made by CEM in the area of evaluation research practice in general. Citing three research themes, they argue that CEM reports have provided a valuable national insight into the value of practice and policy in the areas of standards, the long term impact of effective schools and the influence of different homework policies (2003:649). While interesting in themselves, these reports are important in that they demonstrate how the process of generating data can, over

a period of time, facilitate the dialogue that in theory at least exists at the heart of any successful evaluation system.

The CEM model is a fascinating one in the context of developments in school evaluation systems and as such it deserves to be included in any analysis of emerging support systems. It is quite different to the OFSTED type of external supports discussed earlier in the chapter and closer to the 'bottom up' approaches championed by MacBeath, Barzano et al. However there is one major difference from the latter approach as there is no real attempt to develop teachers as knowledge generators. Rather than giving them ownership of the process of data production, CEM seeks to give them ownership of a rich and detailed stream of data. This is a subtle though significant difference. Teachers now have the information on which to base the telling of their story to any external body however they have been provided with this by someone else. The impact of this on their own engagement with the data produced is difficult to assess. A site visit conducted by the researcher certainly demonstrated clearly that management in the schools which chose to use any of the CEM instruments tended to be very pleased with the data it gave them. CEM newsletters also seem to suggest that the process provides interesting information for teachers to use in individual classes. However, there is no sense of them taking charge of the data and making it their own in the way that many self-evaluation theorists would argue was essential for a genuinely engaged dialogue to take place.

A second issue of debate surrounds the context within which CEM was developed. The UK, and in particular England, has a long tradition of demanding statistically robust and high quality data from individual schools on a regular basis. For this reason, schools are used to the requirement to keep and communicate vital data. This is not the case in all countries and in particular, it is not the situation that exists in Ireland. Indeed it could be argued, as has been alluded to in an earlier chapter, that it is the very absence of data and evidence that makes the Irish system so unique and places great obstacles in the way of a supposedly data led school evaluation system.

Overall, the CEM approach is an interesting one that may, in time, find its way into an Irish school setting. However the current structure of the Irish system with its ambivalent attitude towards much statistical data would seem to suggest that this time could be an extended one. In any case, there seemed little chance of a similar approach to school evaluation and indeed teacher self-evaluation being developed in Ireland in the lifetime of this study and therefore the type of system represented by CEM was not considered appropriate for the study being designed.

Conclusion

Taking an overview of the type of support methodologies that have emerged in recent times in a European context it is possible to discern a number of important themes. Firstly, self-evaluation is now a mainstream concept and education systems throughout Europe are to some extent scrambling to find ways of integrating it into the every day lives of schools. The sheer number of initiatives and interventions being proposed by governments and transnational bodies give some indication of the seriousness with which the development of self-evaluation capacity is being viewed. A second theme to emerge is the centrality of the school itself to the process of developing that capacity. Virtually all methodologies proposed concentrate on enhancing the schools ability to gather data relevant to its own operation. Some choose to do this by forcefully guiding schools down a particular pathway using detailed frameworks and forms whereas others seek to give schools the opportunities to develop their own frameworks through which to tell their stories. While the school is undoubtedly the locus of investigation when it comes to self-evaluation, there is a recognition of the value of establishing networks of schools and indeed individual professionals who have an interest in augmenting their capacity to evaluate themselves. These networks are important in that they allow different perspectives emerge and challenge preconceived notions that are embedded in all school communities.

A third and final theme that has emerged is the contested nature of what it means to engage in self-evaluation. While there is an apparent unanimity as to the desirability of including self-evaluation as a part of our methods for assessing quality in educational provision there

is no real agreement as to how this should be done. The examples drawn from England presented earlier are a good example of this. A seemingly monolithic model of school evaluation based on external monitoring and accountability has been replaced by one that values self-evaluation at all levels. However many of those who dealt with the previous iteration of the system wonder whether the change has only taken place at the level of rhetoric and contend that the new model self-evaluation is little more than self-inspection. Whatever about the specifics of the debate, the discussion as to the type of relationship to be created between all stakeholders in school evaluation systems is a live one in England and throughout the EU. The position taken in this debate strongly colours how the different stakeholders involved seek to enhance the capacity of schools to evaluate themselves. This type of debate is not solely confined to the English system and has echoes in virtually all European attempts to come to terms with the emergence of self-evaluation as a concept to be considered.

The implications of each of these themes and some of the more specific areas of debate discussed earlier will be explored in later chapters. Particular attention will be paid to the context within which an Irish University Education Department sought to design and implement a training programme whose primary focus was to prepare participants self-evaluate as part of the process of engaging with the newly emerging system of school evaluation in Ireland.

Chapter Nine: Exploring the Terrain - Factors likely to influence the development of an evaluation training programme**Introduction**

Much of the material presented and discussed up to this point in this study has been concerned with providing an explanation of how the Irish education system has arrived at its current position on school evaluation. Trends in policy and practice from across the EU and OECD have been assessed, the experiences of school communities undergoing the process of evaluation have been gathered, analysed and presented and in the last chapter, a summary of how other systems assist schools who are attempting to discover things about themselves in a formal and rigorous manner was outlined. In this chapter, the focus of the study will move from broader policy trends and general system wide experiences to a more targeted analysis of the factors that influenced the development of the particular self-evaluation training intervention under discussion. The chapter will begin with an exploration of the particular policy priorities that shaped the two discrete groups of student teachers who undertook the training programme designed. The policy analysis demonstrates how a changing understanding of the nature and purpose of professional development studies in Irish education resulted in a situation where two apparently disparate groups of individuals could simultaneously take part in a process and produce data, reflections and insights that have value not only on their own but also as ways of shining light on each other. It continues with an in-depth analysis of the nature and function of the learning community in any professional development process in education. An important sub-theme investigated here is the nature of community formation and the potential of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to act as a catalyst for such a process. The chapter concludes with an exploration of not only the general role of ICT in the development of community but also examines elements of the online environment, most notably discussion fora and digital video technology, with a view to assessing their potential to act as initiators of a community creation process.

Background to the Programme: Policy and Practice in Irish Teacher Education

The programme of training for self-evaluation under discussion was developed over the course of three years at the School of Education Studies, Dublin City University. One of the fastest growing Education Departments in Ireland, it offers a range of programmes to teachers and other education leaders at undergraduate and postgraduate level. This study focuses on two particular groups:

- Students undertaking a four-year, concurrent initial teacher education degree programme which will qualify them to teach Science at second level. There were approximately 20 students in each of these cohorts for the duration of this study.
- Experienced teachers from a range of education settings who were seeking to upgrade their skills in a set of targeted CPD programmes. The groups undertaking these programmes varied in size from 35 to 55 during the period covered by this study.

While at first glance these might appear to be discrete groups from whom minimal cross over data might be drawn, in practice the changing reality of Irish teacher education policy means that their professional development followed a roughly parallel course for the duration of the study.

This changing context is an interesting one and it has had a major, though not often acknowledged, influence on teacher education provision within Ireland. Put simply, Ireland in common with most other OECD countries has undergone a period of rapid policy development in the area of education (Coolohan 2001). This has resulted in the development of a range of novel and at times poorly understood conceptual and structural changes that will have a significant impact on the nature of Irish teacher education provision in coming years. Probably the most significant of these has been the emergence of the Irish 'Teaching Council'. Established to 'promote and develop teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels' (The Teaching Council 2006) it is arguable that the Council is merely the most public manifestation of the rapidly changing context facing those involved in teacher professional development.

For the duration of this research, the programmes of study under discussion were being constantly re-calibrated and altered in order to take into account the changing policy reality. This was done in such a way as to ensure that students completing the degrees under investigation were not only aware of the changing landscape of education provision but also were in a position to meet the new professional requirements imposed by an evolving system. At the same time however, considerable attention was paid to providing the course participants with the skills and knowledge to engage with the new demands on their professional practice in considered and confident fashion. This has been done with a view to allowing them continually re-define and develop the understanding of the role of the professional educator in a broader social context which at times seems happier with the conception of teacher as technician rather than engaged professional.

This last contextual element is an important one when examining the broad background to the research. In recent years professionals involved in education in Ireland, in common with colleagues in many other countries, have been challenged by a number of discrete discourses relating to the most appropriate way to provide a formation for professionals that will ensure the development of a high quality, flexible and motivated cohort of educators. One such discourse, drawing its core ideas from the work of Schon (1983) amongst others, seeks to assert the primacy of reflection and self-knowledge exercised in a collegial atmosphere dedicated to the improvement of educational provision. Characterised by a commitment to action based on reflection this perspective argues that educators should be viewed as autonomous professionals capable of self-regulation and committed to the maintenance of quality in their daily practice.

An alternative, and at times conflicting discourse, argues that the centrality of the educational process to the economic and social health of a country demands a high degree of transparency and accountability with quality being assessed against clearly defined and easily measurable benchmarks. This perspective argues that educational professionals should be trained to apply the standards with precision and accuracy and that, to an extent at least, autonomy should be replaced by conformity to a set of well-calibrated and comprehensive standards.

For the duration of this research, and indeed beyond, the debate as to the most appropriate model of professional formation to be adopted was a live one (McNamara, Mulcahy and O'Hara 2001). Many course providers and practitioners instinctively reacted against the, 'myth of the formula' (believing that) a *single* cohesive blueprint for checking any teacher's performance, to which most professionals agree and which can be applied justly, cannot be devised (Brundrett and Silcock 2002: vi).

Indeed the criticisms of the reductionist, neo-liberal and behaviourist nature of many of the competence systems that have been developed (Velde 1999, Barnett 1994) would resonate with many Irish educators.

However, notwithstanding the many and comprehensive criticisms of competency based standards systems, it must be accepted that at a policy level they have many supporters (OECD 2005, Anderson 2005). While it is important to acknowledge and indeed validate the discomfort of many educators with the very notion of a conceptually limited competence approach, at a policy level the last decade has seen some significant structural changes in Irish education that has resulted the initial moves towards a system based around standards and competencies being taken. This has been matched by an international debate which has sought to find a compromise between the often conflicting demands of traditionally autonomous educational professionals and sophisticated, well calibrated and ostensibly transparent systems of public accountability within which they are increasingly asked to operate.

Quite often the point at which these two differing conceptions of the nature and role of the teacher in a society come into conflict is around the process of assigning value to the quality of education taking place. This process, as we have seen in previous chapters, is normally formalised in a system of school or indeed individual teacher evaluation. It is therefore not particularly surprising that evaluation systems have become arenas for at times quite fierce debate and conflict in recent years (McNamara et al 2002, McNamara and O'Hara 2006). Nor should it be considered particularly unusual for an evolving approach to initial teacher education to concentrate on the development of a methodology

for providing its students with a set of skills and professional practices to allow them to approach developing modes of school evaluation with knowledge and confidence.

Any methodology developed must be cognisant of the broader conceptual arguments around the role of autonomy and accountability mentioned earlier while at the same time be familiar with the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the particular approaches to school evaluation being developed within its locale. However it is as important that it takes into account the ways in which teachers, and indeed trainee teachers, are being afforded opportunities to examine their own practice and share the insights generated by such examinations through the rapid development and dissemination of innovations in the field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

A parallel strand of policy development in the area of teacher education has been its re-conceptualisation as a lifelong endeavour rather than a period of intensive initial training which might be followed at some indefinite future time by targeted training interventions. Irish policy documents have moved away from this idea and most now specifically mention the primacy of the 3 I's in Irish teacher education provision (Coolahan 2001, 2004). The three I's in question are:

- Initial teacher education
- Induction of newly qualified teachers
- In-service provision for experienced teachers.

By choosing to define these as priorities in the lifecycle of teaching, there has been a conscious decision to move away from the notion of teacher education finishing at the end of the period of initial training but instead seeing it as something that is continuous. This focus draws strongly on the policy priority of encouraging lifelong learning that dominated official Irish policy in the 1990's (DES 1995). Its maintenance in an era where training for the knowledge economy has become a dominant theme in educational policy is interesting in itself but outside the scope of this study.

Perhaps the most significant practical outcome of this dynamic policy context for the programme under investigation is the gradual though perceptible convergence in teacher

education provision at range of levels. While some of this is explicable in terms of a requirement to constantly update the profession in a time of change it is also indicative of a more general convergence in Irish education provision. This drawing together has resulted from both the internal demands of education providers but also from external, policy driven requirements that increasingly see education as a continuum and therefore are beginning to argue for a more integrated approach to initial and indeed in-service training.

For this reason then, both of the programmes of study under discussion have strong similarities basic structure. Both have three main elements:

- Core education disciplines – including psychology, sociology, philosophy, methodology
- Supervised work based practice
- Integrative group and individual projects

Running throughout both programmes is a reflective practice philosophy where participants are encourage to reflect on their professional practice through the lens of contemporary educational theory and vice versa. This latter approach also facilitates a reflective engagement with the issues that arise in the course of an education professional's life. Offered in modular format it also has the advantage of meeting many of the structural and curricular requirements set down in European policy documents such as the Lisbon agenda.

It is against this broad policy and practice background that the attempt to design a training programme for self-evaluating teachers was developed. The challenges posed to the researcher are self-evident. He was quite obviously facing a dynamic policy context where key decisions as to the future shape of teacher professional development were under discussion. In addition, he was also seeking to prepare individuals to engage with a process of school evaluation which itself was contested, fluid and at the beginning of the process at least, only a theoretical construct. While this background clearly posed challenges it also gave the course developer a remarkable amount of freedom. He was able to design and implement a programme that not only met the perceived national requirements in the emerging field of school evaluation but also allowed them integrate many of the insights generated by parallel research in other educational settings.

Designing a Training Programme for the Self-Evaluating Teacher – Core Principles

As has already been noted, the imminent emergence of a system of school evaluation left course providers in the ITE and CPD areas with something of a challenge. The Whole School Evaluation (WSE) pilot project clearly suggested that the type of system proposed would, in theory at least, place a great deal of emphasis on the self-evaluation carried out by schools (McNamara et al 2002). What was unclear was how exactly the self-evaluation aspect of the new system was to be married with the external evaluation element. While the WSE pilot gave strong hints, the period of inactivity between its publication in 1999 and the emergence of the Looking at Our Schools (*LAOS*) system of 2003 was a difficult one for those interested in preparing for the arrival of a new approach to school evaluation. Despite the problems posed by the lack of clarity the designer of the training programme under discussion decided to proceed with its development in 2002. He felt that the WSE pilot programme provided a strong enough outline as to the probable shape of the system to allow them to begin the process of developing a training based response for educational professionals. In addition, there was a strong agreement with the view of Scheerens when he argued that ‘the results of (such) pilots could have an important function in the shaping of initial and inservice teacher training programmes’ (2002: 66).

A decision was made therefore to begin the process of designing a training programme that would incorporate many of the insights generated by international research in school evaluation combined with emerging understanding of the broad outlines of the new system of Irish school evaluation that was visible in the WSE pilot.

At the outset of this process of programme development, it was important to decide how self-evaluation was to be conceptualised. The bottom-up approach advocated by MacBeath and others was the one that seemed to be most in keeping with the dynamic of the academic courses which were to house the training programme. The emphasis on course participants engaging in focused, research based reflection on current practice with a view to improving its quality seemed to resonate strongly with a view of evaluation that saw it as the process whereby a school community investigates its own practice in order to present its own narrative to an external audience. However there was an awareness that this investigation

would not take place in a vacuum. The Irish Department of Education and Science (DES) was in the process of producing a detailed and well-structured evaluation framework and the students who were undertaking this training programme would need to be able to present their own narratives in a way that would make sense in the context of this framework. What was needed therefore was a system that would allow course participants to engage in a dialogue with the external framework (Nevo 1995, 2002).

To some extent the promotion of dialogue has become an idea that it is impossible to find any real opposition to. As with the idea of stakeholder involvement in education the encouragement of dialogue between different sectors has become a staple of official rhetoric at all levels of the Irish education system (Coolahan 2004). Indeed the very model of participative social partnership that had such an influence on developments in Irish society over the last decade was based on the notion of encouraging dialogue between different sectoral groups. What is not often acknowledged are the implications for evaluation that follow from the emergence of this conversation. The instigation of a dialogue explicitly suggests that there are two parties whose voice needs to be heard. While it is possible to acknowledge the differential status of these voices (Nevo 2002) in the context of the broader evaluation debate the acceptance of the value of the teacher voice is an important one. Nevo (1995:186) argues that the inclusion of dialogue in any evaluation system is necessary for two reasons:

First to provide a better learning process to understand reality, and second, to increase the motivation to use what has been learned. A dialogue can make evaluation more insightful and increase evaluation utilization.

Here then dialogue is seen not only as a methodology for improving the quality of the evaluation, it is also central to the process of having its findings put into operation. In this understanding of evaluation therefore, 'external evaluators do not have to agree with all the findings of the internal evaluation but they have to perceive them as being good enough to argue with' (Nevo 2002: 8).

From the perspective of the researcher engaged in the process of designing a training programme to allow individuals take part in this dialogue, the implications are obvious. If

teachers are to take part in this conversation they need something to say! To put it another way, developing a system of evaluation that values dialogue suggests that all parties to this dialogue will have some information that will add to the overall quality of the conversation. From the perspective of the external inspector, this does not really pose too much of a problem. Centralised systems of school evaluation tend to have large banks of data available to them that deal both with system wide data and with school specific information. Individual teachers and schools for the most part do not. Therefore any programme of training for self-evaluation needs to provide teachers with the ability to generate data and, 'the skills required (for this) have mainly to do with work involved in finding evidence through information gathering and the interpretation of findings' (Eurydice 2004: 120).

For this reason at an early stage of the design process for the programme under discussion a decision was made concentrate a significant amount of time and resources on training participants to generate usable data to be included in their own evaluations.

The programme developed therefore had a significant section dealing with evaluation methods. However again taking into account the insights of Nevo (1995:173) there was a realisation that this training in methods had to involve more than just teaching a course on research methods to a group of teachers. While mastering the process of generating data was important it had to be done in such a way as to make it relevant to the context where the teachers were working. Course participants needed to be allowed to engage in a process of 'learning by doing, or learning by using' (Nevo 1995:174) where they could design and implement methods for gathering information that would allow them gather data that was useful to their own particular context.

A connected issue in the area of data collection was the type of information to be collected. For a variety of reasons, both legal and cultural, there has been something of a resistance to the gathering of easily comparable quantitative data on the performance of individual schools and teachers in the Irish education system. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the legal prohibition on the publication of what are commonly termed school league tables in other countries (McNamara and O'Hara 2006). This is not to say that such data is

not available at some level in the system, in fact statistical data on many aspects of the education system is freely available from the DES. It must be acknowledged however that culturally a combination of genuine concerns about the use to which such information would be put and a lack of understanding of the potential benefits of comparative measurement (FitzGibbon 1996, Coe and Tymms 2003) has led to a resistance on the part of many education professionals to any type of methodology that might be used to generate data that could be used to compare performance either internally or externally.

When developing a process for generating data it was important therefore to be aware of this sensitivity. Implementing a methodology that seemed to be focused on generating quantitative data alone would be problematic. While it is important to be aware of the Rudd and Davies warning to be careful of establishing a system of self-evaluation which allows teachers and schools to 'avoid asking themselves difficult questions' (2000: 3), most writers would accept that one of the primary determinants of success in encouraging teachers to self-evaluate is the extent to which they 'buy into the idea' (MacBeath 1999; 2000, 2003; Wroe and Halsall 2001; SICI 2005). The challenge therefore was to develop a programme that would allow for the introduction and use of as wide a range of methods of data collection as possible while at the same time creating a climate that encouraged participants to embrace the concept of self-evaluation as something positive.

One possible solution to this was suggested by Simons (2002) who argued that any new system of self-evaluation should build on the type of informal information gathering that was already taking place in schools. Both Simons (2002) and in particular Wroe and Halsall (2001) demonstrate how many teachers use a variety of at times quite complex methods of information gathering as part of their continual cycle of personal and professional development. Obviously therefore a system seeking to prepare education professionals to self-evaluate in a more systematic fashion would need, at some stage, to include a significant element of reflection on their current practice in the area. To do this properly, a structure and a stimulus for this reflection would have to be created as well as a way of naming the activities that were being undertaken in a way that made sense to a broader community of evaluators. This latter point is in keeping with the insights generated

by Barzano (2002) who suggested that the creation of a common nomenclature for evaluators is a critical task for any programme of training in the area. To continue our conversation analogy, it is not enough that individuals can talk to each other they also need a common language so that they can understand each other.

This process of reflection on current practice with a view to understanding the activities in the context of evaluation has a number of further advantages. Perhaps the most important of these is the opportunity it gives teachers to begin deciding how they will place a value on what they are doing, an essential element of any system of evaluation. Reflection on practice is normally done with a view to understanding and improving (McNiff 2002a, McKernan 1996). Both of these activities imply an appreciation of a standard in relation to activities undertaken. To improve as a teacher you need to understand that your current practice is inadequate in some way. To improve in a collegial setting implies an ability to explain to others how the practice in the school community needs to be enhanced. This requires an improving, reflective, self-evaluative school to clearly state what it considers to be important to that school and also to provide a methodology for allowing teachers to measure their own practice against these statements. In other words schools need to generate, to use the language of the Schools Must Speak projects, 'criteria' which are 'the yardsticks for what self-evaluation measures' (MacBeath 2003: 5). These are the critical centrepieces of any system of evaluation which must by definition be clearly located within the practice of a living educational community. Thus reflection on practice ultimately allows a teacher or school to codify their own assessment of quality and gives them a benchmark against which to measure their own professional practice. This is a process that should be at the heart of any evaluation system.

Nevo, when discussing the outlines of a training programme for self-evaluating teachers, argued strongly that if such a programme was to have any long-term impact it must adopt something other than a 'cookbook approach' (1995: 173). By this he meant an approach which provided teachers with a ready made system for generating data from their practice which does not explain why they are doing this. He further argues that 'the training of

school people in evaluation methods must be based on a balanced combination of theoretical concepts and practical tools' (1995: 173).

It is not enough for teachers to understand how, they must also understand why. For this reason a decision was made by the researcher to include a significant amount of background theoretical material dealing with:

- Models of evaluation
- Key concepts in educational evaluation including accountability, autonomy, internal and external evaluation and self-evaluation
- Evaluation and the emerging structures in European education

Again this type of input made sense in the context of an academic programme which naturally drew participants who valued some form of theoretical input.

A further interesting challenge in terms of programme design emerged as a result of the time constraints imposed by the academic course structures. Semesters lasting twelve weeks in total meant that it would be next to impossible to develop a programme that concentrated every element of the proposed Irish school evaluation framework. Indeed it is arguable that the final *LAOS* framework, with its 143 areas for investigation, would prove a difficult challenge for any training programme no matter what its length. As a result of this a decision was made to focus on one area of professional practice with a view to developing a method for comprehensively evaluating that particular area.

While this decision arose from practical necessity it is interesting that it is in keeping with emerging research findings in the area. For example Simons argues, based on her own extensive research that initial training programmes in the area of self-evaluation should concentrate on 'evaluating one policy issue in depth at a time' (2002: 29). The work of Neil et al (2001) and Neil and Johnston (2005) also echo this analysis. Working with a number of school communities in Northern Ireland who were attempting to develop self-evaluation systems they discovered that staff investigating their own work tended to identify a limited number of critical categories under which to assess their own work.

These categories concentrated on areas that were of practical concern to the teachers and in the case studies reported on they were summarised under the headings of,

- Teaching and Learning
- Supporting teaching and learning
- Staff issues

(Neil et al 2001: 175; Neil and Johnston 2005: 75)

The focus on areas relating to teaching and learning is an interesting. MacBeath (2003: 1) argues there are three main categories of self-evaluation. They are:

- Learning and teaching
- Ethos and culture
- Leadership and management

He suggests that they should be viewed as 'three concentric circles. At the centre is learning-the main and central purpose of the school' (2003:1). The other two circles, although vital to the successful operation of the school, act in some ways as support mechanisms for ensuring the quality of learning that takes place (see figure 9.1).

In essence MacBeath argues that when 'taken together these three points of focus provide the essential constituents of the school as a learning community' (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002: 7).

This analysis of the importance of teaching and learning to the process of self-evaluation proved very influential for the designer of the training programme under discussion for a number of reasons. The first of these was the decision on the Department of Education and Science to include a category of Teaching and Learning in its initial framework of evaluation produced during the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) pilot programme.

Given the importance of this pilot to the final shape of the emerging school evaluation system, it seemed likely that a category dealing with teaching and learning would be included in the national framework. It was therefore considered an ideal candidate to act as a central focus for a self-evaluation training programme.

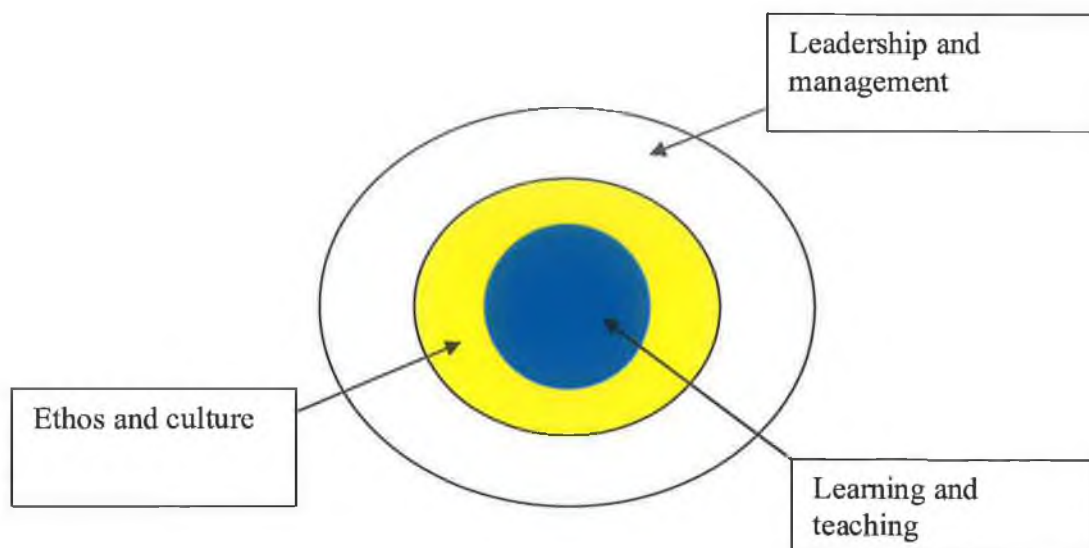


Figure 9.1: *MacBeath Categories of Self-Evaluation*

A second, and no less important reason, was the range of expertise available to the researcher. Over a number of years staff in the University Department which was to host the training programme had been engaged in extensive research in the field of teaching and learning. This research concentrated on three key areas:

- The identification core competencies in the area of teaching and learning for Irish Educators (McNamara, Mulcahy and O'Hara 2001, McNamara, O'Hara and Mulcahy 2005)
- The creation of positive learning environments in schools in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning (McNamara, O'Hara and Byrne 2000)
- The development of original approaches to teaching and learning using Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (McNamara, O'Hara and Roussi 1998)

Each of these research strands required core staff to work with school teachers at different stages of their professional careers with a view to generating useful and practical outputs. As such, it was recognised early on in this research process that the methods of teacher

engagement designed for the earlier projects could be used in this investigation. In particular it was felt that the work on identifying core competencies would be particularly relevant when asking teachers to identify 'criteria' for self-evaluation. There seemed to be an obvious congruence here given that both processes involved the investigation of current practice with a view to identifying and codifying core elements leading to their wider dissemination. The work on the creation of positive learning environments placed great emphasis on building on current best practice in this area of teaching and learning. Teachers were encouraged to record their own practice and use this as the basis for the design of a school wide methodology for changing the organisational culture.

The final strand, which involved the use of ICT as a methodology for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning seemed to offer a wide range of potential opportunities. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the investment in ICT has emphasised the potentially revolutionary impact of the medium on how we learn, teach and develop as professionals (Petraglia, 1998; Jonassen 2000; Huang 2002). In the context of this research, there was a desire to investigate the potential of this medium as a methodology for,

1. Delivering key information and resource material to teachers engaged in the process of self-evaluation
2. Allowing geographically dispersed practitioners to create an informal learning community dedicated to the facilitation and encouragement of the creation of a culture of self-evaluation.

At the end of this period of initial planning, the broad parameters of the training programme began to take shape. It would:

- Include background material on different models of evaluation
- Seek to develop modes of data collection that would be useful to the course participants when they sought to engage in a dialogue with external evaluators
- Concentrate on the area of teaching and learning as a focus for initial investigation

- Develop a process which would allow participants reflect on and engage with their current modes of professional practice in the area of teaching and learning
- Make use of the opportunities afforded by ICT in the process of developing a methodology for enhancing the skills of self-evaluation.

However there were a number of important issues that needed to be faced. On a practical level, the lack of certainty surrounding the shape, content and form of the proposed national evaluation system led to a deal of uncertainty in the programme planning process. On a conceptual level there was an awareness on the part of the researcher that he was seeking to develop a process that seemed to contradict one of the basic tenets of many, although not all, self-evaluation training programmes. This core underlying principle was the contention that the school community should be basic unit of investigation in all activities relating to self-evaluation. Given that the participants on this programme would be attending in an individual capacity it would prove impossible to develop a programme that followed this principle. The challenge therefore was to create a community for the programme participants that would perform the unifying role played by the traditional school community while at the same time allowing them express the individuality of their own particular professional contexts.

The solution proposed by the researcher was to use ICT to create such a community. This would allow them take advantage of not only the expertise in this area developed over a number of years but also to assess the potential of ICT as a methodology for the development and enhancement of self-evaluation competence in professional educators. It is to the principles underlying this online community of self-evaluating teachers that we now turn.

The Nature of the Educational Community

The emphasis on the centrality of the school community to the development of a sustainable and defensible approach to self-evaluation is an interesting one. It echoes work carried out in a number of different branches of educational research. Material published

by writers such as Hargreaves (2002, 2006), Darling-Hammond (1996), Harris and Muijs (2005) and others in the area of the organisational culture of schools place the concept of the school as community at the centre of their work. At the same time research exploring the way individuals and groups involved in education pass on at times complex and context bound core professional skills continually emphasise the role of the community as the conduit and the repository for many of the key concepts communicated (Wenger 2000; Ackerman, Pipek and Wulf 2003; Hoban 2002; Cochrane-Smith 2005; Brown and Duguid, 2000). The community is central therefore not only to what happens in schools but also to how it happens.

This recognition of the importance of the school community is clearly understood by evaluation theorists such as MacBeath, Scheerens and Simons. Perhaps more interesting is the emphasis placed on the role of the school community in official documents dealing with educational evaluation produced by national and transnational bodies such as the OECD (2005), DES (2003 a & b), SICI (2005) and Eurydice (2004). While it is possible to dismiss such an emphasis as window dressing which seeks to pay lip service to a zeitgeist that celebrates inclusion and dialogue a closer reading of some of the work produced would suggest otherwise. For example, Nevo (1995) implicitly provides a justification for this focus in his analysis of a 'basic training' programme for school evaluators. He suggests that single representatives from schools should not be permitted to join because of the type of dynamic that is established in such programmes as well as the tasks that participants are set. He states that,

workshop participants are encouraged to work in their school groups on application exercises and in discussing specific evaluation issues relevant to their own school (1995:176).

The school unit in this case offers the practical context where any interventions are to be implemented as well as the yardstick against which these innovations are to be measured, namely that of relevance. As importantly, the methodology to be adopted by the community when dealing with issues relating to evaluation is clearly flagged. Nevo, in keeping with his earlier concentration on the importance of dialogue, is anxious to

emphasise the centrality of discussion to the whole process. In this example therefore the school community provides the,

- Context
- Methodology
- Criteria for success

against which any attempt to develop an approach to self-evaluation is to be considered.

The designer of the programme under discussion here was faced with an interesting dilemma. The geographically and institutionally diverse student body that was being recruited to undertake the programme did not fit the profile proposed by Nevo et al. Yet the researcher had a strong sense that the community focus emphasised by these writers would be critical to the success of any programme designed to generate a capacity to self-evaluate among teachers. The solution to this dilemma would have to involve the replication of the beneficial characteristics of the school community in a context where the traditional drivers of that community were missing. In order to do this, some thought had to be given to what exactly characterised a school community and in particular to those aspects of the community that enabled the type of professional and personal learning that characterises successful training interventions.

The example from Nevo cited earlier sketches some of the aspects of school communities which facilitate learning and development. They provide a location, a method and a shared understanding of what is important to all who have a stake in the school as an organisation. This latter point has been taken up by a number of writers who sought to examine key aspects of the notion of the school as community. One of the difficulties associated with highlighting the centrality of the notion of community to learning is the danger of seeing it as little more than a loose grouping of individuals who just happen to find themselves in the same organisational setting. Morrissey, developing on the notion proposed by Darling-Hammond (1996) challenges this limited notion by re-defining successful communities as 'professional learning communities' (PLC's). She defines these as entities which engage 'an entire group of professionals in coming together for learning within a supportive and self-created community' (2000: 4).

Harris and Muijs (2005) argue that at the heart of these types of professional learning communities is a commitment to the generation of a culture of collaboration. Drawing on the work of Toole and Seashore Louis (2002: 5) they suggest that,

The term integrates three robust concepts: a school culture that emphasizes (1) professionalism – that is, is ‘client oriented and knowledge based’ (Darling-Hammond 1990); (2) learning—that is, places a high value on teacher professional development (Toole, 2001); and (3) personal connection (Louis and Kruse 1995)
Harris and Muijs (2005: 48)

Speaking at a meeting in Galway, Ireland in January 2006 Andy Hargreaves suggested that these types of community are evidence informed, transformative and believe in an organisation wide sharing of knowledge. In addition they seek to provide local solutions to problems that are clearly situated in the collective experience of the school. Because of their emphasis on sharing and communicating there is a continuous learning process going on which informs all decisions made. At the same meeting he provided a visual summary of his understanding of the Professional Learning Community (see Figure 9.2).

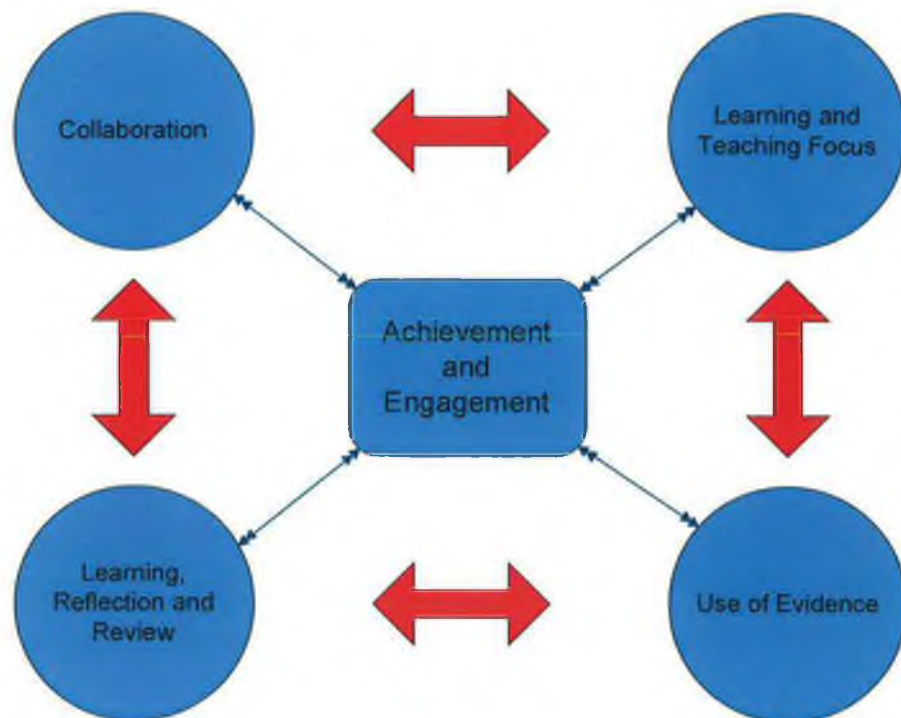


Figure 9.2: Professional Learning Community

At the centre of any PLC there is a commitment to achievement and engagement. In order to maintain this commitment, a number of important activities are undertaken by the school community which include collaboration, reflection, the creation and use of evidence and interestingly, given its centrality to a number of models of self-evaluation previously discussed, a focus on the area of learning and teaching. Bolam, McMahon et al (2005), reporting on a research project seeking to develop effective PLC's, make the point that different contexts, external and internal pressures, organisational size and history impact on how successful any attempt to establish such a community is in practice. They also emphasise the importance of trust and the quality of relationships when attempting to create this type of community dynamic. Harris and Muijs (2005), summarising the literature on PLC's argue that there are,

Five attributes of such organizational arrangements: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions and shared personal practice. (2005:50).

To some extent, the expectation that any one organisation will have all of these attributes in place is difficult to imagine. For this reason the creation of a PLC tends to be seen as a dynamic process rather than a once off, organisation changing intervention. Viewed this way, it is possible to see how a PLC can be created outside of an individual school or organisation setting. It is reasonable to assume that a situation can be created where a group of individuals are brought together with a shared goal and to begin the process of creating a community whose structures are based around the five attributes mentioned above. In addition, the emphasis on relationship building, trust and a knowledge focus is key to any attempt to fashion such a community. It is arguable that these types of dynamic, while often found within one organisation, can also be found in groups which are comprised of individuals who are drawn from a variety of organisational settings.

Here then is a potential blueprint for the type of community that the researcher was seeking to create. Many of its core aspects echoed those of the broader academic programme which was to host the proposed training course, in particular the commitment to collaboration, reflection and teaching and learning as a key focus. What Hargreaves, Morrissey, McMahon et al, Harris and Muij manage to do is to demonstrate how this type of

professional learning community is at the heart of any successful school community, an important realisation for those seeking to imitate them.

In addition to the work carried out by Hargreaves, Morrissey etc there has been a parallel and at times intersecting body of research that has sought to examine how exactly the dynamics of a community context can facilitate and at times enhance the learning of core professional skills. Drawing heavily on the work of constructivist writers such as Vygotsky (1978) and later Lave and Wenger (1991) and Seely-Brown and Duguid (2000), this branch of research has proved very influential with those seeking to create online learning communities as an alternative to geographically and time limited traditional school based learning communities. Central to much of this work is the concept of the 'community of practice' (COP). Defined by Hung et al as a 'sustained social network of individuals who share a common set of core values and knowledge' (2005: 176) these are dynamic, changing entities made up of individuals at various stages of their professional and personal lives. According to Sergiovanni (2000:139) they are so critical to the success of the educational endeavour that 'developing a community of practice may be the single best most important way to improve' an educational organisation.

Writing in 1991, Lave and Wenger suggest that COP's are ubiquitous and that we are all involved in a number of them at any one time. In this understanding of the COP concept, the diverse social and professional contexts that mark the different groupings apart are important but not necessarily central. Rather it is the commonality that is central to the concept that is considered important and this shared element, according to Wenger (1998) is the importance attached to learning. Wenger (1998: 45) suggests that learning is a process where 'we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly'. Arguing that learning is above all a social act, Wenger goes on to state that,

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore to call these kinds of communities *communities of practice*.
(ibid. p 45)

Supporters of the concept of the COP have tried to demonstrate how the complex interpersonal context of a learning community allows individuals to access skills and ideas relevant to their own particular needs in a variety of ways. Equally as importantly they have sought to explain how a community of practice facilitates the transition of an individual from novice practitioner to experienced professional by providing them with opportunities to 'steal' ideas from more experienced community members. Termed 'legitimate peripheral participation' by Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) this process allows new professionals to amass the explicit and implicit knowledge and codes of behaviour necessary for successful entry into their profession. In an educational context, neophyte teachers are allowed participate at the periphery of an educational community while at the same time practicing what they learn in a highly structured yet supportive environment. The centrality of practice to this conception of learning is important. It is in this key aspect that the COP is different to any other type of collection of human beings with a common goal. Brown and Duguid argue that, 'practice is an effective teacher and community of practice an ideal learning environment' (2000:127).

Thus adherents of this approach to learning would seek to emphasise the importance of learning taking place in context where opportunities to practice newly acquired knowledge and skills are always available. Indeed Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) have sought to develop this idea of the centrality of context to the process of learning and cognition in their championing of the theory of situated cognition. In this approach to learning the centrality of practice leads to situations where,

Problems are faced in the context of the situation at the workplace and a demand is created for the learner to solve the problem through which his / her performance is based on successful solutions (Hung et al 2005:160)

This conception of the importance of the broader community to the development of core professional skills has obvious attractions to those involved in teacher professional development whether at an initial or continuing stage. In addition the emphasis on practice in a community setting where individuals can enhance their skills through various types of professional interaction would resonate with many teacher educators.

All Irish teacher education programmes include a period of extended practice in schools. Students are here provided with an opportunity to not only develop the skills necessary for them to become successful teachers but also to see how the complex community that makes up an average school provides the context where these skills are used. In the programme under discussion here, half of the participants were students engaging in precisely this type of practicum experience and it is this context that provided them with the practical experience that allowed them develop a sense of their own attitude to evaluation and its potential role in their own education practice.

A similar dynamic was obvious in the second group of participants in this research. Made up of experienced practitioners who were seeking to enhance their understanding of key aspects of their own practice through engagement with the latest research and the practical knowledge of other skilled educators, this group naturally filtered all they heard through the shared experience base of their own communities of practice. Because they had a rich repository of lived experience, they were able to critique much of what they heard in relation to school evaluation from a position of authority and confidence. The really interesting encounters occurred when the contextually rich experience of two participants or groups of participants contradicted each other. Here learners had to be supported in dealing with the contradiction and helped come to a new understanding of their own practice through their interaction with other ideas. To use a term favoured by writers in the field, learners were provided with a 'scaffold' or support structure which enabled them to continue their learning journey in the community (Jonassen 1999, Vygotsky 1978).

In general then, the programme under discussion was seeking ways to create a community of practice that allowed course participants develop the core skills necessary to engage in a meaningful process of self-evaluation. Because the notion of practice is central to the concept of the COP (Eales 2003), the researcher was in essence required to create a process which allowed participants to actually engage in the activity of evaluating their own professional practice. In addition, they had to be provided with a forum where they could share the insights generated in such a way as to allow them create and maintain practice-focused relationships. The focus on the development of self-evaluation capacity provided the 'shared enterprise' in their relationships spoken of by Wenger (1998). It also allowed

them to create a dynamic of reflective public engagement, a process that ties any community together. More than that, however, was the requirement for them to be allowed to create a shared repertoire of resources, memories and relationships (Wenger 1998). These three distinct though interrelated necessities helped shape the final structure of the programme designed.

The challenge to the researcher now was to try and create a community that embodied the insights of writers such as Darling Hammond, Lave and Wenger, Morrissey and Eales in a situation where participants would be drawn from a wide range of learning contexts and meet relatively infrequently during the period that the training programme was running. One solution that immediately suggested itself was to use recent innovations in Information and Communication Technologies to help create a space where such a community could develop and hopefully thrive. It is to this that we will now turn.

Developing an Online Learning Community of Self-Evaluating Teachers

In the earlier part of this chapter we have examined the notion of the learning community and in particular we have sought to explore what exactly it is that enables a disparate group of individuals to come together and establish a space where complex professional skills and practices can be explored and enhanced. Certain common characteristics have emerged. Successful learning communities value collaboration, they seek to empower each individual to engage fully as a member of that community, they have a practice focus and encourage reflection on this practice in a supportive though public forum.

There are of course some areas of disagreement when examining the notion of the learning community. Some writers, as we have seen, argue that the natural home of a learning community is a geographically defined, organisationally based entity such as a school or company (Eales 2003, Nevo 1995). Others argue that this need not be the case and indeed go so far as to suggest that they 'appear to be a way to handle unstructured problems and to share knowledge outside of the traditional structural boundaries' (Lesser and Storck 2001: 832).

The problem with this latter conception is that attractive as it may be, how exactly do you create this type of revolutionary knowledge sharing community without first having an organisational base from which to grow it? While theoretically it is possible to imagine a group of likeminded professionals meeting at regular intervals in order to develop the type of nurturing, challenging and public community discussed earlier, the reality is that very few individuals have either the time, confidence or indeed desire to get involved in such an endeavour. It is arguable that one of the reasons existing organisations such as schools have become so central to the examination of the role of the community in learning is that they have so many of the pre-requisites for success outlined by Morrissey (2003) already in place. In the last decade however, the emergence of sophisticated and easily accessible Information and Communications Technology platforms and tools have led some writers (Bradshaw, Powell and Terrell 2005; Jonassen 2000; Bonk 2003) to suggest that it might be possible to create such a community at a virtual level. In particular they have pointed to the rapid development in the areas of multi-media content delivery and computer mediated communications (CMC) systems and have sought to explore how exactly they might be used to facilitate the nurturing of online communities (Ferdig and Roehler 2004).

Interesting though these developments might seem in theory, the challenge to those who are championing them is to prove that they can be successfully used in a range of formal and informal learning situations to create a genuine community of engaged, professional learners. Attempts to do just that have multiplied in recent years as researchers and practitioners have sought to find ways of using technology to enhance and at times replace what happens in traditional educational settings. As early as 1993 Harasim identified the increased availability of online communications tools to the development of online communities. Skyrme (1997) echoed that and emphasised the centrality of interactivity and sharing of knowledge to the development of what he called 'communities of knowledge practice'. The emphasis on interactive communication here is deliberate. Much early work in the area of online community building existed in a period prior to the availability of graphically enhanced multi-media enabled user interfaces. Because text based technology was relatively widely available and comparatively easy to support a lot of organisations began to experiment with its use in a variety of settings. A distinction was quickly drawn

between communication that took place instantaneously and that which took place over an extended period of time. The former, usually termed synchronous computer mediated communication, made use of instant messaging technology, at times pre-arranged group e-mailing and latterly chat rooms. The latter, termed asynchronous computer mediated communication, relied heavily on bulletin board systems and discussion fora.

Researchers in a range of educational and organisational settings began to experiment with both types of computer mediated communication (CMC) systems and very soon claims as to their potential for transforming the way we teach and learn began to emerge (Inglis, Ling and Joosten 1999; Preece 2001). Mason (1994) sought to enumerate the advantages of CMC in a list that still encapsulates most enthusiasts understanding of their potential in learning situations. He suggested that CMC facilitates:

- Interactivity
- Collaborative discussions
- Self-directed approach
- Electronic socializing
- Democratic and equalizing tendency
- Time-independence
- Reflective engagement

(Mason 1994: 57-58)

While there was an awareness of the potential offered by CMC, some writers were questioning the validity of the research base on which many of the claims were made. Romiszowski and Ravitz (1997) suggest that while proponents of the benefits of CMC trumpet the benefits of the technology 'for a variety of reasons- access, collaboration, interactivity, self-direction and experiential learning to name a few-yet few of these are grounded in systematic, rigorous inquiry' (pg 762).

It must of course be acknowledged that some the claims made about the potential benefits of CMC were based on little more than enthusiasm for a new technology, however there were those who were engaging in research based evaluation of the potential of these new ways of communicating for the teaching and learning process. Among the most important

of these was Jonassen. Writing in 2000 he argued that the research into the benefits of online learning up to that point indicated that they were important as they allowed learners to:

- Articulate what they know
- Reflect on what they have learned
- Construct personal representations of meaning

As well as

- Support the internal negotiation of meaning making
- Support intentional and mindful thinking

(pg 211)

While the claims themselves are important, and indeed fairly far-reaching, what is interesting from our perspective is their concentration on the centrality of communication, reflection, articulation and meaning making in a social setting. Here many of the key aspects of learning communities as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Hargreaves (2006) are brought to the fore in a different context.

At the same time that Jonassen was attempting to enumerate the benefits of online learning, a significant advance in the way that learning technologies were organised began to receive widespread notice. Given the name 'Virtual Learning Environments' (VLE's) or in some cases Learning Management Systems (LMS) (Bacsich 1999) these types of systems sought to bring together a variety of functionalities in one easily manageable online location. Britain and Liber who wrote one of the first major evaluative reports on VLE's in 1999 sought to define them as follows:

Virtual Learning Environments are learning management software systems that synthesise the functionality of computer-mediated communications software (e-mail, bulletin boards, newsgroups etc) and on-line methods of delivering course materials (e.g. WWW).
(1999:3)

Interestingly they go on to note that,

Most of these systems are intended not simply to reproduce the classroom environment –“on-line” but to use the technology to provide learners with new tools

to facilitate their learning. They aim to accommodate a wider range of learning styles and goals, to encourage collaboration and resource based teaching and to allow greater sharing and re-use of resources. (1999:3)

Here again we see learning technologists emphasise the centrality of collaboration and the use of technology to facilitate rather than impose learning. They also give some idea as to the other perceived benefits of VLE based learning. As well as mentioning collaboration again, there is an important reference relating to the sharing and use of resources. This again echoes the community of practice insistence on the creation of a repository of resources unique to that community yet capable of being used and re-used in a variety of contexts.

In an attempt to explain what was then still a relatively new idea, Britain and Liber provided a schematic outline of the 'functionality provided by a prototypical system' (1999:5). This schematic outline is interesting insofar as it provides what is still a fairly comprehensive summary of the different functionalities provided by a VLE (see figure 9.3). There have undoubtedly been improvements in the technology platform underpinning the VLE's in recent years however it is fair to say that much of the basic functionality remains the same. They are essentially a combination of content delivery and communications systems with some other functions added. In recent years quite a bit of attention has been paid to the underlying data generated by VLE usage and a significant amount of research is beginning to emerge based on an analysis of this type of data (Hara, Bonk and Angeli, 2000).

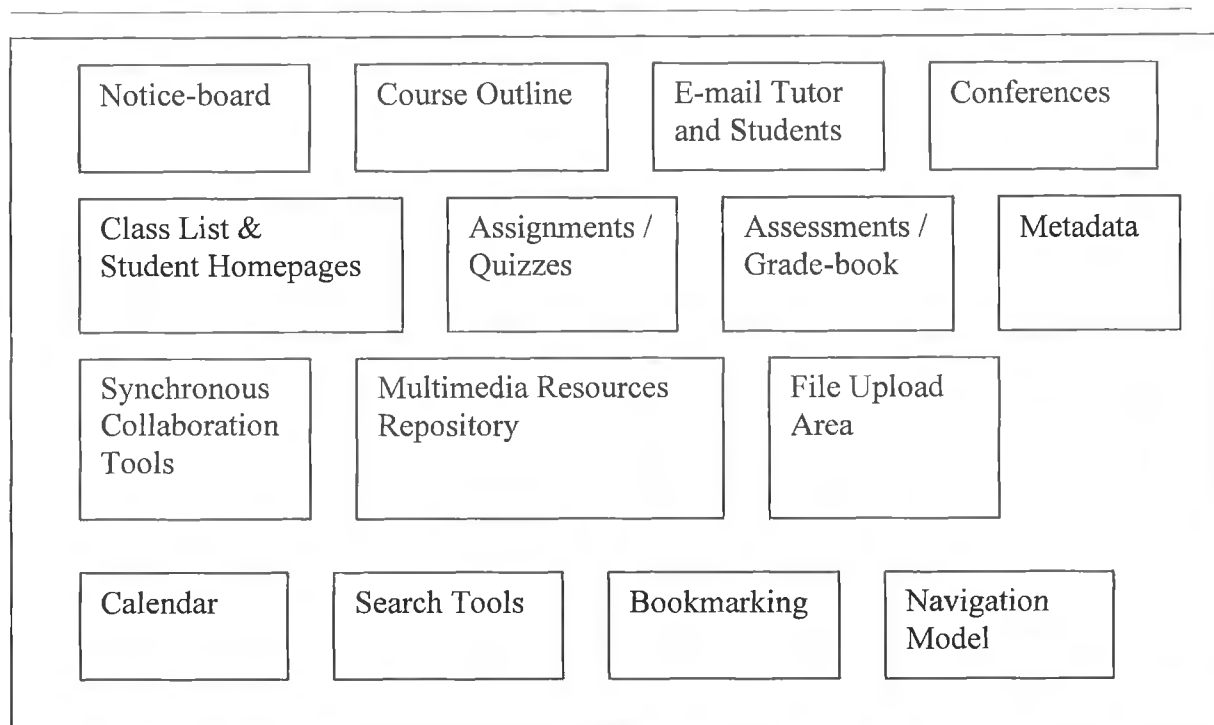


Figure 9.3: A schematic of a Prototypical VLE (Britain and Liber 1999)

At the time that Britain and Liber were producing their report, most VLE's were owned and licensed by large organisations. Perhaps the best know of these were the Top Class, Blackboard and WebCT packages. While site licenses per user were relatively cheap, large organisations such as Universities found them substantial enough to warrant investigation of other approaches to embedding VLE's into their organisations. One of the solutions immediately identified was the decision to adopt an 'open-source' or substantially free VLE. Currently one of the most popular of these open-source VLE's is MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment). Again this dynamic is significant to the programme under discussion as the adoption of the WebCT VLE in 1999 provided a platform on which to build an online community while the migration from WebCT to Moodle in 2003 was to cause the researcher some significant design and technical problems.

The development of the VLE as a cost effective, technically robust and user friendly methodology of course delivery has had a number of interesting practical repercussions for education providers. Perhaps the most important of these has been the ongoing efforts by a

wide range of educational institutions to develop innovative and challenging methods for integrating the VLE into their teaching and learning structures. While a significant number of these innovations have concentrated on the content delivery and managerial functionalities offered by the VLE there have been a number of other strands of visible. From the perspective of this research, perhaps the most interesting of these have been wide range of research initiatives that have been initiated in the general area of online community development in a VLE context. In the next section we will briefly explore some of the more relevant research in the area of VLE enabled online communities with a view to drawing out some general lessons for the researcher.

Enhancing Online Communication: Exploring the Role of the VLE

Given the comparatively short amount of time that researchers have had to work with different aspects of online learning environments, it is interesting to note the diverse range of research that has emerged in the area of development of online communities. Some researchers have started from first principals so to speak sought to define the parameters of the research area. One of the more significant of these studies was that carried out by Preece (2001:10). She sought to define exactly what this new type of community actually consisted of and suggested that it was:

- Made up of people who interact socially as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles, such as moderating
- Consisted of people with a shared purpose, such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a reason for the community
- Had policies in the form of tacit assumptions, rituals, protocols, rules and laws that guided peoples interactions
- Provided computer systems to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness.

Others actually tried to use the VLE to support and develop different aspects of the learning process. Among the most popular applications was the use of the CMC functionality as a way of encouraging different groups or individuals to communicate on a general topic or

subject area. Im and Lee (2004: 155) in assessing the potential of online discussion in general suggested that it should be viewed as a 'learning environment in which students can achieve higher conceptual knowledge through the interaction of knowledge and experience among all students'.

Poole (2000) looking at the same aspect of the VLE suggested that students preferred more time-independent, asynchronous discussions. This finding was amplified somewhat by Fox and MacKeogh (2001) who suggested that the main advantage of online discussion was that it allowed students time to reflect before posting their thoughts, thus acknowledging a preference for asynchronous discussion. Gilbert and Dabbagh (2005:6) further enumerated some of the advantages of asynchronous online discussion when they stated that it promoted 'articulation, reflection and social negotiation'. Research undertaken by Gunwardena, Lowe and Anderson specifically sought to examine how asynchronous discussion impacts on learning. Among their findings was the claim that asynchronous communication 'enables groups that are separated in time and space to engage in the active production of shared knowledge' (1997: 410). Further studies reported on by Hara, Bonk and Agnelli (2000) suggest that it is the very time delayed character of asynchronous CMC that is so important as it is this that gives people the opportunity to reflect.

An added benefit of the CMC environment is its public nature. Public reflection and engagement with important ideas has been emphasised from Dewey (1933) onwards as a vitally important element of any genuine community of learning. This notion of the publicly reflective professional is at the heart not only of the practitioner research community championed by Schon (1984) and McNiff (2000) but also in the works of Lave and Wenger (1991) dealing with the very nature of the community of practice. One of the more interesting consequences of giving a public voice to the individual and group reflections of practitioners is the license it gives them to challenge traditional authority structures. It is not coincidence that the language adopted by proponents of practitioner research (McNiff 2000; Silverman 2004) who champion the transformative impacts of such modes of investigation matches that of self-evaluation researchers who seek to demonstrate how developing an engaged and confident school community can successfully maintain a

dialogue of equals with external accountability systems (MacBeath 2005, Nevo 2006). What might be somewhat unexpected are the claims made by online learning practitioners who see their technology enabled communities achieving much the same results (Salmon, Globerson and Perkins 1991; Kapitzke 2000). Typical of these is the statement made by Millwood and Terrell (2005) who argue that,

Online communities offer authentic voices to be heard widely and frequently challenging the concept of the 'authoritative voice' particularly in professional development (pg. 195)

Here then online learning is presented not just as a technology enhanced mode of learning it is also seen as providing participants with a forum which is designed to allow them find a confident and at times critical voice with which to critique their personal and professional environments.

Bradshaw, Powell and Terrell try to draw some of the discrete strands discussed earlier together when they attempt to explain how the online learning community established as part of a ten year research project precisely mirrored those more traditional learning communities previously examined. They chose to define their online community quite simply as 'an online space that provides for overt communication between a group of people' (2005: 206). In order to allow this community develop the researchers provided 'discussion, activities, resources and knowledge' (ibid. p 213). They also suggest that online communities go through a number of stages before they begin to function efficiently. These stages include:

1. An induction process
2. Creation of informal, online social contacts
3. Support for meaningful discussion
4. Modelling of good behaviour and presence

The first two are interesting as they can be, to an extent at least, taught. The latter two are challenging as they deal with the activities of the group facilitator. This person or persons is considered vitally important to the online community as they can set parameters, guide processes, sort out issues and problems or do none of these things. The role of facilitator is

a controversial one. There are a number of different conceptions of their role ranging from one which sees them as being in total, upfront control of the learning process and community to one that sees them as being little more than a technocratic, trouble shooting presence (Gustaffson and Gibbs 2000). Again Bradshaw, Powell and Terrell (2005) are quite upfront about their understanding of the role of facilitator. They see it as being essentially a hands-on role and argue that it is one of the three underpinning realities of their conception of the online learning community along with the activities of the community and the components of the learning programme being engaged in. This concept of the external, guiding and challenging voice or persona is an important one in online learning. Bonk (2004:97) suggests that,

Knowing when to intervene, when to push students, when to embed additional support or structure and when to provide counter-examples are the persistent challenges of the online instructor.

This analysis of the role finds an interesting echo in the work of Swaffield (2005) and Swaffield and MacBeath (2005) who have in recent years been attempting to explore the role of the 'critical friend' in the development of self-evaluation communities. They attempt to define the potential role of the critical friend in a self-evaluation process as follows,

Facilitating the process, running sessions, modelling procedures, for example ensuring participants keep to ground rules ... creating opportunities to hear opposing points of view...pressing for evidence, encouraging heads, teachers or students to become more critical... demystifying data
(Swaffield and MacBeath 2005: 249-250)

The similarities are striking. Both the online facilitator and the critical friend have multiple tasks built into their role. These include providing support, challenging when needed, explaining, providing data, demystifying and above all being present in some form or other to the learning community. From the perspective of the researcher, this synchronicity of tasks and role definitions was one which demanded to be explored in the context of the course being designed.

Broadly speaking, the online learning community is seen by most writers as being essentially a communications focused, reflective entity that has a role in developing a social

learning model. In an attempt to summarise their understanding of the way their online community works, Bradshaw, Powell and Terrell make the following statement,

Within the community there is a common domain, that of professional educators, and through active participation this reflection is taken further as each learner analyses and critiques shared understandings of the group (2005:213).

The key concepts of practice focused professionals seeking to actively reflect on their experience in a supportive group environment with a view to deepening their understanding of what the critical elements of their professional practice are again to the fore (Davies et al 2005). The addition of the idea of the shared understandings of the group is also significant as it suggests the creation of an original, community specific knowledge that sets it apart from others.

The VLE is a powerful tool and one that can, if used in a structured and theoretically informed manner, provide a forum for the type of public dialogue and engagement that is at the heart of any community of practice or indeed professional learning community. Pavey and Garland are keen to emphasise the importance of engagement in any type of online learning process. They suggest that VLE's are designed in such a way as to suggest that they have the 'potential to stimulate depth of learning by encouraging students to engage more fully with topics and issues' (2004: 305). The use of the term 'potential' above is an interesting one. There can be a tendency when examining a new approach to teaching and learning to confuse its potential impact with its practical impact. Again to emphasise, VLE's have a powerful potential to stimulate genuine, in-depth learning but to fulfil this potential a number of steps need to be taken. Davies et al (2005) citing Salmon (2002) suggest that a number of important pre-requisites must be in place if online activity is to have a meaningful and useful outcome. These include 'motivation to work with each other through this medium, providing clear learning objectives to participants and encouraging structured interaction between them' (p 617). If we are to accept this analysis then any successful use of online learning requires those with responsibility for the delivery of programmes to,

- Sell the medium in a way that ensures motivation

- Provide a clear outcomes structure that allows individuals to clearly map where they are going with the technology
- Facilitate structured interaction between community members

Fox and MacKeogh (2001:12-15), writing in an Irish context, argue that a critical element of any successful online learning situation is the attention paid to its design. They suggest that course developers need to consider what exactly they are asking their students to do and more importantly, why they are being asked to do it. They further suggest that the application of technology to a learning situation just because it exists will not necessarily enhance the quality of the learning engaged in. Echoing some the criticisms of Romiszowski and Ravitz (1997) cited earlier, they argue that while a CMC enhanced environment may lead greater engagement and higher order thinking, significant thought needs to be put into how the communication is initiated, maintained and resourced.

Bradshaw et al (2005) approach the topic of design from a slightly different though no less important angle. They argue that it is necessary to have stimulating content to act as a platform from which to develop the engaged, reflective dialogues that are so necessary to the model of learning being proposed. The type of content that is delivered is important, the method potentially as important but only when consideration has been given to why a particular format of delivery method has been adopted. In the case of the programme under discussion there was a commitment to exploring the content delivery capabilities of the VLE platform from an early stage. The functionalities offered by the VLE meant that it was comparatively easy to offer:

- Lecture notes
- Academic articles
- Links to wider resources on the web
- Structuring and linking material dealing with the use of online learning
- Informal discussion fora in both synchronous and asynchronous mode

In addition to these modes of content delivery, the research interests of the programme developers mentioned earlier resulted in an eagerness to examine methodologies for

integrating the emerging digital video technology into the overall programme structure being developed.

Integrating Digital Video into an Online Learning / Self-Evaluation Community

There have been many attempts in past decades to place emerging generations of film and video technology at the heart of educational practice. Brophy (2004) examining the efforts since the mid 1960's argues that for the most part the initial enthusiasm for the technology tends to get lost in the practical difficulties of integrating it in a meaningful manner into different branches of education. As early as 1970 Baker was arguing that video technology should be seen as being useful in specific aspects of the educational endeavour, and in particular in teacher professional development, but only when specific learning outcomes can be associated with its use. Notwithstanding the theoretical and practical difficulties associated with its use, educationalists in general and teacher educators in particular have sought to find ways of using video technology in a meaningful manner for almost four decades now. Gamaron-Sherin (2004: 1-9) lists some of the major uses which include:

- Microteaching
- Interaction analysis
- Modelling expert teaching
- Video based cases
- Hypermedia courses
- Field recordings

To some extent the specifics of the formats do not really matter, what is interesting is the regular attempts to find a home for video technology. Gamaron-Sherin suggests that it is the very flexibility of the video format that allows it to survive and adapt to new learning environments. Perhaps more importantly she argues that many of the changes of focus in the use of video are not necessarily the result of significant improvements in the technology but rather as a result of the changing theoretical framework within which they were being used. She suggests that the most significant of these was, 'the shift from behaviourism to cognitivism' (Gamaron-Sherin 2004: 9).

From the perspective of this study Brophy's analysis of the dominant theoretical framework within which video technology is currently used is an interesting one. He suggests that,

The theoretical rationales underlying most authors' use of video emphasize notions of situated learning of grounded theory within application contexts (when discussing the value of classroom videos), and notions of co-constructing professional knowledge within a learning community (when discussing the discourse patterns and activities featured in the teacher education curriculum into which video viewing is incorporated). In addition, certain theorists are cited commonly, notably Schon (1983, 1987) in what is involved in creating reflective practitioners.

Brophy 2004: xii

Here again we have the concepts of situated learning, professional practice-based knowledge, learning communities and reflection being brought to the fore.

One of the more significant developments in recent years has been the emergence of digital video (DV) technology as an easily accessible, comparatively cheap communications medium (Theodosakis 2001). DV is flexible, inexpensive and integrates seamlessly with most VLE's. For this reason, recent research examining the potential use of video in education has begun to focus on the possibility of course participants becoming producers as well as consumers of video (Sullivan 2005). This change in focus has obvious implications for those interested in the creation of online, practice-based communities. We have already seen the importance attached to the knowledge creation aspect of any community of learners as well as the significance of the development of a shared language to describe the practice knowledge being created by that community (Wenger 1998, Wenger and Lave 1991). What the emergence of DV technology combined with CMC functionality of a standard VLE seems to offer is the method to generate grounded content, the location to host and disseminate that content, the forum to discuss and reflect on the meaning of the material created and overall structure to guide that reflection in a public yet secure manner.

This broad position is being examined in practice by a number of researchers. Perry and Talley (2001) examined the combined use of video and web technology with 38 ITE providers. The results were, for the most part, positive with most respondents indicating a sense that their practice was enhanced by the introduction of combination of technologies.

An interesting aside to this research was the discovery that only 8 out of 38 ITE providers actually chose to create their own videos with those who failed to do so citing technical issues as the main reason for the lack of interest. The presence of issues relating to bandwidth, software availability, processor capabilities, etc. were to have an impact on the earlier part of the research under discussion here but the exponential developments technology resulted in the latter part of the research developing a different focus.

A parallel piece of research was conducted by Ferdig and Roehler (2004). Again seeking to explore the potential intersection of video and web technology they argued that one of the main benefits of video technology was that it allowed students view and review incidents of teaching until they were sure that they understood them. Bonk (2004) speaking of the same view/review process suggests that in these cases,

Videos provide an anchoring event for reflection as they can be replayed and discussed until students understand and can interrelate some of the concepts embedded in them.
(Bonk 2004:98)

Ferdig and Roehler suggest that it is the availability of social fora that provides students with the space to develop the vocabulary to discuss the issues. Without these shared, public spaces many students would be unable or perhaps unwilling to name the reality that they were witnessing in a way that made sense to them. Ultimately these researchers argue that what the intersection of these two technologies allow students do is to, 'create a common knowledge base' (2004: 131). It is the creation of precisely this type of shared knowledge base that is at the heart of any attempt to establish a community of learners, whether it is online or in a physical location.

In summary then, recent research which has sought to explore the benefits, potential or real, of the integration of web technology, digital video technology and the communication capabilities of online communications software in a VLE structure appears on the whole to be positive. While there are still problems to be addressed, not least the end user micro-technical problems often associated with downstream technological and skill deficiencies,

the technology as a whole seems to offer a way of generating not only new knowledge but a different type of community to reflect on and indeed build that knowledge.

For education providers, the emergence of the VLE platform has significantly enhanced the capacity of many organisations to offer a variety of online supports to participants in their everyday activities. Because many of the functionalities that had previously been distributed across a range of expensive sub-systems have been brought together in one package, users have begun to explore ways of integrating technology into their professional practice. At higher education level some organisations have experimented with delivering courses completely 'online' while others have sought to find ways of using VLE's to support existing teaching. This latter approach, often known as blended learning, seeks to combine the best of different modes of educational provision with a view to enhancing the quality of the student learning experience (Dukes, Waring and Koorland 2006). In the final section of this chapter we will briefly examine the conceptual and practical underpinnings of the blended learning approach with a view to determining its potential as a mode of course delivery for the training programme under discussion.

Blended Learning: Mixing Modes for Effective Teaching and Learning

There is a strong argument to be made that the rise of the blended approach to teaching and learning at a range of educational levels owes more to the relatively haphazard integration of emerging technology by enthusiasts than any coherent and structured implementation plan drawn up by educational leaders. Be that as it may, the last five years have seen an exponential increase in the use of and reference to this mode of course delivery at higher education level in particular (see for example Romano, Wallace, Helmick, Carey and Adkins, 2005). In an attempt to provide some form of coherence to discussions relating to the blended learning model in the UK, Rothery provides an overview of the different implementation modes most commonly associated with it. Defining blended learning quite simply as 'learning and teaching approaches which contain a mixture of online activities and face-to-face activities' (2004:3), he suggests that there are three distinct ways that blended learning can be understood. These are:

- A blend of face-to-face and online activities in course design
- A learning/teaching activity which is itself a mixture of physical and online methods
- Access to a learning environment which consist of a mixture of external and local resources, a mixture of real and virtual resources, accessed by a mixture of face-to-face and online methods (2004: 4)

It is possible to see these approaches as a continuum, discrete entities or elements that can be combined as and when a course provider feels it appropriate. Given the flexibility with which the concept has been approached, it is unsurprising that Garrison and Kanuka can argue that,

Blended learning is both simple and complex. At its simplest, blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences.... At the same time, there is considerable complexity in its implementation with the challenges of virtually limitless design possibilities and applicability to so many contexts (2004 a: 96)

Notwithstanding this conceptual complexity, there is growing sense that the emergence of robust and cost effective VLE technology is changing the parameters within which blended approaches to learning are understood. Rothery argues that an expanded view of the potential of the VLE in higher education has resulted in a situation where they are increasingly being used to allow students have their say (2004:7). Indeed research carried out by Swan (2001) and Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2003) suggests that it is the ability to communicate offered by VLE type interactive technologies that makes blended learning so attractive to many users. In many ways this echoes earlier discussions relating to potential of online communication to facilitate the development of communities of practice and professional learning communities. However recent research conducted by Garrison and Kanuka (2004) and Vaughan and Garrison (2005) goes one stage further and suggests that blended learning is 'particularly effective' (Garrison and Kanuka 2004: 97) in the creation of communities of practitioners. They argue that,

Community provides the stabilizing, cohesive influences that balance the open communication and limitless access to information on the Internet. Communities

also provide the condition for free and open dialogue, critical debate, negotiation and agreement. (ibid. p 97)

The role played by blended learning in supporting this is a very specific one. Garrison and Kanuka suggest that it has,

The capabilities to facilitate these conditions and adds an important reflective element with multiple forms of communication to meet specific learning requirements. (ibid. p 97)

Here again we have contemporary research highlighting the role of reflection, communication, dialogue and open, public debate as key aspects of community development. However we also have the assertion that the combination of online and face-to-face delivery modes that characterise blended learning make this a particularly suitable form of environment for the development of communities.

From the perspective of the study being discussed in this report, the research undertaken by Vaughan and Garrison (2005) is particularly interesting. In essence, they contend that a blended learning environment significantly adds to the quality and quantity of cognitive outcomes achieved by a community of inquiry. Reporting on the results of a year long study with a higher education faculty, their research suggests that different levels of cognitive engagement are facilitated by a variety of teaching environments. For example, an initial face-to-face meeting of a group of learners is a good place to trigger ideas and initiate communication. It can also act relatively successful forum for creating a social relationship between group members. However, the time pressured reality of most face-to-face encounters mean that it can be quite difficult for individuals and groups to engage in considered reflection of issues being discussed. Vaughan and Garrison (2005) along with Mayer (2003) and Lally (2000) would suggest that the very process of posting to an online forum encourages and in some cases requires individuals to take time to reflect and present their ideas in a coherent and defensible manner.

From the perspective of the programme under discussion, this suggestion of the potential benefits of a blended learning mode of course delivery was significant. The practicalities

of delivering a course to two groups of educational professionals who would be present in a University setting for a certain part of a week and engaging in VLE supported practical work on others realistically seemed to demand some form of blended approach. While a decision to adopt some form of blended approach to course delivery was made early in the process, the precise balance between the online and face-to-face elements was not. As a result of this, a series of experiments with different formats was engaged in with a view to discovering the best combination of the two elements. In the following chapters of this study, the final format will be presented in some detail along with a short explanation as to how the particular balance between the two elements was arrived at.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed outline of the influences that shaped the training programme for self-evaluating teachers developed at Dublin City University. The centrality of the notion of community and the different interpretations of that concept were examined in some detail and an attempt was made to demonstrate how this idea can be extended beyond its traditional school bound definition. This process of extension depends critically on innovations in ICT that have taken place in recent years and a considerable amount of time was spent exploring exactly how functionalities such as CMC and DV can be used in conjunction with emerging VLE technology to develop online learning communities. In the following chapters, these disparate strands will be drawn together and an analysis of their influence on a 'blended' three year training programme designed to develop self-evaluating teachers capable of engaging with an emerging Irish system of educational evaluation will be provided.

Chapter Ten: Broadening the research methodology for this phase of the research

Chapter seven of this study provided an explanation of the broad methodological approach adopted by the researcher in the first phase of this work – namely case study research in schools. Relying heavily on semi-structured participant interviews this part of the research sought to analyse the new system of Whole School Evaluation in its early stages of implementation. Naturally as the study developed and the focus moved to an in-depth exploration of the self-evaluation programme designed and implemented by the researcher, the methodological tools used were to change somewhat although the semi structured research interview remained a constant. This latter part of the study relied heavily on data generated through the use of the MOODLE VLE as well as more traditional formats such as interviews and surveys. At a practical level this meant that while the fundamental research position outlined in an earlier section of this work did not have to be re-examined, the specific challenges thrown up by the type of data being analysed needed to be addressed. In particular careful consideration had to be given to how the VLE-generated data was to be structured, analysed and used. The uniqueness of the data generated posed a number of challenges for the researcher in areas such as:

- The choice of an analytic model to assess the quality of the postings
- The broad ethical framework to be adopted when dealing with such data
- The use of specially designed software to enhance the quality of analysis undertaken.

This chapter will detail how these and other challenges were met and provide a theoretical background for the subsequent findings and recommendations chapters.

Increasing the Data Flow: Drawing From Additional Resources

In an earlier chapter of this study a short list of the data collection methods used was provided along with a brief explanation of the general research stance adopted by the researcher. Locating the study firmly within the qualitative paradigm, the researcher chose to use as broad a range of data sources as possible (Huberman and Miles 2002). The exploration of the programme developed to enhance the professional capacities of ITE and CPD teachers provided a range of additional data sources. Whereas the earlier part of the

research concentrated on interviews, documentary analysis and questionnaires the second part significantly increased the range of data sources used (see Table 10.1 below).

Data Collection Methods	
ITE	CPD
Questionnaires	Questionnaires
Interviews	Interviews
Online Discussion Postings	Online Discussion Postings
VLE Generated Statistical Data	VLE Generated Statistical Data
Individual Reports	Individual Reports
Group Reports	Group Reports
Group generated digital video material	

Table 10.1: *A summary of data collection methods*

While maintaining the broad qualitative stance mentioned in earlier sections of this work, the researcher chose to investigate both additional modes of data collection and other methodologies and frameworks for working with and exploring the data generated.

Exploring the Data: Using Software to Code and Clarify

The rise in popularity of systematic, theory led qualitative research over the past number of decades has resulted in the emergence of a number of support mechanisms for the novice and experienced researcher working in the area. Among the more interesting of the supports to emerge has been software to assist the process of qualitative data analysis. More properly known as computer assisted qualitative data analysis software or CAQDAS (Bringer, Halley Johnston and Brackenridge 2006) its use has become so commonplace that

MacMillan and Koenig were able to state that 'the issue is not whether to use CAQDAS but how it should be used' (2004:180). When first developed their primary selling point was the advantages they offered the researcher who needed to deal with large volumes of textual data and who felt intimidated by the physical and conceptual limitations of traditional 'cut and paste' methods (Richards 1995). Indeed Seale when analysing the advantages of CAQDAS puts this at the top of his list. He summarises the benefits of the software under four broad categories:

- a) Speed at handling large volumes of data, freeing the researcher to explore numerous analytic questions.
- b) Improvement of rigour, including the production of counts of phenomena and searching for deviant cases.
- c) Facilitation of team research, including the development of consistent coding schemes.
- d) Helping with **sampling** (emphasis in the original) decisions, be these in the service of representatives or theory development

(2004:189)

What is interesting about this list is the claims made for CAQDAS over and above those relating to the mechanics of data analysis. Not only will the software speed things up it will improve rigour, facilitate team research and help with sampling. While not necessarily disagreeing with the claims, there is a danger of what MacMillan and Koenig term the 'wow factor' (2004:180) taking over. The wow factor is simply the natural tendency of individuals to marvel at what something new can do without asking why it is doing it or whether it is strictly necessary. MacMillan and Koenig go on to point out one of the major dangers of the wow factor in relation to CAQDAS is the assumption that 'software is the methodology, and that by simply learning to operate the program, the researcher is doing analysis' (ibid 180). This latter point is particularly important. CAQDAS is a tool, it is a powerful tool and can greatly enhance the process of data analysis but its use cannot absolve the researcher from the need to ground his or her study in a coherent and robust methodological context.

If we accept that the methodological framework must be addressed as a matter of course when CAQDAS is employed, it is interesting to explore some of the other benefits listed by Seale. The issue of rigour and our ability to validate the analysis and results offered in a qualitative research report are vitally important ones (Silverman 2004, Huberman and Miles 2002). What CAQDAS seems to offer is a way of demonstrating to even the most critical observer how the particular conclusions produced were arrived at. It does this by providing a visual and numeric record of the process of analysis in an easily understandable.

Researchers can now easily calculate how many times a particular word, phrase or concept occurs in a particular piece of text, explore the broader context of its use, search for any negative or contradictory cases and if necessary visually model their understanding of the significance of word or idea.

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface with a search for the code 'Discipline'. The 'Results' pane displays a table with columns: Name, Sources, References, Created, and Modified. The 'Queries' pane on the left shows 'Discipline' selected. The 'References' pane on the right shows three references with their respective coverage percentages and text excerpts. Annotations with arrows point to specific elements: 'Code: Discipline' points to the 'Discipline' query in the left pane; 'Number of references in data (n = 62)' points to the 'References' column header; and 'Samples from data' points to the text excerpts in the right pane.

Name	Sources	References	Created	Modified
Chemistry	1	1	16/06/2006 17:59	16/06/2006 17:59
Discipline	1	62	13/11/2006 01:30	13/11/2006 01:30
Evaluation	6	6	29/10/2006 11:23	20/10/2006 11:23
Evaluation 2	7	7	20/10/2006 11:24	20/10/2006 11:24
Evaluation 2/2	8	8	13/11/2006 00:46	13/11/2006 00:46

References:

- Reference 5 - 0.03% Coverage
however, by the 2nd class with each group they were a little bit chatty so i got to exercise my power of discipline!
- Reference 6 - 0.05% Coverage
good to hear ye all doing well! to those of ye who have problems i sympathise with ye as i have some discipline problems too but it's all going to happen to us at some stage!
- Reference 7 - 0.17% Coverage
I have to say my best class is the 5th year chemistry class I actually thought i'd have a few problems with it but there was no discipline problems at all and all the girls are really enthusiastic I'm also starting to get to know some of their names which i usually have a major problem with.

Figure 10.1: Using CAQDAS

This process can be seen in the example presented above, which was drawn from another study for ethical reasons, relating to student teachers experiences of misbehaviour whilst on teaching practice. In this example, we can see that there are 62 references to 'discipline'

present in student web postings from a stated period. We can see each of these references clearly numbered in the bottom right hand frame. The researcher can now examine each of these references with a view to developing a view on student experience discipline as an issue on teaching practice.

The issue of sampling to an extent draws on the same functionalities if we accept Seale's position that the main point of sampling in qualitative research is,

not so much to create empirical generalisations through large representative samples but to develop theory. (This can be done by) comparing cases where a phenomenon exists with those where it does not, seeing which other conditions appear to be associated with the phenomenon. (2004: 195)

What CAQDAS allows a researcher do is to code a large number of cases and then draw comparisons and contrasts between these cases with a view to developing a theory or explanation as to what is happening and why. In these situations theory is not only developed but a clear, unambiguous record of how it was developed is available to be interrogated by the researcher and others.

Interesting though these capabilities may be, they do not necessarily meet with universal approval among qualitative researchers. There is a recurrent theme among some writers suggesting that the use of CAQDAS is a backdoor way of accepting the primacy of the positivist approach to research (Carvajal 2002, Bong 2002). The importance ascribed to counting, proving and producing is seen as being in some cases at least as being inimical to a naturalist and emergent approach to data analysis. A second criticism that emerges regularly is the contention that the very structure of most CAQDAS packages forces users down a grounded theory approach to research whether or not they wish to (Seale 2004). While many of the package developers would vehemently deny this (Richards 2005) it is a widespread view that needs to be addressed.

Notwithstanding the criticisms and concerns raised by some writers, it was decided early on in this research to make use of the functionalities of a CAQDAS package. This was done for a number of reasons. The first of these was the general comfort level of the

researcher with this type of software. He had been using different packages for almost a decade and felt very much at home with them. A connected issue was the awareness of how the software could be used to assist in the management and analysis of the CMC generated textual material. As will be seen in the latter part of this chapter, there were many hundreds of pieces of textual data to be analysed and the functionalities offered by CAQDAS seemed to promise a more streamlined method for dealing with this data.

A final and equally significant reason for the use of the software was the rapid increase in functions offered by packages. Whereas in the past different packages offered for example either the ability to retrieve text or build theory most new software now offered a whole range of functions. Indeed, most packages now provide the researcher with some or all of the following: text retrievers, text base managers, code and retrieve programmes, code based theory builders and conceptual network builders (Weitzman 2000: 808-809).

Following an extensive study of the different CAQDAS available a decision was made to use the NVIVO 7 package, one of newest and most powerful of the many tools available.

As well as offering all of the functionalities suggested by Weitzman above, it also had a powerful multimedia analysis tool which was to prove particularly useful in this study. The developers explicitly sold the package on its ability to not only record, retrieve and analyse a broad range of information but also to make dynamic connections and develop new theories. They state explicitly that,

There's no predetermined ten-point plan when it comes to making sense of your data. That's why NVivo 7 allows you to go back and revisit your information, test theories and explore your concepts and ideas through superior querying and graphical tools at a point during your project. It's a powerful way of researching.
(NVIVO Brochure 2006: 2)

This flexibility was considered to be particularly important in a study that was iterative in nature and developmental in focus. The ability to develop and test theories at different stages of the process was vital as was the freedom the software afforded to experiment with ideas and concepts. In practice, the NVIVO software proved to be, to coin a phrase, fit for purpose. The large quantities of data produced were stored, analysed and repeatedly accessed. Theories were developed, challenged and modified and reports made and argued over. It is arguable that one of the reasons the use of the software proved so successful was

the strong sense the researcher had of the broader methodological context within which it was being used. The software remained a tool and did not become an end in itself.

Exploring the Data: Using Software to Count

The second use of data analysis software in this study was probably a little less novel. In common with the vast majority of current educational researchers, the author of this study chose to use a statistical analysis package to manipulate the quantitative data generated (Gorard and Taylor 2004). The software used in this case was the SPSS package, one of the most widely available of all statistical analysis software. Described by its developers as 'the leader in providing predictive analytics solutions that help educational institutions make better decisions' (SPSS 2006:2) the software helps researchers to:

- Collect, prepare, analyze, and manage research data
- Discover important concepts and relationships in journals, publications, and research databases
- Produce high-quality output for reports and publication

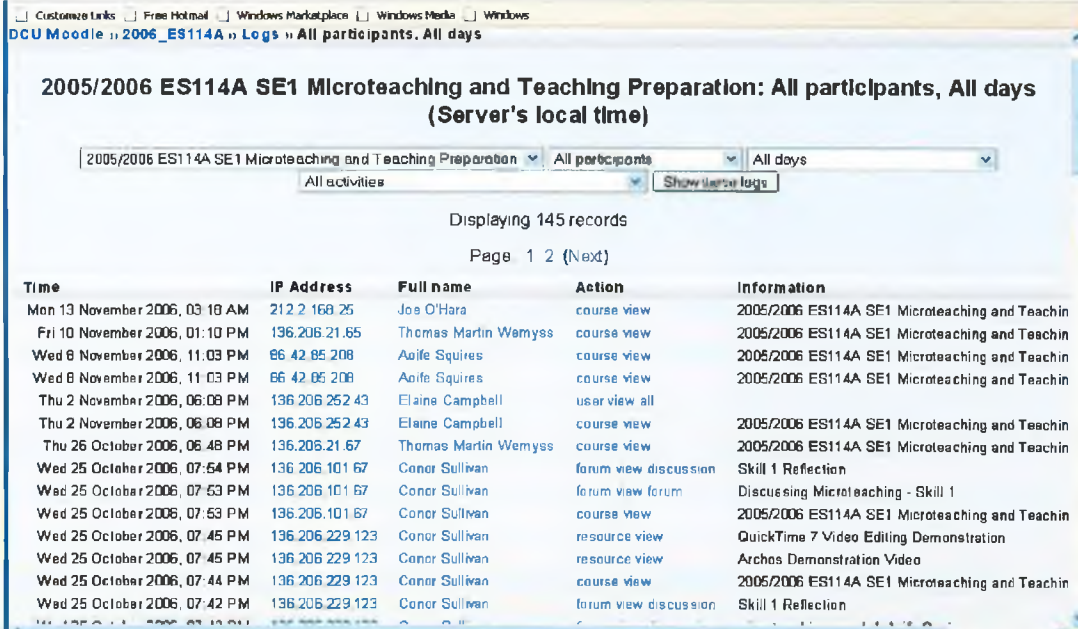
(SPSS 2006: 3)

In reality, it was the first of these functionalities, the ability to manipulate research data that was of most use to the researcher. Because of the complexity of the software, the researcher received assistance from an expert user who was based in the same Department when deciding on the type and format of data to be produced. His input was also important during the process of questionnaire design to ensure that the structure adopted in each question was appropriate and above all useful.

Despite the broadly qualitative nature of the study being undertaken, there were some significant segments of quantitative data available to the researcher. Table 10.1 above indicates the two major sources of this data, the questionnaires generated in the course of the study by both participants and researcher and the VLE usage statistics generated by participants (Appendix N and O). Analysis of the former proved relatively straightforward with data tables being generated and basic descriptive statistical operations being

participants (Appendix N and O). Analysis of the former proved relatively straightforward with data tables being generated and basic descriptive statistical operations being performed on the data. This produced many of the data sets explored in the latter sections of this chapter which added significantly to the understanding of the more text based qualitative material.

The second source of statistical data, the VLE usage statistics were somewhat more complicated at the initial stages as they had to be recorded and categorised prior to analysis in the package. There was the additional issue of the sheer volume of the data generated by the VLE. As we will see later, each time a participant accessed a page, a permanent record was made. This led to many thousands of records being produced which had to be recorded and manually transferred to SPSS. Figure 10.2 below provides a screenshot of the basic usage data produced by MOODLE in its raw state.



Time	IP Address	Full name	Action	Information
Mon 13 November 2006, 03:10 AM	212.2.168.25	Joe O'Hara	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Fri 10 November 2006, 01:10 PM	136.206.21.65	Thomas Martin Wemyss	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Wed 8 November 2006, 11:03 PM	86.42.85.208	Aoife Squires	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Wed 8 November 2006, 11:03 PM	86.42.85.208	Aoife Squires	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Thu 2 November 2006, 06:08 PM	136.206.252.43	Elaine Campbell	user view all	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Thu 2 November 2006, 06:08 PM	136.206.252.43	Elaine Campbell	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Thu 26 October 2006, 06:48 PM	136.206.21.67	Thomas Martin Wemyss	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:54 PM	136.206.101.67	Conor Sullivan	forum view discussion	Skill 1 Reflection
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:53 PM	136.206.101.67	Conor Sullivan	forum view forum	Discussing Microteaching - Skill 1
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:53 PM	136.206.101.67	Conor Sullivan	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:45 PM	136.206.229.123	Conor Sullivan	resource view	QuickTime 7 Video Editing Demonstration
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:45 PM	136.206.229.123	Conor Sullivan	resource view	Archos Demonstration Video
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:44 PM	136.206.229.123	Conor Sullivan	course view	2005/2006 ES114A SE1 Microteaching and Teachin
Wed 25 October 2006, 07:42 PM	136.206.229.123	Conor Sullivan	forum view discussion	Skill 1 Reflection

Figure 10.2: Raw statistical data from MOODLE

As a result of the widespread use of packages such as SPSS over a significant period of time, there is less of a 'wow factor' associated with them. Most qualitative researchers

tend to be rooted in the general methodological debates surrounding the type of data used in different modes of research.

To a large extent these issues did not arise in the course of this research as there was a clear understanding of the underlying philosophical and research position from the outset. As has been stated on a number of occasions, this was a qualitative study which used a variety of data collection methods in order to achieve a higher degree of reliability and validity (Huberman and Miles 2002). There were general research issues to be addressed however which impacted on the use of the statistical data generated with perhaps the most important of these being the sample used.

The issue of sampling is a relatively contentious one in qualitative research. We have already seen one explanation suggested by Seale which explicitly links it to the idea of theory building (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Other writers (Maykut and Moorehouse 1994, Silverman 2004, Huberman and Miles 2002) approach it from a slightly different perspective. Maykut and Moorehouse approach the issue from the perspective of the difficulties that often face qualitative researchers when approaching the area of sampling. They state that, 'many of us have been taught that in order to have an acceptable sample for a research project we should select people at random from the population' (1994: 56). This is often impossible in a qualitative research setting and therefore researchers working in this paradigm tend to select a sample with a view to 'gaining a deep understanding of some phenomenon' (ibid). This concept of selecting a sample for understanding is not of course alien to the quantitative paradigm, in fact it could be argued that this is at the root of all sampling techniques. However it is an explicit goal of most qualitative research and was one which underpinned this study. Rather than strive for an impractical random sample a decision was made to employ a 'purposive' sample which included all participants in the study with a view to developing the deepest understanding of the phenomenon possible (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 370). In practice this meant that the data from the 34 CPD and 14 ITE participants would form the basis for all investigations and in particular for the statistical models produced in the course of the use of SPSS.

There was one final area in relation to sampling which needed to be addressed. As we have seen, the study generated a high level of both textual and numerical data in the course of its CMC element. This posed something of a problem for the researcher. While it was comparatively easy to analyse the numerical data using SPSS the text based data presented more of a challenge due to its volume and complexity. Best practice in the area tended to recommend the concentration on up to one third of the messages posted online as a way of guaranteeing that a comprehensive and useful analysis would take place (Lally 2000, Hara, Bonk and Angeli 2000, Garrison and Anderson 2004). The selection of the messages could be either random or purposeful. In keeping with the broader research framework adopted in this study, a decision was made to adopt a purposeful sampling approach and to choose the postings relating to:

- The use of the self-generated data collection instruments
- The general postings dealing with attitudes to self-evaluation

In making this decision it was important to take account of the framework for analysing CMC adopted as each had their own complexities and areas of particular interest. In the next section we will examine the framework adopted and explore its impact on the overall structure of the data analysis approach used in the study.

Methodology: Analysing Online Communication

One of the more interesting methodological challenges posed by this study was the requirement to analyse a large amount of data generated in the course of asynchronous computer mediated communication. At one level it is possible to argue that as the output from this type of communication is transmitted in written form then a standard analysis model such as those proposed by Silverman (2005), Miles and Huberman (1994) should be applied. Indeed, for much of this research just such a model was used, resulting in the emergence of significant themes that impacted on the overall shape of this study.

To an extent however, this approach misses the point in relation to the analysis of CMC. As we have seen in chapter 9, one of the huge benefits of working in a CMC environment is the opportunity it provides for participants to engage with each other, with ideas and in

reflection. CMC is a dynamic communications medium whose inherent architecture happens to publicly record the processes through which people's thoughts, ideas and positions develop and change over time. In many ways this process is unique. While other data collection formats may contain some of the elements of a CMC environment it appears that none possesses quite the same combination. For example, participant journals have the dynamic, developmental focus but not the public aspect while focus groups have the public element of position statement but not the extended development element.

Recognising the unique nature of much of the data produced by such fora, a number of researchers have sought to develop models of analysis that accurately capture the richness of the interactions and processes recorded. In particular, writers from the early 1990's onwards have sought to develop models of content analysis of online discussion fora that capture the critical dialogue and reflective engagement aspect of the CMC environment (Henri, 1992, Marra, Moore and Klimczak 2004). Given the centrality of reflective analysis, conceptual engagement with the process of self-evaluation and possible online community building to the programme under discussion, it seemed obvious that the researcher need to adopt or adapt an existing CMC analysis protocol for this study. In particular, he had to find a methodology that allowed him examine, if possible, the level of engagement with the concepts discussed in the various fora. This section will examine the various protocols examined as well as discussing the strengths and potential challenges posed by the model that was eventually chosen.

Analysing Online Communication: Comparing Models

Given the comparative youth of the CMC format it is not particularly surprising that most of the methodological development that has taken place in the field has occurred in the last decade and a half. While there were some writers tentatively exploring the implications of CMC for teaching and learning (Harasim 1993, Romizowski 1997) the earliest significant model for analysing the communication and knowledge development aspect of CMC was developed by Henri in 1992. This model sought to assess the quality of online communication by concentrating on four aspects; the social, the interactive, the cognitive and the metacognitive. Drawing from a range of data analysis, discourse analysis and

communications sources she sought to provide a rationale for each of the categories chosen as well as a basic schema for applying them (Hara, Bonk and Angeli, 2000). Mara et al (2004) provide examples of these developments when explaining the categories (see Table 10.2).

Henri's 1992 Model of CMC Analysis	
Category	Example
Social	Rates of participation, statements of a social nature e.g. 'how are you today
Interactive	Statements that refer to other postings e.g. 'as John said' etc.
Cognitive	Statements containing evidence of reasoning at elementary, in-depth, inference drawing, judgemental & strategic levels
Metacognitive	Statements demonstrating high levels of reasoning e.g. analytic or evaluative statements or positions

Table: 10.2: *Henri's Model adapted by Mara et al*

(2004: 25)

What made this model so innovative was the attempt made to focus on,

the social activity and the interactivity of the individuals in a group at the same time as giving a picture of the cognitive and metacognitive processes of those individuals
(Lally 2000: 7)

The increased use of CMC throughout the 1990's led to the development of a number of alternative models for analysing the nature, quantity and quality of the discussions taking place (Burnett 2000). One of the more significant models to emerge was that proposed by Gunwardena, Lowe and Anderson (1997). This model explicitly built on the work of Henri in that it acknowledged the importance of structured framework for analysis that she proposed. However, Gunwardena et al chose to change the focus of the analysis

concentrating less on the teacher role in facilitating the creation of knowledge and more on the social construction of knowledge by course participants. Choosing to give the paper which first proposed this model, the title of 'Analysis of a global online debate and the development of an *interaction analysis model for examining social construction of knowledge in computer conferencing* ' (italics added) emphasises this point. The Interaction Analysis Model (IAM) developed suggested that the process of knowledge construction in any given group goes through five stages (see Table 10.3).

Gunwardena, Lowe and Anderson Interactive Analysis Model	
Phase	Example
Phase 1	Sharing and Comparing Information
Phase 2	The Discovery and Exploration of Dissonance or Inconsistency among ideas, concepts or statements
Phase 3	Negotiating of Meaning / Co –Construction of Knowledge
Phase 4	Testing and Modification of Proposed Synthesis or Co-Construction
Phase 5	Agreement Statements/Application of New Meaning

Table 10.3: *Gunwardena, Lowe and Anderson Interactive Analysis Model*

(Adapted from Gunwardena et al 1998: 142)

This model proved to be very influential and was particularly valued for the concentration it placed on the social construction element of knowledge creation in online fora. It could be argued however that by concentrating almost exclusively on participant led socially constructed knowledge the IAM model limited its potential range of application to those learning situations where the teacher had a very limited role. This is perhaps understandable as the model was designed, initially at least, for application with a purely online course. As we have already seen, the programme under investigation in this study

chose a 'blended' delivery mode and for this reason the researcher considered the IAM to be unsuitable for the purpose of analysing the CMC data produced.

The examination and subsequent rejection of both the Henri and IAM models by the researcher helped clarify the characteristics that would be needed to assess the data produced in the course of this study. The model would need to provide a framework to assess conceptual development in some objective manner. In addition it would need to provide a structure for understanding the role played by course participants in producing new knowledge in the course of their discussions. However, as importantly, it would need to include the role of the teacher or researcher as an essential element of this knowledge development process. Having examined a number of other models, for example the Newman, Webb and Cochrane (1995) protocol and the Gilbert and Dabbagh (2006) model based on Blooms Taxonomy, a decision was made to adopt the 'Community of Inquiry Model' proposed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer in 2000. It is to this model and its impact on the study under consideration that we will now turn.

Adopting and Adapting the Community of Inquiry Model

In Chapter 8 of this study, we briefly examined one of the ancillary pieces of research that developed from the original 'Community of Inquiry Model' (COI) investigations conducted by Garrison et al in the late 1990's. This research, published by Vaughan and Garrison in 2005, dealt with the potential of a blended learning environment to significantly enhance the quality of a professional development programme in a higher education institution. While the 2005 research is important in the context of one aspect of this study, the earlier foundation work on the communities of inquiry was to be particularly significant when it came to choosing a data analysis model for use with the CMC generated material.

The COI model was developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) in an attempt to provide a framework for explaining the complex interactions that take place in any online learning situation. The model 'assumes that learning occurs within a community through the interaction of three presences - social, cognitive and teaching' (Vaughan and Garrison 2005: 2). Figure 10.3 below, drawn from the original 2000 article, demonstrates the

authors understanding of how the different elements of the model interact. They would argue that to a great extent, both social presence – the ability of participants to present themselves socially through the medium of text based online communication – and teaching presence – the structuring and guiding element provided by the teaching figure in any learning situation- act as enablers for the ultimate purpose of any learning encounter, the achievement of cognitive outcomes (2000: 94).

They further suggest that concept of cognitive presence encompasses ‘the analysis, construction and confirmation of meaning and understanding within a community of learners through sustained discourse and reflection’ (2003: 55). It is, in their opinion, the key element that transforms a group from being a loose collection of individuals to a knowledge producing community. This transformation occurs through a process of engagement with ideas, experiences and individuals in an online setting.

In addition to providing the basic COI model Garrison, Anderson, Archer and others have, in a series of papers published from the late 1990’s to the mid years of this decade, attempted tease out the implications of using the model in real life teaching and learning situations which make use of CMC (see Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000 and 2001, Garrison and Anderson 2004, Vaughan and Garrison 2005, Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, Koole and Kappleman 2006). One of the areas that received particular attention was the development of a process for measuring the extent to which the cognitive, social and teaching elements of their model were present in any given CMC enabled learning situation. Adopting an approach similar to that developed by Henri and Gunwardena et al the core team of writers have developed frameworks for each of the three elements. Each of the frameworks deals with an individual element of the model and further subdivides them into categories providing indicators for each of the categories identified. Table 10.4 below was developed by Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, Koole and Kappleman (2006), and provides a summary of the model.

In practice researchers tend to explore one element of the model at a time and as a result, a number of additional frameworks for each of the discrete elements have been produced to

In practice researchers tend to explore one element of the model at a time and as a result, a number of additional frameworks for each of the discrete elements have been produced to

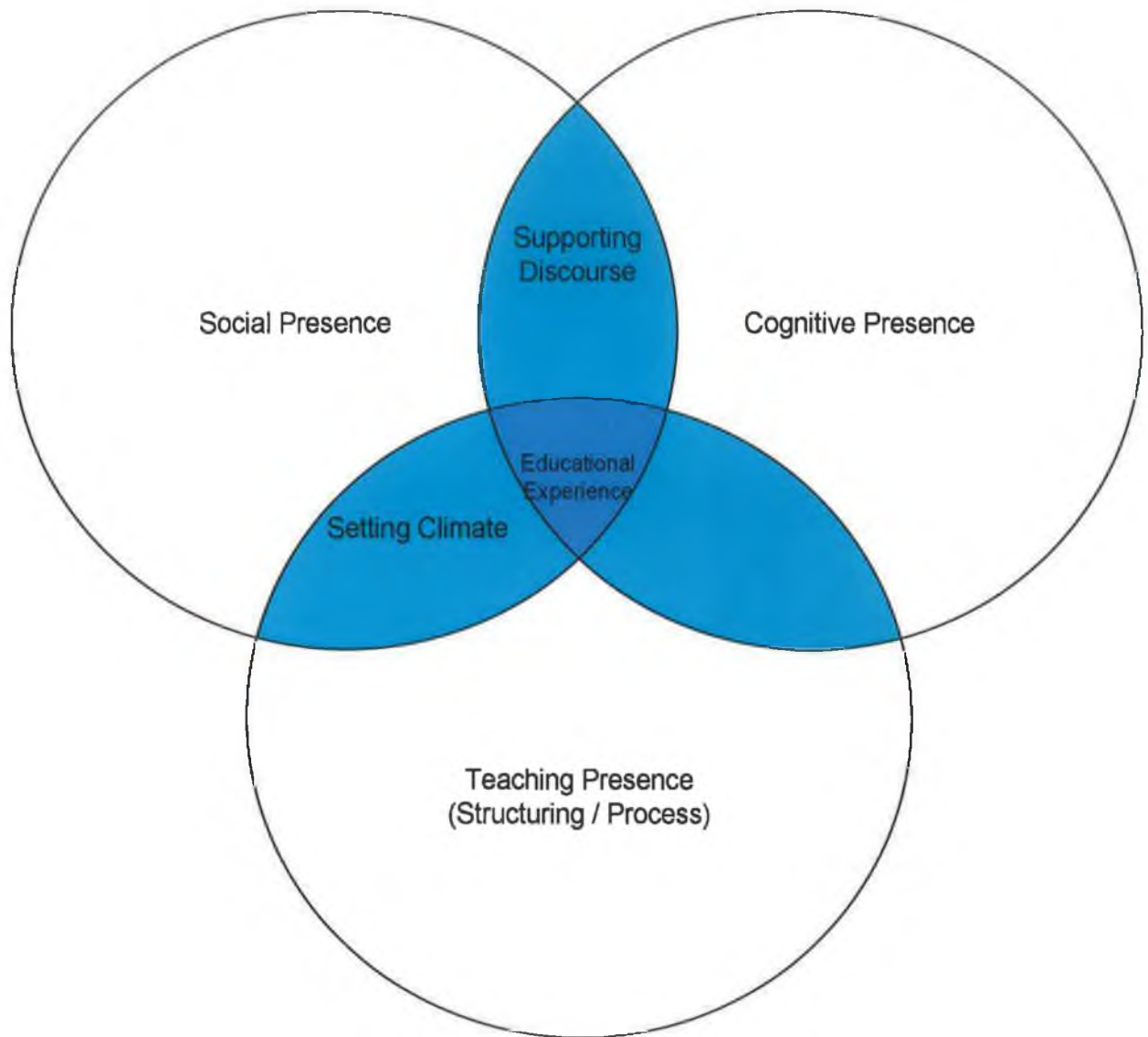


Figure 10.3: *Community of Inquiry Model*

(Garrison and Anderson 2004: 26)

assist in the coding process (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer 1999, Anderson, Rourke, Garrison and Archer 2002).

Community of Inquiry Coding Scheme		
Elements	Categories	Indicators (examples only)
Cognitive Presence	Triggering event	Sense of Puzzlement
	Exploration	Information Exchange
	Integration	Connecting Ideas
	Resolution	Apply new ideas
Social Presence	Affective	Expressing emotions
	Open communication	Risk-free expression
	Group cohesion	Encouraging collaboration
Teaching Presence	Design and organization	Setting curriculum and methods
	Facilitating discourse	Sharing personal meaning
	Direct instruction	Focusing discussion

Table 10.4: Community of Inquiry Coding Scheme

(Garrison et al 2006: 7)

For many researchers one of the initial decisions to be made relates to the aspect of the model to be prioritised in the course of a particular study (Poscente 2002, Meyer 2004). The complexity of the model and the multi- analytic levels offered mean that this type of choice is inevitable. In most cases the primary aspect explored is decided by the context in which the teaching and learning is taking place as well as the focus of the research. Indeed, the process of model development over the last decade has been marked by the production of a series of papers examining specific elements in isolation from the others.

In the context of this study the most influential of these has undoubtedly been the 2005 Vaughan and Garrison analysis of the impact of blended learning on cognitive presence. Defining cognitive presence as ‘a condition for higher order thinking and learning’ (Garrison and Anderson 2004: 28) the argument as presented suggests that blended learning environments can have a particularly significant impact in encouraging higher order,

reflective thinking in a linked CMC environment. This is important for a study such as this one which is seeking assess the extent to which individual teachers engage reflectively with not only the theoretical underpinnings of self-evaluation theory but also the practice generated experiences of their professional peers in a blended setting.

A second important element in a blended learning model is the role adopted by the instructor or teacher (Reece and Lockee 2005). As a result of the central guiding role adopted by the researcher in the management and guidance of the course, it was considered important to examine the role of teaching presence in the CMC element of the final version of the programme implemented. The definition used by Anderson et al (2001) to describe teaching presence reinforced this decision. Put simply, teaching presence is,

the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes (2001:2).

There are strong echoes here of the MacBeath (2005) and Swaffield and MacBeath (2005) understanding of the role to be played by the 'critical friend' in the process of facilitating the development of self-evaluation competence in teachers and schools.

Of course a concentration on two aspects of the proposed model does not preclude an interest in the third and some attention was paid to the social aspects of the CMC texts produced in the course of the study. Garrison et al (2000: 94) define social presence as 'the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially'. While this is undoubtedly a critical aspect of a purely online communications setting, and has been acknowledged as such by writers from Henri (1992) to Gilbert and Dabbagh (2006), it is arguable that it is less important in a blended environment where participants are able to create a social profile for themselves by the very fact of their physical presence.

The process of examining the COI model helped clarify a number of important elements of the data analysis approach that was eventually adopted in this study. For the reasons stated, a decision was made to concentrate the analysis on the cognitive aspect of the CMC texts produced, supporting this with an exploration of the relevant teaching presence while

produced, supporting this with an exploration of the relevant teaching presence while acknowledging, when significant, the social aspect. The next section will examine the process of data analysis as it operated in practice as well as some of the conceptual and practical issues that emerged in the course of the analysis.

Analysing CMC Data Using the COI Model

At one level the process of analysing the data generated in CMC events using the COI model is comparatively straightforward. Researchers are encouraged to read through the transcripts and using the frameworks provided for each element to assign a code to each element of the transcript (Meyer 2004). The nature of the categories and indicators provided for each element made this model particularly suitable for transfer to the NVIVO qualitative data analysis package discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Each of the elements was designated as a node with the sub-categories being attached to that node (see Figure 10.4 below for a sample screenshot of the NVIVO Nodal Page).

The screenshot shows the NVIVO software interface. The 'Tree Nodes' window is open, displaying a list of nodes under the 'COI' category. The nodes are organized into a tree structure, with 'COI' at the top and several sub-nodes below it. Each node has associated data: a source count, a reference count, and creation/modification dates. A 'Complete Postings' window is also visible, showing a message from Joe O'Hara dated Tuesday, 22 February 2005.

Name	Sources	References	Created	Modified
COI	1	15	12/06/2006 16:29	10/11/2006 20:30
Cognitive Presence	0	0	10/11/2006 20:44	10/11/2006 20:44
A Triggering Events	1	3	12/06/2006 16:35	10/11/2006 20:32
Sense of Puzzlement	0	0	10/11/2006 20:49	10/11/2006 20:49
Exploration	0	0	12/06/2006 16:34	10/11/2006 20:32
Information Exchange	0	0	10/11/2006 20:49	10/11/2006 20:49
Integration	0	0	10/11/2006 20:36	10/11/2006 20:47
Connecting Ideas	0	0	10/11/2006 20:47	10/11/2006 20:50
Resolution	0	0	10/11/2006 20:48	10/11/2006 20:48
Apply New Ideas	0	0	10/11/2006 20:50	10/11/2006 20:50
Teacher Presence	0	0	10/11/2006 20:51	10/11/2006 20:51

Teaching Week 1
by Joe O'Hara - Tuesday, 22 February 2005, 02:40 PM

Hi all,
As you read this you should be recovering from your first weeks teaching.

The process of coding was completed over a number of weeks with extensive use being made of the query and modelling functionality of the software. At the end of this process tabular data relating to patterns of cognitive presence were produced (see Table 10.5 below) and assessed with a view to coming to some sort of conclusion about the value of the CMC process as a whole.

Category	No.	%
Triggering	1	11%
Exploration	3	33%
Integration	4	45%
Resolution	1	11%

Table 10.5: *Recording Cognitive Presence Sample Table*

Overall, the COI model proved very useful for analysing the different types of communication taking place in the blended CMC environment created for the project. In the next chapter, the insights generated will be presented as part of the overall findings for the study and their broader implications teased out. Whilst acknowledging the generally positive nature of the experience it is important to note that there were a number of issues which arose that caused the researcher some concern and which will be examined briefly in the next section.

Using the COI Model – Issues and Concerns

To an extent, the concerns that emerged as a result of the use of the COI model are ones that might naturally be expected when dealing with text based discourse. It is something of a truism but it is important to accept that the inherently imprecise nature of language can lead to difficulties in the precise interpretation and categorisation of individual statements, an essential element of the COI model. Faced with this imprecision, qualitative researchers have developed a variety of solutions. As we have already seen, some have chosen to

emphasise the importance multiple sources of corroboration as a method for validating thematic categorisations (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Others have sought to develop robust models which control, as far as is practicable, the different variables present in any set of data to be analysed (Garrison et al 2000, 2001).

In the context of the CMC analysis models, one of the major sources of concern for developers as well as end users is the unit of analysis to be adopted when examining the data. What the debate surrounding the most appropriate unit of analysis comes down in large part to a conflict in views relating to the best way of ensuring precision in coding discussions. Garrison et al (2000, 2004) have been particularly focused on this element of their model developing a complex and statistically robust case for the designation of the whole message as the basic analytic unit. They argue that using the unit has a number of advantages including the fact that it is 'objectively identifiable: Unlike other units of analysis, multiple raters can agree on the total number of cases' (Garrison and Anderson 2004:144). Another identified advantage is that it produces a manageable number of cases. This is particularly important when there are large numbers of participants making multiple postings that need to be analysed. Finally, it guarantees that the ultimate decision as to the length and conceptual boundaries of the unit analysed are set by the author and not by the researcher.

Compelling though these arguments may seem at first glance, there are a series of competing and at times equally as convincing set of theories put forward by other CMC analysts. For example Hara, Bonk and Angeli (2000) in their article '*Content Analysis of Online Discussion in an Applied Educational Psychology*' suggested that the paragraph should be used as the basic unit of analysis. Arguing that most users naturally use the paragraph as a structure to subdivide their messages into a series of thematic units they suggest that analytic models need to work at this level. If they do not, there is a danger that they may miss some of the more detailed development patterns that are present at individual paragraph level. Fahy (2000) and Hillman (1999) suggested that the only unit of measurement capable of accurately recording all relevant themes while at the same time lending itself to widespread, objective use is the sentence. These authors would argue that

the level of inter-rater reliability is significantly enhanced by choosing this unit of analysis, thus ensuring the greater analytic accuracy of the final themes produced.

In contrast to this tightly defined and to an extent reductionist approach, Henri (1992) suggested that the basic unit of analysis be defined as a unit of meaning. She explicitly rejects the establishment of unit definition criteria prior to an initial reading of the CMC dialogues and instead insists that the unit be allowed emerge from the overall structure of the message. This approach has a number of significant advantages. Firstly it acknowledges the dynamic nature of most CMC communication which can result in a significant number of different thematic strands being presented in one message, paragraph or even sentence. This is particularly obvious in messages constructed by individuals who are more used to the fluid communications medium of SMS text or instant messaging. A second important advantage of this approach is the opportunity it affords the researcher to be flexible and sensitive in their reporting on the richness of the dialogue taking place. By allowing the researcher dialogue with the message in a number of different units, the unit of meaning facilitates the use of the full range of identifying criteria provided by models such as the COI and IAM.

Of course there are problems associated with this approach. Garrison and Anderson (2004) are particularly dismissive of it due to the inherent subjectivity of the final decision made by the researcher. In their view this subjectivity makes the process of guaranteeing inter-rater reliability particularly problematic. While this latter point is undoubtedly valid, what it does is place into sharp relief the particular research context out of which the original COI model was developed. The model was produced to look at purely online interactions. There was little opportunity to examine other data for corroboration as none was present. In this situation, the best process for ensuring the validity of findings produced was to have a number of researchers code the same CMC dialogue with a view to their coming up with similar results (Garrison et al 2006). Inter-rater reliability in this situation became the guarantor of validity.

Important though these debates around the appropriate unit of analysis undoubtedly are, it is arguable that this importance diminishes somewhat when the research context changes to a blended format from a purely online one. In a blended format there are usually multiple data sources which allow researchers to ensure validity through traditional qualitative data approaches such as triangulation. Removing the need for rigorous inter-rater reliability and replacing it with the concept of triangulation frees the researcher to adopt the more flexible, though admittedly more subjective, unit of meaning approach proposed by Henri (1992). In the study being presented here the issue of the unit of analysis was a live one for most of the period of analysis. The researcher actually adopted both the message and the unit of meaning approaches to analysing the postings in order to compare their strengths and weaknesses. Unsurprisingly each had elements that suggested that they should take precedence as well as aspects that were not particularly helpful in getting to the essential meaning of the dialogue. In the end, it was decided to follow the unit of meaning approach proposed by Henri as it seemed to provide a richer description of the dialogue and in particular the cognitive development process taking place in the CMC events under investigations. In practice when the message as unit approach was adopted much of the richness of the discussion was lost and the analytic categories identified tended to cleave to the middle of the COI model. This pattern has also been noted by Meyer (2004) who carried out a comparative analysis of four models for assessing cognitive presence in CMC dialogues. In addition, as the research developed it soon became obvious that the CMC events under investigation actually took place in a continuum that started with and returned to the face-to-face dialogue that was occurring the formal classroom elements of the programme. Here again, the broader blended format seemed to demand a greater flexibility in analysing meaning as it had to take into account events and issues referred to that were outside of direct dialogue but were an essential element of the overall learning process.

A second broad area of concern to emerge was that of how to accurately assess the dynamic structure of the dialogue that was taking place. The COI model attempts to do this by speaking of the social aspect of messaging and using this as a category to summarise the non-cognitive student processes that were clearly present in the communications. This appeared somewhat limited and it certainly seemed to ignore the rich vein of participant

data the most VLE's now produce. It also suggested a different approach to that adopted by Henri who emphasised the importance of assessing this sort of information as a way of understanding what is happening in any CMC event. As well as offering an insight into the patterns of dialogue, an approach that explored the patterns of interaction could potentially provide the possibility of accurately assessing the impact of different teacher inputs on the overall direction of the dialogue taking place. This was considered particularly important in a blended context where teacher input was significant and targeted from the start of the process.

A decision was made therefore to try and find an approach to mapping interaction patterns in the CMC events that were being analysed. One of the more interesting models proposed in this area is the one identified by Hara, Bonk and Angeli (2000). They choose to call the section of their paper dealing with this 'electronic interaction pattern findings' (2000:12) and to an extent this describes exactly what the researcher undertaking this study was seeking to discover. Their basic position is that participants in CMC events 'strive to develop similar social relationships to those in face to face settings' (2000:12) and that the development of these relationships can be mapped graphically. Again Hara, Bonk and Angeli were dealing with a pure CMC setting and there was a need to adapt the analysis mode produced to take account of the blended context under investigation in this study. Taking this into account, a mapping model of interaction patterns was developed in the course of the analysis of the CMC events and it will be used in the findings section of the study to illuminate some points relating to the social dynamic of the online group. Figure 10.5 below contains a sample of the type of model developed.

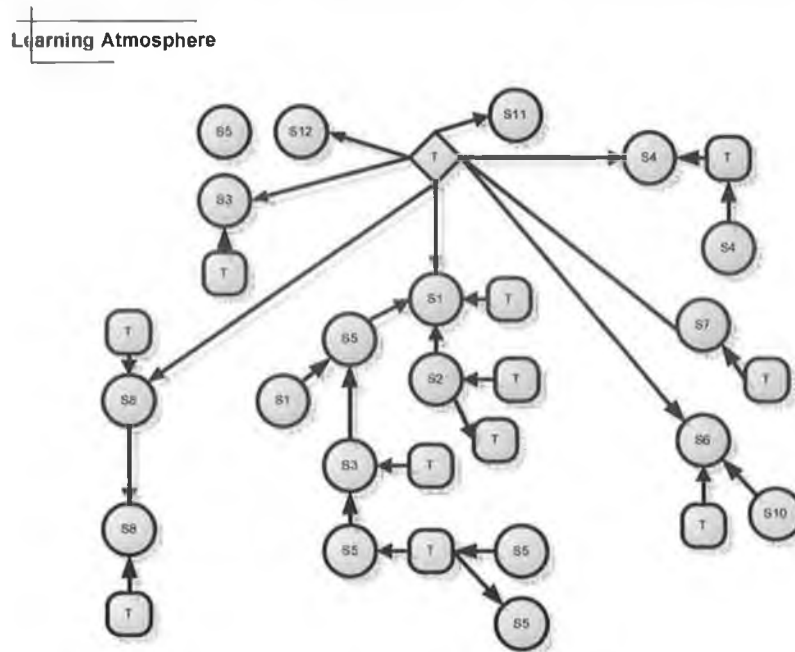


Figure 10.5: Sample Map of Interaction Patterns – Learning Atmosphere Discussion

The third area of concern that arose as a result of the analysis of CMC generated data related to the ethical issues raised by the use of this material. There has been an increasing awareness on the part of researchers working in the area of CMC analysis that the use of data generated in these fora throws up particular ethical issues that need to be addressed honestly and openly. In the context of the study being reported on here, a decision was made to address the concerns raised in the context of the broader ethical framework adopted. It was felt that this approach would give coherence to the response to the legitimate ethical concerns surrounding the use of CMC data (Garrison and Anderson 2004) while at the same time providing a background to the choices made.

The general ethical framework adopted by this study was at all times informed by the emerging best practice in the area. The past decade has seen the general ethical approach adopted in all types of qualitative research come under increasing scrutiny (Shaw 2003, Clough 2004). While there was no real suggestion that researchers were acting in an unethical manner there was a sense that the full complexity of the qualitative research

environment was not always taken into account when researchers chose to address the issue. For this reason, professional organisations such as the BERA, the British Educational Research Association, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) began to publish sets of comprehensive ethical guidelines. The BERA 'Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2004) are an excellent example of this type of document. Running to fourteen pages and containing forty-eight subsections, the guidelines attempt to provide the educational researcher with a comprehensive document capable of addressing most ethical dilemmas they were likely to encounter.

In addition to these comprehensive sets of guidelines there has been an attempt by a wider range of writers to develop some broad ethical principles that can be applied to most research situations (see for example Smyth and Williamson 2004). Christians (2000) tracing the development of these general principles suggests that from the early 1980's most codes of professional ethics produced by scholarly associations were had four key areas of concern. They were:

1. Informed consent
2. Deception
3. Privacy and confidentiality
4. Accuracy

(Christians 2000: 138-140)

To an extent these categories are self-explanatory. Informed consent relates research participants and in particular about their 'right to be informed about the nature and consequences' of the research they are taking part in (Christians 2000:138). Deception is specifically targeted at the researcher and requires them at all times to be open and honest in their dealings with the research participants. Privacy and confidentiality relates primarily to the protection of the individuals taking part in the research and in particular to the requirement to keep their identities anonymous where possible. The final area of concern that of accuracy in relation to the data produced and analysed, is an essential criterion of all research. Indeed Christian describes accurate data as being 'the coin of the realm, experimentally and morally (2000: 140). In one form or another these four concerns

have been repeated and at times refined in most ethical frameworks produced since the 1980's. For example the AARE's summary of the field argues that,

of the material which has been written on ethics in education, the focus has been on qualitative methods and on questions of confidentiality, informed consent and minimization of harm

Halasa 1998:1)

In recent years a substantial amount of work has been carried out seeking to tease out the implications of applying these core principles to real life educational research situations. It is not that surprising given the diversity of these situations that a range of responses to the application of the general principles has emerged. Some work such as that carried out Grinyer (2004) addresses the issue of anonymity and confidentiality and argues quite convincingly that in many situations participants would prefer their identities revealed as it gives them a sense of ownership of the data used. Other writers, Malone 2003 being one of the more trenchant, argue that fully informed consent is not possible and that harm to research participants is essential.

Whilst it is undoubtedly important to acknowledge the emerging critique of the general ethical framework it is fair to say that most researchers would strive at the very least to ensure that participants are no worse off personally, professionally or physically as a result of their taking part in an investigative process. Dingwall (1992 cited in Miller, Dingwall and Murphy) describes this 'governing ethic' as being one of 'fair dealing' (2004: 338). However as they go on to point out, much recent work in the area has been interested in dealing with the area of 'best practice' (2004: 338). This is understandable given the practical focus of most current educational research.

In the context of this study, the development of a robust but practical ethical framework was identified as a key issue to be addressed in the early stages of the process. This was considered particularly important when approaching the potentially difficult area of negotiating research access with a group of participants who were simultaneously students on an academic programme. The obvious power differential and the issue of the

appropriateness of the relationship came to the fore. In order to overcome many of the legitimate concerns that emerged a decision was made to develop an ethical framework that addressed the four areas of concern raised by Christian (2000) (see Appendix D).

This framework was given practical effect through a series of actions on the part of the researcher. In order to address the issue of informed consent, decision was made prior the beginning of the research to draw up a document explaining to potential participants exactly what was happening (see Appendix D). This document outlined,

- The aims of the research
- An outline of the expected timeframe
- A statement of 'fair dealing' indicating exactly what the relationship between the researcher and participant would be. This also addressed any concerns the participants might have about the dual role of the researcher as teacher and investigator
- A mechanism for allowing anyone who wished to withdraw from the research

In addition to this participants were given commitments in relation to the confidentiality of the data gathered, their own personal privacy and an indication as to the potential uses that might be made of the information gathered. On a practical level the by now standard practices in relation to the provision of transcribed interview notes to all interviewees, the guarantee of their right to alter or remove any elements of the transcript which they felt were inaccurate or prejudicial were applied rigorously.

There remained, however, the interesting issue of what to do with the data generated in the course of the CMC events. In recent years there has been an emerging body of research which seeks to address the ethical challenges posed by the enhanced data recording capabilities of ICT enabled learning environments (Garrison and Anderson, 2004, Santos and Le Baron, 2006). Reading this emerging research it is clear that the principle of fair dealing underpins virtually all of the issues raised. Of particular concern to the CMC researcher are the problems that arise as a result of the availability of large quantities of both qualitative and quantitative data that are generated automatically by VLE and other

ICT enhanced environments. Quite often this layer of data is produced without the participants knowledge and its use could be considered to be an example of deception. In addition, the presence of a personal identifier in each individuals posting usually in the form of a name or nickname means that it is very difficult to guarantee anonymity if the raw postings are to be used.

This situation as described above leaves the ethically concerned researcher in something of a quandary. They have been presented with an incredibly rich source of data yet if normal ethical guidelines are to be applied it is unlikely that much of it can be used! One solution proposed by Santos and Le Baron (2006) is to get individual approval from all participants through the use of consent forms. In this system, if consent is not forthcoming then messages and threads must be deleted. Garrison and Anderson (2004) adopt a slightly less absolutist approach pointing out that analysis of CMC events often takes place months or years after the actual dialogue took place and in this situation getting individual approval is nearly impossible. They suggest using the find and replace function to remove all reference to names or any other identifying characteristics from the messages thus guaranteeing anonymity.

In practice, the study being described here used a combination of each of the approaches described above. Prior to the introduction of the online posting element of the programme participants were given a detailed note outlining the potential use that might be made of the discussions that taking place there. They were also informed that the underpinning statistical data might be used for analytic purposes later on in the research cycle. Finally a guarantee was given that all postings would be rendered anonymous by the removal of all names and other obvious identifiers. Again, participants were given an opportunity to withdraw their consent for the use of postings at any stage and they were given a guarantee that all postings and dialogues would be deleted. A decision was made not to delete the data usage statistics as these were considered anonymous and also to be a natural by product of technology usage that it was legitimate to investigate.

In summary then, the decision to interrogate additional data sources in the course of this part of this study had a significant impact on the methodological structure of the research. While the broad stance remained unchanged, the addition of data generated by participant usage of the MOODLE VLE as well as more traditional forms of data such as interviews and reports added to the richness of the description offered. The use of both CAQDAS and statistical software to manipulate and make sense of the data generated was important to the overall outcome of the study and needed to be addressed in some detail. Perhaps the most critical decision to be made related to the model of analysis used when working with the CMC generated material. Having explored a range of potential models a decision was made to adopt the COI model of Garrison and Anderson (2000). Important though this decision was the fact remains that researching in a CMC enabled environment affords many opportunities but also poses a significant number of challenges. This study attempted to take advantage of the opportunities offered while at the same time giving careful consideration to the challenges. The latter was done with a view to finding contextually appropriate and workable solutions that could be applied to the benefit of both the research and more importantly the course participants.

Designing an Analytic Framework

When designing an analytic model to explore the data generated during the course of the completed training programme the researcher was at all times conscious of the fundamental purpose of that programme. The course was designed to develop education professionals who were capable of evaluating their own practice in such a way as to give them both the information and the confidence to engage in a process of dialogue with a new, national system of school evaluation. Previous sections of this study have explored in some detail those elements in any system of professional development that are considered essential when attempting to prepare educators to engage in a process that requires them to evaluate their own practice. In summary what writers such as Nevo (1995,2002, 2006), MacBeath (2000, 2003, 2004) and Simons (2002,2004) argue is that any approach seeking to develop self-evaluating professional educators must be,

- Community centred
- Practice oriented

- Focused on helping teachers to gather accurate and usable data about their own practice
- Capable of engendering a sense of ownership and commitment on the part of teachers to the concept of self-evaluation

Given that the programme in its final form sought to include each of these elements, it seemed logical that any analytic model seeking to examine the data generated should also contain some or all of these areas (see Figure 10.6 below).

As can be seen from the diagram below, the model designed was a dynamic one that sought to explore not only the discrete elements identified by evaluation theorists but also to examine the complex interconnections that exist between those elements. At the heart of the model is the self-evaluating teacher. This is an explicit acknowledgement that all data analysed in the course of this study was generated by education professionals engaging in and reflecting on self-evaluation in a variety of educational contexts. To put it another way, all data generated in this study emerged from the professional practice of the teachers involved and all analysis undertaken must be informed by an awareness of this fact.

Developing the Self-Evaluating Teacher : An Analytic Model

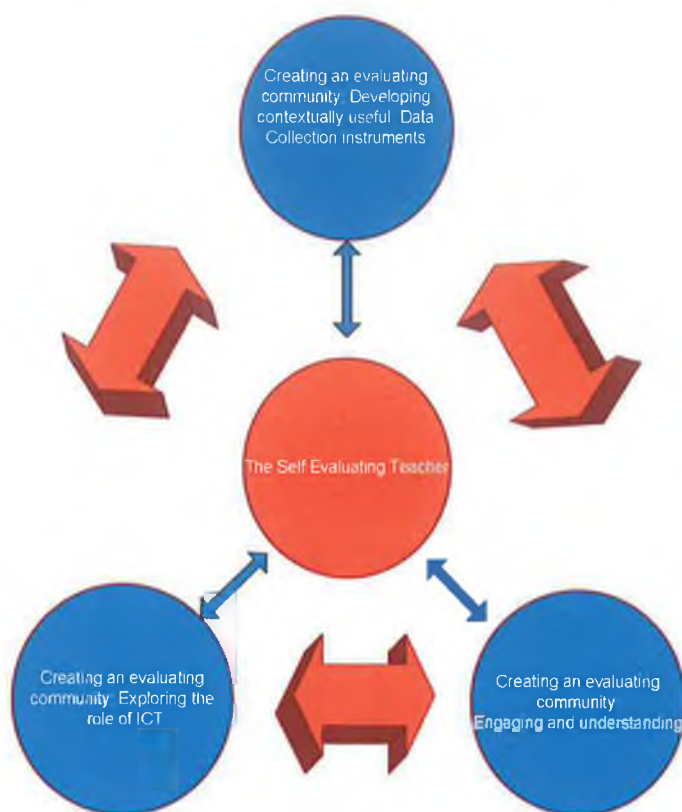


Figure 10.6: *Developing the self-evaluating teacher: an analytic model*

A second and no less essential element of the model is the importance assigned to the concept of community. Building not only on the work of MacBeath et al but also on that of Hargreaves (2006), Lave and Wenger (1992), Darling-Hammond (1995) etc the model seeks to examine the role of the professional community in the development of self-evaluation capacity. The central argument proposed is that each of the discrete elements implemented in the third and final year of the programme were both designed and put into practice by teachers working in a community setting. What is notable about this particular type of community is that it was not a 'school community' in the traditional sense. Rather

it was made up of teachers from different organisations and at different stages of their careers who were seeking to enhance their professional skills. The challenge for the researcher was to create an environment where this type of community could develop as well as generating a method of examining exactly how this process happened. The solution proposed relied heavily on the communications and other functionalities offered by a Virtual Learning Environment and much of the data investigated in this part of the study is drawn from that source.

The iterative approach adopted allowed the researcher experiment in the first two years of the cycle before identifying those aspects of the process that were fundamental to the development of self-evaluating professionals.

By the end of the third year of the cycle these elements had been clearly identified as,

- Empowering teachers to generate useful, appropriate and relevant data collection instruments for use in their own professional settings
- Facilitating a practical engagement with self-evaluation in order to develop a practice based understanding of its potential role in a range of educational settings
- Using ICT to enhance the quality of self evaluation practice

The analytic model designed sought therefore to examine relevant data under each of these headings with a view to deciding whether or not the programme designed actually did develop self-evaluating teachers capable of engaging in dialogue with external stakeholders. In the next two chapters of this study a detailed analysis of the findings generated by the use of this model will be presented and discussed.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of the methodological issues addressed in the course of the design and implementation of the research. The innovative nature of many of the data collection methods used, in particular those which drew from the ICT element of the programme, resulted in a number of specific challenges arising. These included issues relating to the particular modes of analysis to be used when dealing with large quantities of computer generated qualitative and quantitative data, the general ethical approach to be

adopted when dealing with practitioner generated data and the framework of analysis to be used when reporting on the data generated.

The researcher sought to address these challenges by clearly defining a broad research philosophy and making practical decisions based on this general approach. At a practical level, this led to a decision to adopt broadly qualitative approach in terms of the research design which emphasised the use of a wide range of data collection instruments as and when they were considered appropriate. The analysis of the data collected was greatly facilitated by the use of data analysis packages, both qualitative and quantitative. The use of CAQDAS in the form of the NVIVO package in particular added significantly to the processing of the large amounts of online text based material generated in the course of the study.

This centrality of this latter form of data to the understanding of the quality of learning taking place in the course of the programme required the researcher to adopt a framework of analysis that was specifically tailored to the investigation of participant led online discussions. After a comprehensive literature search, it was decided to use the Garrison and Anderson (2000) Community of Inquiry (COI) framework to explore the level and extent of learning taking place in the online fora. In particular, the COI model provided a methodology for identifying the extent to which participants in these fora could be seen as having created the conditions for the establishment of a genuine community of practice. This was done through an analysis to the type of online presence evidenced in the discussion.

The final section of the chapter dealt specifically with analytic framework developed by the researcher to link together the discrete elements of the data generated into a coherent narrative. Concentrating on the participants engagement with the programme designed, the framework sought to examine the interlinked areas of the designing and using data collection instruments, engaging with the process of self-evaluation and using ICT to support the self-evaluating teacher. The framework ultimately sought to examine how the

interaction of these three discrete elements in an emerging community context could add to the development of programme participants as self-evaluating professionals.

Chapter Eleven: Training the Self-Evaluating Teacher: One University's Response**Introduction**

In earlier sections of this work we have examined the emergence of an Irish system of school evaluation and the issues that have arisen as a result of its gradual implementation. In common with many other European education systems, the Irish education community has struggled to balance the at times apparently irreconcilable demands for public accountability and oversight alongside those of professional development and autonomy (McNamara et al 2002). It is partly the difficulties inherent in balancing such demands along with more specific industrial relations issues that resulted in the implementation of the Irish system taking almost a decade. Thus while the pilot project for the system was finished by the late 1990's it wasn't until 2004 that the first evaluations under the designated framework, 'Looking at our Schools', took place (McNamara and O'Hara 2006).

This lengthy lead-in time left course providers in the initial teacher education (ITE) and continuous professional development (CPD) areas with something of a problem. By the beginning of this decade it was obvious from the statements of the Department of Education and Science (DES) that some form of evaluation system was to be introduced (DES 1999a, DES 2003a). It was equally obvious that this evaluation system was going to involve an element of self-evaluation (DES 2003a, Eurydice 2004). As self-evaluation almost by definition requires teachers to engage in a process of data collection and analysis (Nevo 1995), this would have implications for the structure and content of both ITE and CPD programmes offered in Ireland. The essence of the problem facing providers in this period was that while it was clear that some training would be needed, there was a lack of clarity in a number of key areas. In particular, there was no real certainty as to the structure that would be put in place, how this would relate to the proposed evaluation framework and how all of this would come together when inspectors actually began visiting schools. What follows is an account of how the School of Education Studies at Dublin City University (DCU), sought to deal with these uncertainties while at the same time developing a school

evaluation training programme for use with a range of teacher education students at various stages of their careers.

This chapter begins with an examination of the training programme developed, exploring its influences and providing a detailed outline of the different development stages engaged in prior to its final roll-out in the 2004-2005 academic year. This is followed by an exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme using the analytic framework discussed in chapter ten (see Figure 11.6). Given the complexity of the data analysed, these findings are presented over two chapters.

This research draws on,

- Statistical data generated by participant use of the Moodle VLE
- Structured analysis of students online postings
- Responses to questionnaires designed to gauge student understanding of and opinions on self-evaluation
- Analysis of interviews conducted with participants following their completion of the programme
- Detailed analysis of participant reports written at the end of the implementation phase

and forms the basis for the general recommendations provided in the final chapter of this study.

The Training Programme

In the course of this study we have examined in some depth the theoretical and practical influences which shaped the programme developed. At a conceptual level there was a genuine commitment on the part of the researcher to the creation of a training methodology that would allow course participants to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in a dialogue (Nevo 2006) with the emerging Irish system of school evaluation. There was also strong interest in locating this process of knowledge and skills development within a professional learning community structure. The parallel and indeed connected awareness of the centrality of practice to the process of knowledge development also

resulted in a programme that sought to integrate a number of the key ideas of the communities of practice concept into the final design.

Somewhat paradoxically, the decision to focus on the creation of a community from a geographically and professionally disparate group of both individual and trainee teachers seemed to contradict one of the central tenets of much school evaluation literature. Many of the writers promoting the idea of school self-evaluation choose to emphasise the centrality of the school community to the process of developing capacity in the area. For this reason the researcher was forced to examine ways of creating an environment that contained all the positive characteristics of a school community while acknowledging the lack of a pre-existing structure. This led the researcher to experiment with ICT and in particular with its content delivery and CMC functionalities. The former included an investigation of the potential offered by DV technology with the latter seeming to promise a way of providing participants with both a forum and methodology to engage in focused reflective dialogue about their understanding of self-evaluation. At a broader level, this use of ICT was located within a programme structure that possessed many of the classic characteristics of a blended mode of programme delivery (Rothery 2004, Reece and Lockee, 2005, Vaughan and Garrison 2005). In practice this meant that participants were to be encouraged to engage with the online communications aspect of the programme to as great a degree as was possible. However there was also an acknowledgement that the face-to-face and more traditionally structured inputs that formed a core part of the teaching on the programme would have an influence on how that online interaction was structured and developed.

A final, though equally important element influencing the design of the training programme was the broad policy context within which it was developed. The movement by the DES to develop a system of school evaluation took a number of years. Indeed the final shape of the evaluation system had not been decided when this programme was initially introduced. As a result of this, the researcher decided to adopt an iterative developmental approach. This used a three year development cycle and allowed the researcher concentrate on different

aspects of the programme at different stages while at the same time giving him the freedom to integrate any new initiatives produced by the Department as and when they arrived.

Given this methodology of course development it is unsurprising that the final programme introduced in year three of the research bore little resemblance to that used in year one.

There were however a number of common elements which included:

- A concentration on the area of teaching and learning
- A focus on the practical experience of the course participants with a view to using this as a basis of knowledge creation
- The provision of background material on different models of evaluation
- The use of ICT to enhance the process of community building and reflection
- The development of models of data collection which could be used across a range of educational settings

These ideas formed the backbone of the training programme. In practice, the presence of two distinct cohorts of students and the freedom offered by a three year development framework allowed for a deal of experimentation and investigation to take place. Table 11.1 provides a brief summary of each of the activities undertaken and is followed by a more detailed explanation of each year's tasks.

Year One

The key focus of this year was an examination of the possibility of developing an online community in both the ITE and CPD groups. Students were provided with an online forum where they were encouraged, and at times required, to make postings relating to their current professional practice. For the ITE group this period of reflection on practice was timed to coincide with their extended teaching placement and lasted for six consecutive weeks. Following an initial survey of ICT competence in the CPD group, it was decided that they required additional support in the area and for this reason most of the online work took place in the final four weeks of a twelve week module.

Drawing from the work of Scheerens, MacBeath and Simons the primary input focus was in the area of teaching and learning and this provided a context within which participants were encouraged to use the online fora.

	Year One		Year Two		Year Three	
	ITE	CPD	ITE	CPD	ITE	CPD
Use of Online Discussion Forum	x	x	x	x	x	x
Provision of Multi-media material to aid reflection	x	x	x	x		
Provision of training input – reflective engagement on current practice	x	x	x	x	x	x
Identification of criteria for structured reflection	x	x	x	x		
Links to academic and other resources	x	x	x	x	x	x
Provision of training input – models of evaluation	x	x	x	x	x	x
Working with information- using data to make judgements	x	x	x	x	x	x
Introduction of LAOS evaluation framework			x	x	x	x
Provision of training input- development of online communities of practice			x	x	x	x
Design of data collection instruments			x	x	x	x
Provision of training input- school evaluation models			x	x	x	x
Production of original DV material					x	
Design of data collection instruments – using T&L section of LAOS framework					x	x
Provision of training input – autonomy, accountability and self-evaluation					x	x

Table 11.1: *Overview of three-year training programme*

In addition to the general training material participants were provided with specific training inputs including,

- Working in an online environment
- Reflecting on current practice using ICT
- Models and modes of evaluation

- Identifying key teaching and learning criteria and using them as a basis for developing a framework for structured reflection
- How to work with the data they were generating

There was also a commitment on the part of the researcher to provide useful and challenging stimulus material to facilitate the process. For this reason participants were provided with,

- Specially commissioned multi-media resources consisting of video clips, extensive explanatory notes and links of online resources designed to act as a stimulus to reflection on the teaching and learning process (see Appendix E)
- Structured reflection questions designed to focus online discussions
- Links to a wide range of relevant online resources

There were a series of experiments conducted in relation to the format of the reflective process with focus at times being placed on group reflection and at other times on individual reflection. Following an extensive evaluation, this initial iteration on the training programme was deemed to have been quite successful however there were a number of issues that needed to be addressed in the second cycle.

Year Two

While the second year of the programme was quite similar to the initial year there were a number of significant changes, some of which were introduced as a result of the initial evaluation others as a result of the changing external policy context. Areas of continuity in year two included,

- Use of online fora
- Provision of a range of inputs in the area of online communities, reflection etc
- Provision of a range of stimulus material including multi-media packages
- Focus on teaching and learning and use of practical experience as a basis for guided reflection
- Learning to work with different types of data
- Use of this experience as a basis for the defining criteria for reflection

As well as these similarities there were a number of changes. Perhaps the most significant was the introduction of the LAOS framework to both participant groups. The Framework had been published in the course of year two of the programme and was used to provide an additional input to aid the process of criteria selection. It is unsurprising given the work of writers such as Nevo, Scheerens and MacBeath that the researcher chose to use the Quality in Learning and Teaching and Learning 'area' of the LAOS framework as a basis for discussion and reflection (DES 2003b : 23-28). This section contained three 'aspects'. An aspect is defined as a concept which 'represent(s) the different activities collectively constituting the area of the schools operation that is to be evaluated' (DES 2003b: ix). Each aspect was further broken down into components (see Table 11.2 below).

Aspect A: Planning and Preparation	
Component 1: Planning of Work	Component 2: Planning for Resources
Aspect B: Teaching and Learning	
Component 1: Methodology	Component 2: Classroom Management
Component 3: Classroom Atmosphere	Component 4: Learning
Aspect C: Assessment and Achievement	
Component 1: Assessment of modes and outcomes	Component 2: Record Keeping and reporting

Table 11.2: Breakdown of the LAOS Framework

In addition, experience from year one of the programme resulted in more specific inputs on,

- Developing online communities of practice – it was decided that more discussion needed to take place regarding the process of community formation, the practicalities of online interaction and the use of professional practice as a basis for individual and group reflection / discussion
- Models of evaluation – the publication of the *LAOS* framework led to a more focused concentration on school evaluation models as opposed to the general discussion on evaluation conducted in the first year.
- Experimentation with different models of online facilitation – these ranged from the focused research question to a more ‘hands off’ approach designed to allow participants to develop their own online discussion leaders and facilitators.

The programme ran for a full semester in its second year and there was far greater spread of activities within that twelve-week period for both cohorts of participants. Again, the programme finished with a comprehensive evaluation which led to a substantial restructuring of the third and final year of the intervention.

Year Three

In the period between the completion of the second cycle of the programme and the beginning of the third significantly more information became available on the practical impact of *LAOS* on the education system as a whole. As a result of an initial analysis of this information, a decision was made to change the focus of the training programme somewhat. While no significant elements were dropped, some were combined with different aspects being highlighted. In addition, the sequence in which different elements of the programme were introduced was altered with a view to emphasising particular areas of the *LAOS* programme.

The revised programme undertaken by both ITE and CPD participants is presented below.

Phase One - Preparing to self-evaluate

Autonomy and Accountability in Education

- National and transnational influences

Evaluation in an Irish Context

- The LAOS system – origins, influences and implementation

Developing an online learning community

- Strategies, goals and exercises
- Reflecting in an online setting

Gathering information in Schools

- Models, modes and techniques of data collection and analysis

Phase Two - Working as an evaluating community

Using the LAOS framework to evaluate Teaching and Learning

- Designing data collection instruments
- Using the instruments in a professional practice setting

Phase Three – Reflecting on self-evaluation

- Reflecting on self evaluation in practice
- Critiquing the data collection instruments
- Evaluating self-evaluation

At a general level, this final iteration of the training programme was designed in such a way as to take account of the insights generated in the course of the first two years of the intervention and the increasing body of knowledge emerging from other elements of the research relating to the implementation of the LAOS model of school evaluation. There was also a clear intention on the part of the researcher to keep the core ideas of the programme to the fore and in particular to emphasise the role of the online learning community reflecting on professional practice using self-generated data collection instruments. For this reason, the changes introduced tended to be more ones of sequencing than a radical overhaul of the system. Whilst acknowledging that, the change of sequencing did provide a more defined structure for the training programme as whole. The final iteration now follows the traditional training model which begins with providing

background material, continues with the development of appropriate responses and finishes with the implementation of and reflection on those responses.

In the first phase, the background material section, a clear and focused input was provided not only on evaluation but also on important elements of the programme including online communities and data collection (see Appendix F and G). This took the form of a series of academic inputs and training workshops where participants were encouraged to engage with both the information being presented, and perhaps more importantly, with each other. In both the CPD and ITE courses participants were broken up into sub-groups and encouraged to work on a series of training exercises in those groups. This process was used as a way of creating vital interpersonal links between individuals that could hopefully be built on later in the programme

The second phase concentrated on applying this background information in a practical context. The major change here was the decision to focus on the design and use of data collection instruments. In order to streamline the process of instrument generation, it was decided to use sub-groups created in the earlier part of the programme as the basic units of development. Each of these subgroups was given the task of generating an instrument which they considered appropriate for the purposes of fulfilling the evaluation requirement set down by one of the *LAOS* Teaching and Learning area components (see Table 11.2 above) .

Considerable thought went into process used to train individuals and groups to generate their own self-evaluation instruments. The researcher was mindful at all times of Nevo's (1995) warning of the need to clearly differentiate between the methodological training necessary for individuals to engage in formal educational research as opposed to that needed by educational professionals seeking to understand their own work in a self-evaluation setting. For this reason, the training was always presented in the overall context of facilitating the process of investigating participants own teaching.

This element of the training programme was delivered in three discrete though linked stages (see Appendix H). The first stage provided participants with a basic though comprehensive introduction into different types of question categories used in survey instruments. It had been realised as a result of the evaluation carried out on the second year of the programme that participants needed an easy to follow guide that dealt with the specifics of question design in surveys. This resulted in a short document being produced which was distributed to all students and used as a basis for a workshop on instrument design (see Figure 11.1 below). In this workshop participants were asked to produce a concise three-question survey and to provide a rationale for the inclusion of each type of question.

Designing Self Evaluation Instruments: Sample Question Categories	
Question Type 1: Numeric Scale	
In this sort of question you are asked to use a numeric scale to indicate your agreement with a particular statement or idea. For example:-	
Instructions: Please answer the questions using the numerical scale below(7 being the highest rating and 1 being the lowest rating) by circling the number that comes closest to your opinion.	
Please rate the importance of planning to teaching	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Please rate the extent to which you achieved your aims	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Figure 11.1: *Designing Data Collection Instruments: Stage One*

The second stage of this process was marked by the introduction of targeted resource material connected to the LAOS Teaching and Learning area. It was decided to continue the practice of assigning individual component sections of this area to sub-groups and to ask them to produce a data collection instrument relevant to this component. The process of assigning the section was a collective one with individual groups indicating a preference

for one component over another. The experience of the second year of programme development had convinced the researcher that the process of distributing this material had to be carefully managed and in some cases significantly augmented. For this reason the material distributed consisted of:

- a) The relevant subsection from *LAOS*
- b) A reminder of the possible range of question types available to the participants
- c) Additional resource material drawn from organisations such as OFSTED, the How Good is our Schools Programme and the Schools Must Speak for Themselves programme (see Figure 11.2 below and Appendix H)

Teaching and Learning Methods
Themes for Self Evaluation (LAOS)
The appropriateness of teaching strategies and methodologies employed and the account taken of the range of pupil abilities, needs, and interests
The extent to which lessons are structured so that content and pace are appropriate to the class and to the time available
The degree of variation in teaching strategies and methodologies used in the curriculum area
The effectiveness with which teaching strategies and methodologies in the curriculum area are used
The appropriateness of the range of professional and material resources used to support the teaching of the curriculum area
The account taken of best practice in relation to health and safety and environmental requirements in the teaching of the curriculum area
Questions you might ask include:
Rank the following methods in order of your preference (Question Type Hierarchical Scale)
Are the methods I use appropriate to my class group? (Open Question)
Which of the following methods do I use when teaching?
Groupwork, Discussion, Role Play, Experiment (Scale)

Figure 11.2: Designing Data Collection Instruments: Stage Two

The third and final stage saw sub-group participants brainstorming around the theme they had chosen and producing a draft of the data collection instrument (See Figure 11.3 for a partial example of one such instrument). This process was facilitated by the researcher and other members of academic staff and participants were assisted with some of the more technical aspects of questionnaire design when this was requested. It is important to note at

this stage that academic staff only became involved when requested and then only to offer advice on a specific topic. The overall structure and content of the data collection instrument was entirely in the hands of the participants. On completion of this process, each sub-group took on the responsibility of formatting the instrument and distribute electronically to the broader participant group.

<h2 style="margin: 0;">Self Evaluation Instrument</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Classroom Management</h3>				
Name:	Date			
Class	Topic			
<p>Question 1 how would you rate the level of student behaviour in this class (1= Excellent, 2 =Good, 3 = Neither good nor bad, 4 = Bad, 5 = Unacceptable)</p>				
1	2	3	4	5
<p>Question 2 Does your school have a discipline / classroom management policy?</p>				
			YES	NO
<p>Question 3 If it does, did you use it in today's class?</p>				
			YES	NO

Figure 11.3: *Designing Data Collection Instruments: Stage Three*

What Was Developed? – Examining the Data Collection Instruments

The design process engaged in required both the CPD and ITE cohorts to produce and distribute four data collection instruments (see Appendix I). The areas of professional practice to be evaluated using the questionnaires were:

- Planning
- Classroom Management

- Teaching and Learning
- Assessment

Each of these areas formed part of the *LAOS* Teaching and Learning theme and were initially considered to be non-negotiable.

The design process took place over a two-week period early in the programme with participants being given the opportunity to review the operation of the data collection instruments both during and after this period. There was a common order of usage adopted by the two programmes with each beginning with the planning instrument and moving onto a new instrument each week (see Table 11.3). As a result of the initial review, the CPD cohort requested that the designated area of classroom management be changed to classroom management and learning atmosphere as they felt this more accurately represented their understanding of the role of that particular theme in their professional lives. At a later stage in the process, the ITE group requested that the design process be revisited and that a different type of daily evaluation instrument be produced and used in place of the assessment instrument. Both of these requests were acceded to. This meant that the process design resulted in the production of three thematically linked and two discrete instruments (Table 11.3).

In order to assist the process of evaluating the instruments it is proposed to examine their:

1. General type as defined by Airasian and Gullickson's 'Categorization of Self-Evaluation Examples' (1997:18)
2. Structure in terms of numbers and type of questions

Data Collection Instruments Designed	
CPD	ITE
Planning	Planning
Classroom Management Management and Learning Atmosphere	Classroom
Teaching and Learning	Teaching and Learning
Assessment	Daily Evaluation Sheet

Table 11.3: *Data Collection Instruments Designed*

Categorising the Instruments

Airasian and Gullickson (1997) designed their Categorization of Self-Evaluation Models in order to provide education professionals with a series of templates with which to examine their own work. They suggest that any process seeking to improve educational practice needs to base itself on solid information. In their opinion, the only way to get this information is to examine professional practice through multiple lenses and from multiple perspectives. In essence they argue that even with the current popularity of systems of professional development based on the concept of reflective engagement,

Before we can meaningfully reflect on practice, before we can chart avenues that need change, before we can make meaningful decisions about practice it is necessary that we have a clear awareness of our teaching practice; our actions, assumptions, beliefs and effects (1997: 16).

The model suggests therefore that data collection instruments that seek to allow educators examine their professional practice should be grouped under the area of that practice that they are trying to assess. The four areas identified by Airasian and Gullickson (1997:18) are:

- Beliefs – Underpinning values of educator relating to subject / pupils/ profession

- Knowledge – Professional knowledge and expertise
- Practice – What actually happens in a learning situation
- Effects – How this impacts on students / colleagues / learning organisation

The process of categorising the instrument involves the researcher reading each of the questions and assigning the question to one of the areas of interest. Instruments can cover more than one area.

Categorization of Self-evaluation Instruments					
		Area Assessed			
Course	Instrument	Beliefs	Knowledge	Practice	Effects
CPD	Planning	✓		✓	
	Classroom Management	✓	✓	✓	
	Teaching and Learning	✓	✓	✓	
	Assessment			✓	
ITE	Planning	✓		✓	
	Classroom Management	✓		✓	
	Teaching and Learning	✓	✓	✓	
	Daily	✓	✓	✓	

Table 11.4: *Categorization of Data Collection Instruments adapted from Airasian and Gullickson 1997*

There are a number of notable issues that emerge from the process of categorising the instruments. The first is the total lack of instruments coded in the category that seeks to examine the 'effects' (1997: 18) of professional practice. This is all the more striking as at least one of the instruments, assessment, is meant to be primarily concerned with the assessment of student learning. Interestingly, one of the programme participants raised exactly this issue as a criticism of the instruments designed. They claimed in their final report that they,

found that the questionnaires were focused on me even when they should have been focused on the students! I found this really confusing at times. How can I examine assessment without looking at what students do? Also, why does self-evaluation only seem to value what teachers say about themselves? Do the other people involved in education not have a voice?

Another somewhat more pithy response to the online forum makes a similar point about one of the CPD instruments,

Again I seem to have a block with regard to this questionnaire as I find it difficult to see how one can self-evaluate a participant's learning
(CPD Online Discussion: Using the T & Learning Instrument)

A second significant outcome is the discovery that all of the instruments designed have some form of practice focus built in. This is understandable, particularly given that the broader thematic area of Teaching and Learning is concerned with the mechanics of practical engagement in an educational setting. It also confirms something of the general point made in the participants' contribution above. The instruments were designed to focus on what happened in individual learning encounters and for most participants this was co-terminous with their actions as teachers.

A third interesting outcome of the process involves a comparison of the thematically linked instruments designed by the two cohorts. The planning and teaching and learning instruments follow the same categorisation pattern with the former including questions that address areas of beliefs and practice only and the latter dealing with beliefs practice and knowledge. The instruments diverge at the classroom management / learning atmosphere

instrument level with the CPD using this instrument to assess beliefs, practice and knowledge and the ITE participants indicating an interest in only their beliefs and practices.

Taken as a whole, and accepting the caveat about the general lack of effects focusing, this process has highlighted the broad range of information and interests being investigated by the programme participants. If this evidence is to be believed, they are obviously interested in developing an in-depth understanding of most elements of their professional practice.

The Structure of the Instruments Designed

As has been explained above, prior to their producing the data collection instruments, the course participants were provided with a range of support materials designed to assist them in the process of their creation. Among the support materials provided were a series of briefing documents containing a short introduction to common question types used in surveys. Participants were encouraged to use as broad a range of these question types as possible in the final instruments designed. This was done in order to vary the type of data generated but also to give the participants the opportunity of considering alternative ways of examining recurring issues in their professional practice.

A number of respondents commented on precisely this aspect of the design process in their final evaluative reports. One mentioned that,

We deliberately included questions that provided both quantitative and qualitative data. This framework provided the writer with a framework by which she could review her practice and helped the reflection process by triggering thoughts, views and opinions that might otherwise not have occurred.

As is pointed out in the above quotation, the question types were grouped under two headings, qualitative and quantitative (see Appendix G). For the purposes of simplifying the explanatory process qualitative questions were renamed open questions and were defined as any question that required respondents to write in proper sentences. Quantitative questions were designated as closed questions and were introduced as questions which

required the respondent to complete a simple action of choice in a format decided by the researcher. The closed question categories in provided for participants included:

- Numeric Scales
- Hierarchical Scales
- Agreement Scales
- Multiple Choice questions
- Yes / No questions

There was no attempt to claim that this was a complete list of question types and participants were actively encouraged to seek out other modes of question if they felt it would be useful for the collection instrument. One further type of question was introduced to the students who chose to call it a combined question. This was a question which, as its name implies, combined a quantitative with a qualitative format.

At the end of the design process, as we have already seen, the two cohorts produced eight discrete data collection instruments. Each of these instruments, even those which were thematically linked, had a different structure and included different question types. A number of general patterns emerge from the table below. It is interesting, for example, to note that the ITE participants were significantly more willing to the use open questions. In particular, the daily evaluation questionnaire designed by this group in the latter stages of the programme was made up almost exclusively of open questions. In addition, the average number of questions used was in or around ten other than on the CPD Assessment questionnaire which limited itself to four. Both of these issues were to prove important in the final part of this section dealing with participants evaluation of the use of the instruments and will be further addressed there. (Appendix I)

A more useful set of comparison data can be uncovered when comparing the thematically linked questionnaires.

Types of Questions Used in Data Collection Instruments					
Course	Instrument	Open	Closed	Combined	Total
CPD	Planning	1	6	6	13
	Classroom Management	0	9	1	10
	Teaching and Learning	2	4	3	9
	Assessment	1	2	2	4
ITE	Planning	1	8	2	11
	Classroom Management	1	5	3	9
	Teaching and Learning	5	1	4	10
	Daily	8	1	0	9

Table 11.5: *Types of questions used in data collection instruments (note, questionnaires listed in order of usage)*

As can be seen from figures 11.4 to 11.6 below, and in keeping with the data generated by the categorisation exercise, a thematic connection does not necessarily guaranteed a structural similarity.

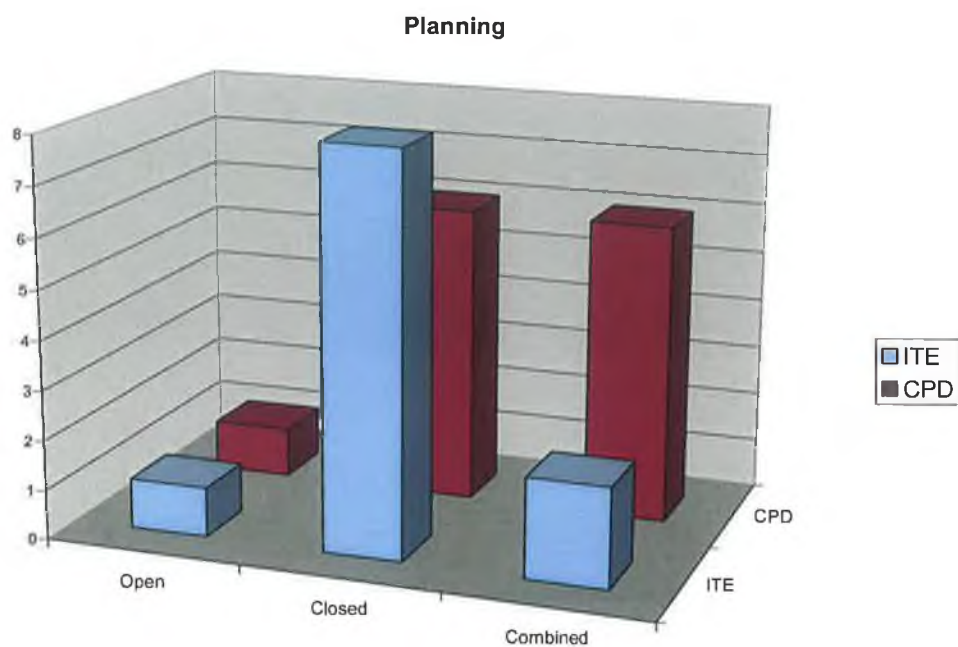


Figure 11.4: *Planning Question Types*

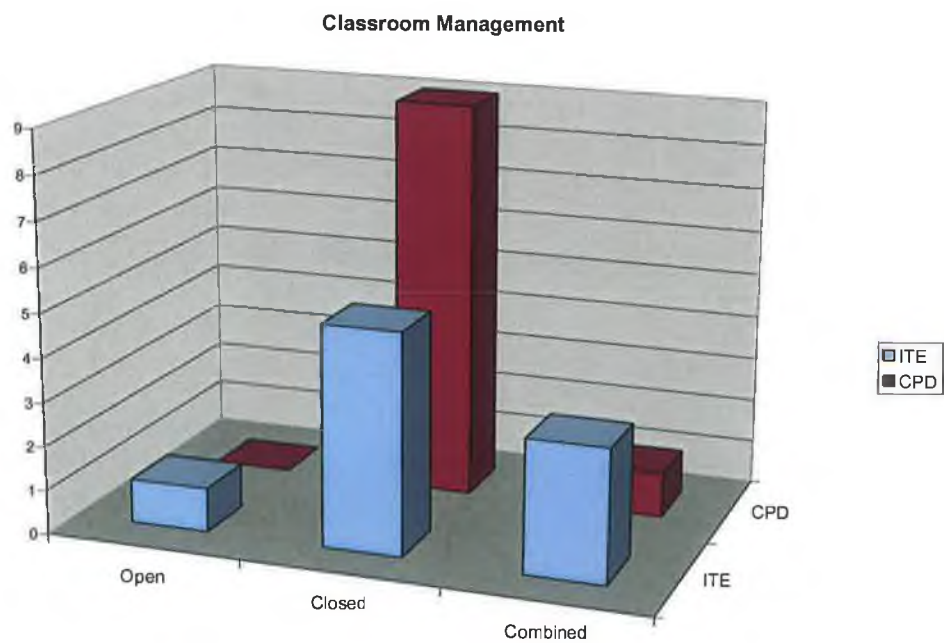


Figure 11.5: *Classroom Management Question Type*

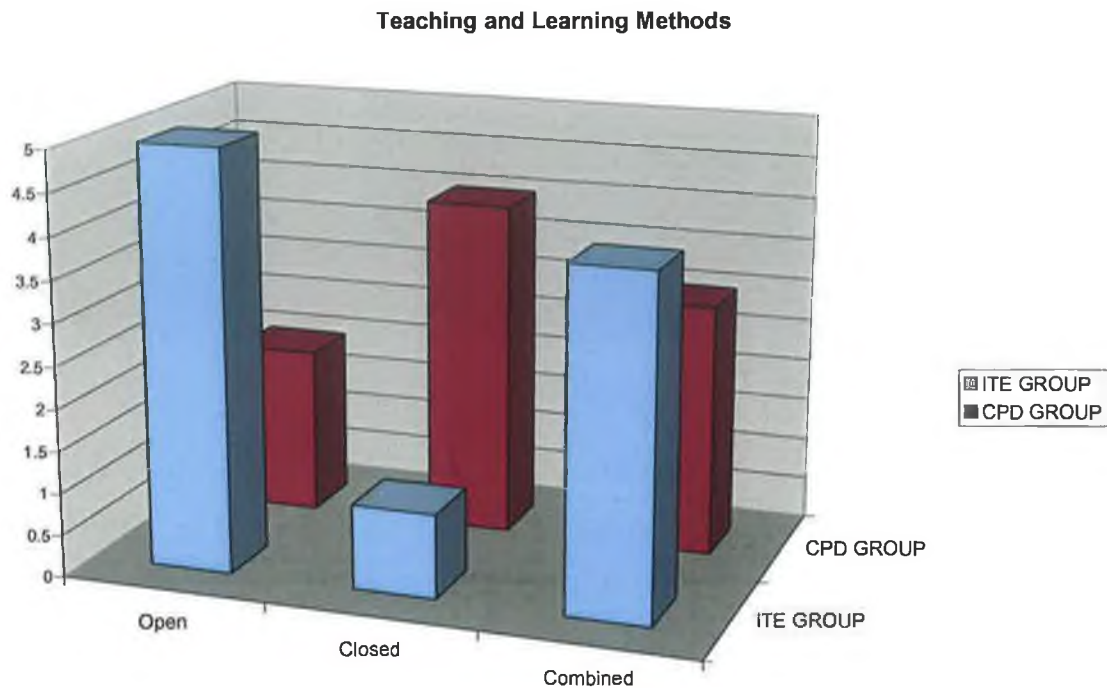


Figure 11.6: *Teaching and Learning Methods Question Types*

The graphic display of the data clearly charts the change in question focus adopted by the ITE participants. There is a smaller but discernible alternation in the CPD group however this is probably more noticeable in the assessment instrument (see Appendix I).

When the instruments were finalised, participants were encouraged to use them for a specified period in their workplace and were required to post their evaluations of the instruments online. This is significant as it allowed course participants engage in detailed discussions relating to specific elements of the LAOS framework, one of the key prerequisites of any approach to self-evaluation that seeks to promote dialogue.

The final phase provided the forum where these data rich discussions took place and the availability of this information allowed for a number of different dynamics to emerge in terms of online facilitation. While the programme developer tended to take the lead at the

beginning of each weekly discussion by choosing the topic to be addressed for that week, there were a number of attempts made to give to the course participants the opportunity to take control of the discussion fora where appropriate. In addition, the programme developer sought to model different modes of online facilitation at different stages of the process including that of the critical friend, social facilitator and lurker.

It should be noted that there was an additional element of the programme introduced for the ITE students alone. They were supported in the creation of original DV material for use as a stimulus for reflective discussion and self-evaluation. The materials concentrated on the use of specific teaching and learning skills, specifically the microteaching skills (McIntyre, McCleod and Griffiths 1977, Brophy 2004) studied by all students at DCU. Participants were asked to record, edit and place a clip of 30 seconds to one minute online and to invite discussion as to its value as an exemplar of good teaching. It was the self-generated element that was considered most important as participants were being encouraged specifically to use examples of their own practice to assist the development of the knowledge base of the online community of which they were part. The limitation of this aspect of the programme to the ITE students was a logistical one alone. As full time students they had more free time on campus to make use of the equipment available to record and edit their material. The CPD participants were in a much more time pressured situation and it was not considered practical to require them to produce such material. In subsequent iterations of the programme the greater availability of portable DV technology has led to this element of the programme being extended to all participants.

By the end of the three-year development cycle there was in place a comprehensive and complex training programme designed to facilitate the development of the ability to self-evaluate in a two linked groups of educational professionals. By choosing to adopt an iterative approach which built towards a final programme structure in its third year, the researcher gave himself the freedom to experiment with different ways of approaching a potentially controversial subject area. The iterative cycle also allowed the researcher to take account of the rapidly changing external policy context which had a major influence on the final shape of the programme. What eventually emerged from this process of

development was a blended approach to the development of self evaluating educators which managed to combine the benefits of traditional face to face teaching with the potential of emerging ICT systems to enhance the professional skills of course participants (see Figure 11.7)

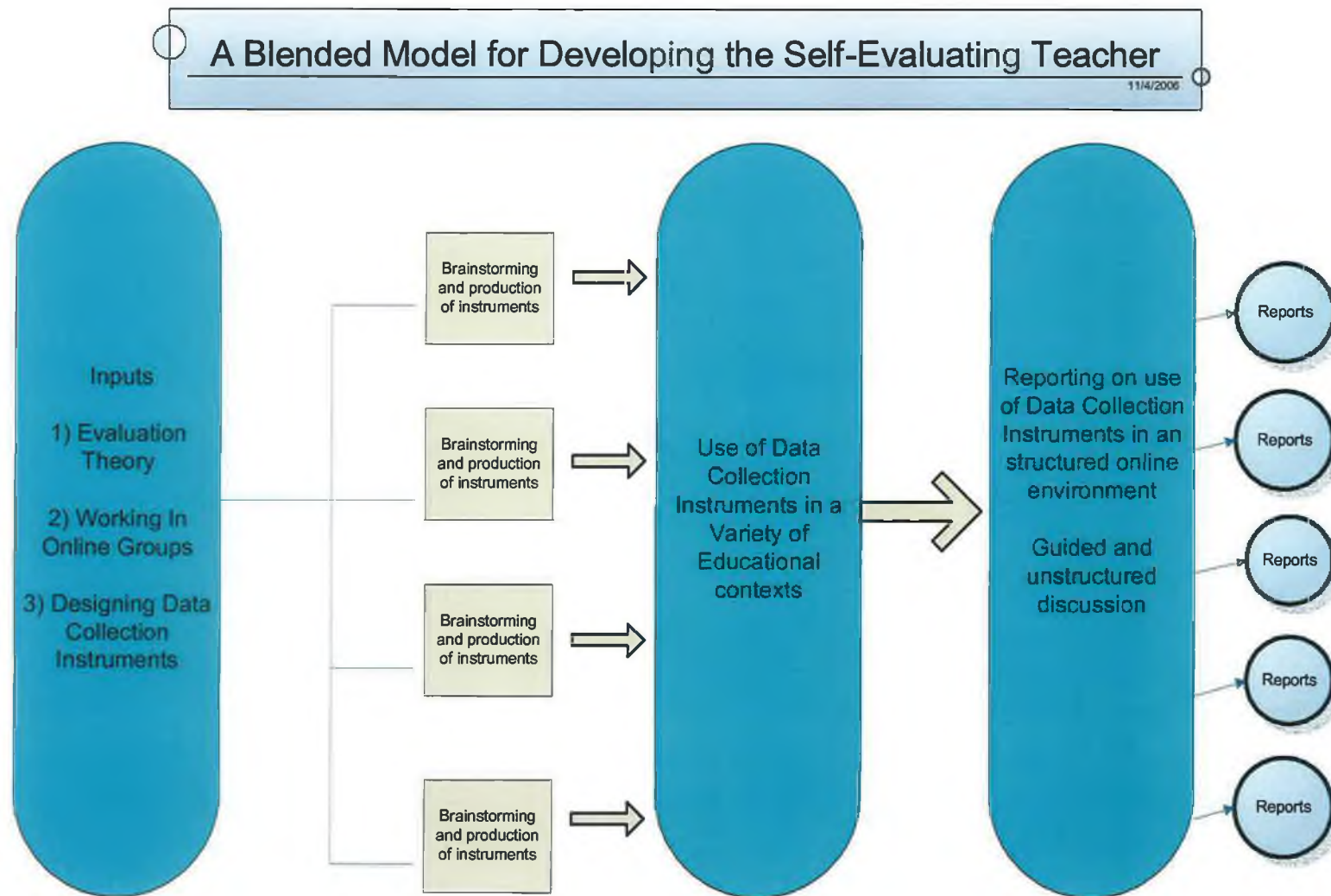


Figure 11.7: *A Blended Model for Developing the Self-Evaluating Teacher*

Developing the Self-Evaluating Teacher: An Analysis of the Data

The analytic model developed and discussed earlier in chapter ten argues that there are three distinct though connected categories under which the data generated in the course of this project should be examined (see Figure 11.6). Those categories focus on:

- a) The ability of course participants to generate, use and evaluate a series of contextually appropriate data collection instruments
- b) Participants understanding of the concept of self-evaluation and its potential role in their professional lives
- c) The role played by ICT in facilitating the development of self-evaluating professionals

In this section of the study we will analyse the data under each of these categories in turn while at the same time exploring the linkages that connect them. This latter point is important as one of the central arguments made by the study is that the programme as designed was able to facilitate the development of self-evaluating educational professionals by providing them with practice focused, data generating, ICT enabled community. The particular understanding of community offered requires that each of the discrete categories is working in concert and therefore some appreciation of the interplay between them must be provided.

Generating, Using and Evaluating Data Collection Instruments

At numerous stages in this study we have examined the importance attached to the process of empowering teachers to generate useful, appropriate and relevant data collection instruments for use in their own professional settings. MacBeath (1999, 2005) argues that the act of generating information about elements of professional practice considered to be of value by the teacher is what differentiates self-evaluation from self-inspection. As we have seen in the previous section, Nevo (1995, 2002) suggests that the process of training teachers to evaluate their own work using materials generated by the learning community in which they are located is a critical initial step to developing the dialogue that is at the heart of his understanding of the self-evaluation process. Barzano (2000) Simons (2002) and Scheerens (2002) also acknowledge the importance of preparing educational professionals

to formally investigate their own practice and argue that it should be at the heart of any professional development process seeking to address the area of school evaluation.

From the perspective of this study, the process of training programme participants to create data collection instruments capable of generating contextually appropriate information about their own professional practice was seen as a critical aspect of the approach to self-evaluation being developed. The broader context of the emergence of the *LAOS* model of School Evaluation and the paucity of existing methods for allowing teachers to assess the quality of their own work seemed to require that the developing programme at least attempted to address the issue. For this reason each iteration of the programme included a section which was devoted to assisting participants to develop their own evaluation instruments. The process normally required the participants to be divided into sub-groups which were randomly chosen. By the third cycle of the programme, this element had developed into the three-stage process outlined earlier in this chapter. In summary, the three stages involved:

1. Development of the data collection instruments – Including:
 - a. The identification of the particular aspects of *LAOS* Teaching and Learning section to be evaluated by each sub-group
 - b. Provision of training on the process of generating data collection questionnaires
 - c. Brainstorming around the area
 - d. Production of the instrument by the sub-group
 - e. Distribution to the broader programme group
2. Use of the data collection instrument by all programme participants
3. Evaluation of the instrument both online and in final programme reports

In this section of the study we will assess the reaction of the course participants to the process described above. This will be done in two parts. Section one will address the process of instrument development with section two exploring participants' experiences when using the instruments in a variety of educational settings.

Evaluating the Process of Instrument Development

When asked their opinion on the usefulness of being facilitated in developing their own self-evaluation instruments, a clear majority of both the CPD and ITE programme participants indicated that they found the process helpful (see Figure 11.8 below).

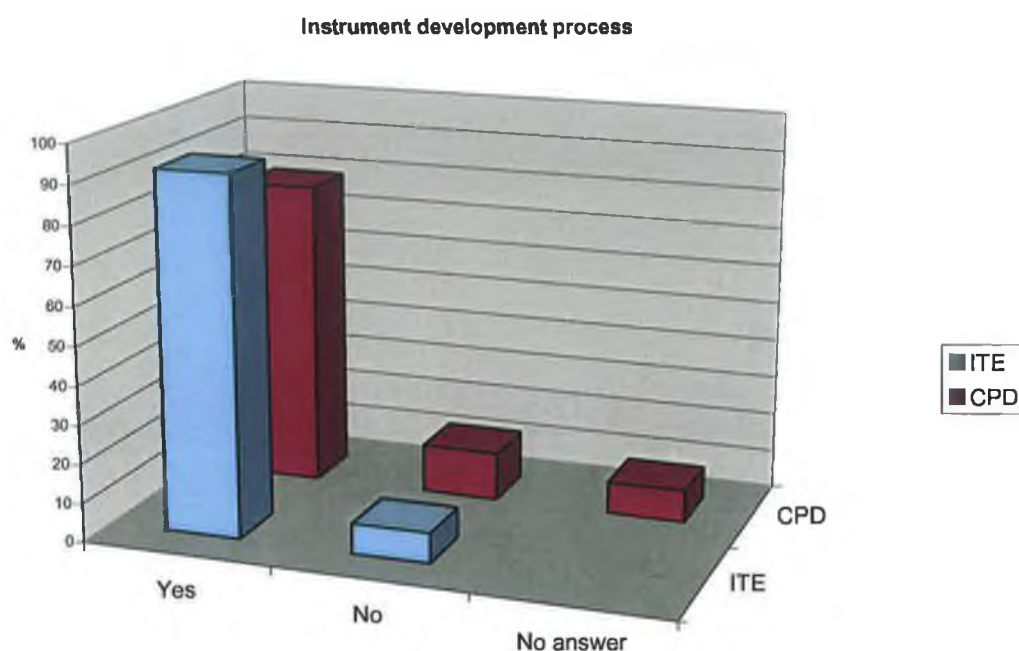


Figure 11.8: *In your opinion was the Instrument Development Process useful?*

(ITE $n = 13$; CPD $n = 24$)

With 79.2% of the CPD and 92.3% of the ITE participants respectively indicating their overall satisfaction with the process, it would seem on the surface at least, that the three-stage model developed was considered a success. A close examination of the qualitative data generated in the course of the study indicates a similar though more complicated pattern. While there is an overall satisfaction with the process indicated, there were two significant issues flagged by participants which deserve to be addressed in more detail.

Issues in Instrument Design: Working in Groups

One of the key elements of the design process was the establishment of sub-groups of participants to work on individual instruments. Chosen at random, each sub-group was asked to design one self-evaluation instrument for use by the whole cohort. While this process led to the production of a number of usable instruments for both groups of participants, it did provoke some debate. Members of the CPD cohort in particular expressed a series of at times ambivalent opinions regarding the usefulness of the process.

On the positive side, those who found the discipline of working in groups useful tended to emphasise the value of the creative dialogue created by having members from a variety of educational contexts taking part in the process. One participant, in response to a question posed in an end of programme evaluative survey, encapsulated this viewpoint when they stated,

due to the class diversity a great amount of information and experience went into the creation of the questionnaires which were used in the process of self-evaluation. These questionnaires I found invaluable and I doubt if I could have developed such questionnaires on my own. ...If you have other people on board during the development of the instruments tools, it makes the whole thing more relevant and it stands a better chance of overall success

Here the diversity of the group is seen as adding to the usability and durability of the instruments created. In addition, the very process of working in a group is seen as being an essential prerequisite to the process of instrument creation.

Another participant, writing in her final report on the programme, developed this understanding of the importance of group diversity pointing out that,

The questionnaires used in this self-evaluation process, being developed by so many people with so many diverse backgrounds in the class gave the author a much broader outlook of the areas in which she might improve her teaching practices

In this situation, the broad range of professional contexts represented in the group encouraged the respondent to ask questions of her practice that she may never have previously considered. This type of response directly addresses one of the potential

criticisms of the self-evaluation process, namely its perceived tendency to avoid asking difficult or uncomfortable questions (Davies and Rudd 2000).

The theme is taken up by a third member of the CPD cohort who links the cycle of instrument development to the cycle of reflection that is at the heart of much of the professional development and self evaluation literature. In outlining the different stages of the development cycle she explained that her,

group began by brainstorming. We were from very different backgrounds. The process identified multiple and varied ideas. Over a period of time we reviewed and reflected on the relevant material in the area of evaluation. This was critical to the process. We devised a definitive set of themes and questions based on our reflection.

Another response to the final evaluation survey chooses to emphasise the impact of the group design process on their own interpersonal skill when it states that,

During the development of self evaluation instruments my communication skills were vastly improved. This occurred as a result of the deep reflection that was required when structuring the questionnaires with other people. I had to be able to make my points about what I thought was important and listen to others who mightn't have agreed.

This point was picked up and amplified somewhat by a respondent who also hinted at the range of opinions that were being expressed about the suitability of the group development process when they said,

Yes and this is really in keeping with the rest of the year and course. I know some of my group complained because they felt that there was too much difference between the individuals involved but I thought that was very useful. It forced us to explain our positions and compromise over the questions we were going to ask.

It is interesting to note that what this participant saw as a positive aspect, the necessity of explaining positions and compromising, was seen by others as a significant drawback of the group design methodology adopted. One ambivalent respondent suggested that while working in groups 'allowed constructive discussion, it left us with static evaluation tools, i.e. because of our group the majority had to be used'.

Others were more direct with their criticisms and suggested that the wide variety of work contexts represented in the average group led not to a diversity of opinions but to a process of instrument development that favoured the bland, uncontroversial and overly generic. This had the result of making them, in the opinion of the respondents at least, unusable without some significant remedial action on their part.

This position is summed up by the response of one CPD participant who criticised the group-enabled process,

‘cos it was too “general” when I used them in my own work context it felt incompleted (sic). I ended up redesigning a new tool for my specific work context

Another more trenchant criticism along similar lines broadened that analysis of the limitations of the design process to include the insights of MacBeath. Again we have a statement from the end of programme survey that lets the reader know,

It was essential that I redesigned the tools to take into consideration my personal context as well as my professional one. The tools designed in the groups me ideas about how to design my own. If I remember rightly McBeath has something to say about the danger of using “templates” (pre-designed tools) in self evaluation. If self evaluation is to be “real” it must include “self”.

While it may be a little extreme to equate a group development process with the imposition of external strictures on an independent professional the comment does indicate to an extent the frustration inherent in engaging in such a process for some participants.

Interestingly, but perhaps not too surprisingly given the overwhelmingly positive response to the initial question, the ITE participants had a different view of the group development process. One reply to the survey question relating to the usefulness of the process stated that,

It was good to develop them in groups because you got to share ideas with other people. Some of the questionnaires weren’t really relevant to my school but I understood where they came from because of the discussion around them.

Another indicated that they,

Liked this part of the process a lot. It gave us a chance to use the experiences we were having in schools and to put them into the questionnaires. It was also great to have the groupwork to focus our conversations on topics that were really relevant to us.

In both of these responses the group is seen as adding to the process by acting as a sounding board and an explainer of different aspects of the instrument design process. A final set of comments from this group moved the analysis on from one that dealt with the mechanics of instrument design to one that emphasised the importance of the process for the ITE participants emerging sense of themselves as professional educators. The first comment, drawn from the end of programme evaluation survey, states that,

I really think that this was very important. For too much of your time as a studente (sic), you feel as if you are being told what to do all of the time. We were now being expected to be teachers and it was important that we got a chance to have an input into what we were doing. It would have been a bit ridiculous to expect us to make decisions and then to stop us from getting involved in planning how we were going to evaluate them.

This position finds a strong echo in one of the final evaluative postings made on the MOODLE site. Here, speaking of the process of self-evaluation, we have a participant announcing that,

On another issue, I liked the way that we were asked to get involved in putting together questionnaires in this module. I really feel that this shows that we were being taken seriously as teachers. This is really important because we have to feel like teachers if we are ever going to become teachers. When we are treated like students but are out in schools it gets really confusing at times. Asking our opinion was really good and getting us to do things based on what we knew took us seriously.

ITE Online Dialogue : General Discussion

In summary then, the use of the group focused design process was seen as having a number of both positive and negative points. On the positive side, participants valued the opportunity to feed in the collective experience of a range of individuals from a broad spectrum of educational contexts. For this reason a number of them acknowledged the challenge posed by differing perceptions and the initial difficulty in overcoming these.

However there was also an acknowledgment that the very process of overcoming these challenges resulted not only in the production of better data collection instruments but also in facing questions that:

- a) They had never thought of
- b) Might have chosen to ignore due to the difficulties of addressing these in their organisation.

Issues in Instrument Design: The Role of Participant Experience

A second broad theme to emerge from both the CPD and ITE groups relating to the process of instrument production was the perceived attitude taken by the programme to prior participant experience in the general area. It should be remembered that the researcher, mindful of Nevo's (1995) warning about the danger of developing a research methodology course rather than a self-evaluation skills development programme, actively sought to contextualise the research methods material within broader self-evaluation literature (see Appendices G and H). While this approach undoubtedly had a strong conceptual basis, its implementation resulted in participants engaging with the literature in ways that led them to offer an experience focused critique on the underpinning values of the training programme designed.

One of the most significant areas identified by this critique was the selection of the field of investigation which provided a thematic basis for the programme designed. For some, and in particular those from the CPD cohort, the prescriptive nature of the instruction to examine areas of teaching and learning invalidated their own position as experienced educators. In addition, some participants suggested that there was an inherent contradiction in a process which sought to empower educators to identify quality in their own work but only allowed them do so within a tightly prescribed area.

This position was summed up by one participant who chose to make the following point in a section of her final report dealing with 'problems and difficulties identified with the process'.

*Problem: The themes for evaluation were imposed on the evaluator.
Does this not immediately negate the very essence of 'self' evaluation?!*

Though the themes were relevant, more *focused* themes, chosen by the evaluator would have elicited a greater amount of useful material. If themes were chosen by the evaluator, a greater sense of ownership of them and their outcomes would have resulted. These criticisms are consistent with those of MacBeath (2004) who criticizes (sic) the move towards the use of designer packages in self evaluation (italics in the original)

Another made the point that she,

Felt that I was in a straight jacket. I was being asked to look at teaching and learning when what I really needed to do was look at how my school was managed. What was the point in this for me? I was meant to be self evaluating but I ended up evaluating what I was told to do by others.

Not everyone agreed with this perspective however. One of the sub themes to emerge from the data was the value that some participants placed on having a clear structure to follow when designing their questionnaires. In addition, the provision of information under each heading drawn from OFSTED and FENTO was seen as adding significantly to the process of actually producing data collection instruments. In direct contrast to the 'straight jacket' comment of above a number of participants felt that the provision of clear instructions and a designated area of investigation was particularly helpful. A comment from the general evaluation forum sums this perspective up,

The stuff from LAOS and OFSTED was really useful when we were designing the questionnaires. It helped us to concentrate on what was important in the area we were asked to look at. This was really important when we were working on areas that we didn't agree on. I think we would be still there arguing now except that we were able to point to your notes and say no that is not what we are being asked to do.

CPD Online Dialogue: General Evaluation Discussion Forum

To an extent, these are matters of interpretation. What appears unnecessarily limiting to some participants is a helpful guide to others. It is possible to accept that both perspectives are valid and that it is the context and type of professional experience of the individual participant that leads them to respond in a given fashion.

For the ITE participants, the issue of the interaction of prior experience was at one level less important. There was no real evidence of their having any problems with the use of a designated thematic area. Indeed, where there were comments about the use of the LAOS

documentation they tended to be at the informational rather than the analytical. That is not to say, however, that the ITE participants were unaware of the importance of the experience they brought to the process of designing data collection instruments, just that they tended to conceptualise it in a different way. For these participants, experience was something they were trying to develop and therefore they were keenly aware of occasions when they felt its perceived absence negatively impacted on their ability to engage with the process of self-evaluation. For a number of this cohort, the process of designing data collection instruments represented one such occasion. Their position was perhaps best summed up by the comment made in a post programme interview by one the ITE cohort.

I don't think that we had enough experience to deal with the information about the types of questions to ask to help us form good self evaluation sheets. I thought it was great the way that you allowed us to make our own in areas that we thought were relevant but whenever we came to filling them out it was obvious that we didn't have enough experience to ask the right sorts of questions

ITE Participant Interview: Appendix O

Another, picking up the theme in their final programme report, suggested that,

I felt a bit confused by the questionnaires early on. I knew that I was meant to be asking questions about my teaching and I knew that I had to agree them with others but I wasn't too sure about what sort of questions to use. The notes were really detailed but it was a bit hit and miss when I went to use them in the class. I think we got better at this and when we decided to change things around at the end I liked that we all sort of agreed about what type of questions were best.

A final comment from another participant had a forward look to it

I think I will be much better at this thing next time I try it. Going through the process of designing and using the questionnaires once really thought me a lot about how you need to put them together. Looking back on it now, a lot of the questions we put in weren't needed and we left out a lot that we did. It was frustrating but I suppose that is how you learn.

Aside from the welcome though perhaps rhetorical commitment to the idea of repeating the process at some future date, what these three quotations do is to suggest the vital importance of the process of using the instruments to the participants overall perceptions of

the value of the process of design. For both cohorts of participants, the actual use of the questionnaires added to the quality of their professional experience and to a certain extent, they viewed the issue of the quality of the design process through this lens.

Using the Data Collection Instruments – Cycle of Implementation and Impact

One of the central themes of this study has been the necessity of providing self-evaluating professionals with the tools to generate useful and usable data about their own professional practice. However it is interesting to note what the self-evaluation literature claims should happen as a result of a professional engagement with these types of structured evaluation instruments. In theory at least, the provision of appropriately designed instruments not only allows practitioners' to judge the quality of their own work, it also provides them with the information and vocabulary with which to engage other key stakeholders in the education process (Nevo 1995, MacBeath et al 2000, Simons 2002).

The use of the practitioner designed data collection instruments by both cohorts of participants gave the researcher an opportunity to actually investigate the validity of these claims. In particular, the availability of weekly online postings combined with final evaluative reports and survey material allowed him assess the extent to which the use of the data collection instruments moved from something that was in reality imposed by the dynamics of the programme to something that participants valued and would continue to employ in subsequent years.

In essence the analysis of the various data sources suggested that both cohorts followed a similar implementation cycle when using the data collection instruments (see Figure 11.9).

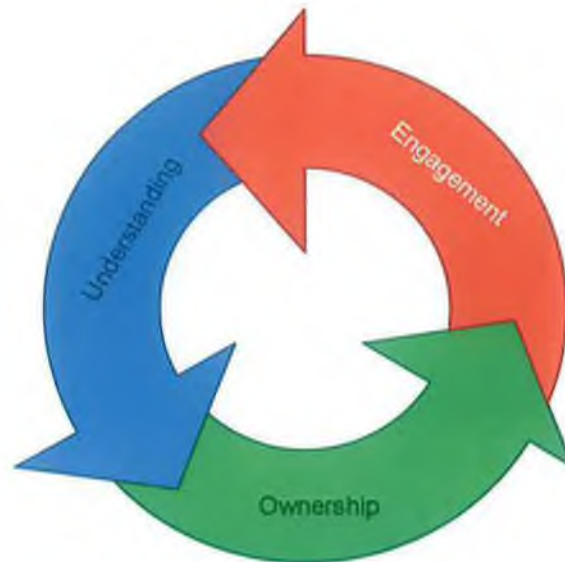


Figure 11.9: *Data collection instrument implementation cycle*

The cycle begins with an initial engagement with the process of instrument use which, if we are to be honest, is at times an imposed engagement. In most cases however it moves from an imposed engagement to a voluntary engagement which in turn results in the emergence of an understanding of the value of the process being engaged in. The final stage of the cycle sees participants take ownership of the process of instrument use. This final stage is particularly interesting as it can result in participants altering the received instruments to make them more usable in their own professional context. In this way they move from being products of a group to being the property of the individual. However, because the individual is part of the broader community who produced the initial instrument, they bring their own context-based understanding of how to improve the instruments back to the larger group and in the process, add to the knowledge base of that professional community.

This cycle takes place at both the micro or individual questionnaire level, and at the macro or programme implementation level. Naturally individuals and groups progress through the

stages at different speeds. Indeed it is arguable that some of the more interesting postings to emerge from the discussion fora came about as a result of dialogues between individuals at different parts of the cycle. In the next section, we will examine the individual stages in detail with a view to developing an understanding of the key thematic areas that arise in each.

Stage 1: Initial Engagement

The initial engagement with the data collection instruments tended to result in a detailed examination of the minutiae of the process being conducted. Participants in general sought to examine the instruments through the prism of a context specific implementation rather than taking a broad view of the meaning of the process they were being asked to undertake. This resulted in some interesting if very specific themes emerging. Probably the two most significant were,

1. The length of the questionnaires
2. Question format

Quite a number of the initial postings relating to the use of the data collection instruments concentrated on how the surveys were designed. Among the most commonly posted comments were those relating to the overall length of the questionnaires and the number of questions posed. While some of the comments were positive, typically participants tended to equate length with problems. A typical posting of this sort was made by a CPD participant who when asked to comment on the use of the planning instrument generated by her group stated,

I felt that 13 questions was a lot to answer. If I were to keep up the self evaluating I would be more likely to answer less questions on a regular basis and keep them on file. It seemed a lot for just one area - i.e. planning. There are also the other areas to consider.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Using the planning instrument)

Another in the same forum claimed that,

It showed me that there is room for improvement but also I found it very long and time consuming to fill in.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Using the planning instrument)

One of the ITE participants, reacting to his cohorts planning instrument, made much the same point,

There are just so many questions and a lot of them are asking you for the same stuff in different ways. Also it was really time consuming. I am teaching five classes in a row some days and I just don't see the point in having to fill out a long questionnaire after each one.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

What is notable about this posting is the connection made between the length of the questionnaire and the amount of time available in the average teaching day to complete them. This was particularly acute for those participants who chose to complete the instruments after each class, the method recommended by the researcher. One of the ITE participants summed up the problems faced by such conscientious evaluators in their final report.

Finding time to complete the questionnaires was really challenging. The timetable dictates continuous lessons throughout the day with short breaks thus I was required to complete some of the questionnaires at break neck speed. This was ok when they were a sensible length but some of them were just too long.

Other than the final quotation above, all of the others are taken from the early weeks of the implementation process. Later in the process, participants begin to develop different methods for dealing with long questionnaires. One ITE participants summed this up when they detailed their methodology for dealing with extensive questionnaires.

One thing I have changed is how I use these things. I realise that I need to complete them after class if I am going to remember anything but I also know that they are very long. What I do now is tick the boxes quickly and write short notes to myself about anything important. Then when I come back later, I know what I was talking about.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Using the Teaching and Learning instrument)

Another made the same general point,

I haven't changed my teaching style really that much because my classes have been working pretty well so far with the methodologies I've been using. But I have found the evaluation sheets to be much more beneficially (sic) than the past few. I really feel I am getting to grips with how we should work them. I just use

them now without really worrying about how big some of them are and have found that they aren't so bad. Well done everyone on the suggestions.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Using the Teaching and Learning instrument)

Perhaps the final word on the issue of questionnaire length should come from a CPD participant who besides demonstrating the how individuals move from one part of the cycle to another, used her final report to reflect on her developing understanding for the need for different sized data collection instruments.

In the initial stages of the process I thought that the questionnaires should be quick and easy to use. As I engaged in self-evaluation further, I began to realise that while it does need to be user friendly, I need to learn from it. It needs to be useful to me as a professional practitioner. I cannot compromise on length to the detriment of the quality of information gained. It is important to use a form that is relevant to my work. However it should be capable of feeding into and useful to any existing evaluations in the organisations or groups I work for.

The phrase, 'I cannot compromise on length to the detriment of the quality of information gained', presents a perfect example of a practitioner coming to terms with the philosophy underpinning a particular approach to data collection. This is the vital step to understanding the value of the process as a whole.

Question Format

A second area that elicited some comment across a range of data sources at the stage of initial questionnaire use was the type and usefulness of questions used. In essence the debate revolved around the value or otherwise of closed questions to practitioners attempting to engage in meaningful self-evaluation. The most dynamic conversation to take place around the issue occurred in the ITE planning instrument forum. It is worth quoting elements of this dialogue at some length as it clearly demonstrates an online community beginning to come to terms with an important aspect of how they derive evidence for use in their judgement about the value of their work.

For many, completion of questionnaires with a predominance of closed questions involved little more than mindlessly ticking a box. One contributor to the MOODLE site expressed

the frustration induced by this format of question quite eloquently. In response to a series of questions relating to how she used the planning instrument, her opinion of the instrument and whether she found it helpful she managed to use the phrase 'tick the boxes' five times.

(a) After each lesson or at the end of the day i'd sit down take out a pen and tick the boxes. That was it.

(b) There were definitely things in the sheet that have the potential to make you think about planning in a different way, the way it was set out though, tick this box tick that box, it was just too easy, you could do it without thinking at all.

(c) I didn't find it particularly helpful at the time nor do I think I will find completed ones helpful in the future.

There was no room for explanation (sic) or expansion.

'The methodologies I planned to use were effective'- box ticked, big deal, what were they?

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

Another respondent to the same forum echoed the criticism when she said,

I just filled it in after every class. it made me think about how i planned my class and it helped me to appreciate the fact that not all plans go according to plan. it wasn't that helpful because when filling it out it was just mostly ticking yes and no and there wasn't enough questions to make you think how you could really change the lesson and to improve it

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

What is interesting about this response is the reason given for the dissatisfaction with the question format. The respondent suggested that 'there wasn't enough questions to make you think'. This point was taken up by the original respondent who went on to explain her dissatisfaction with the closed question in terms of the limitations placed on the user by the format.

The questions posed were really good and could certainly help you to improve your planning, but the required response was inadequate. I'm not suggesting that we should write an answer to each question individually, But more use them as a set of guidelines for writing relevant information for ourselves, so that we can make it useful. It's not the did it work or did it not that really matters, it's the what was it and why.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

However, not everyone agreed with this perspective. One respondent replying to a quite trenchant criticism of the planning questionnaire stated that,

im sorry to disagree with most but i thought that the planning instrument was an eye opener. ... i thought it was excellently, expertly put together. first question, yeah i agree you could just tick the box, but then its broken down into time management, methodology, aims and objectives, resources, pace and structure. it actually made my think of each question, and then relate it to the class i had. for instance, i dont think you could change it. it was an eyeopener for me and really made me think of the class from the first minute til the last.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

Another that,

I used it by ticking the boxes, although I really thought about how the class went in terms of my lesson plan and I ticked the appropriate box. I also tried to elaborate on how the lesson plan went and on areas of improvement where the planning evaluation sheet allowed.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

It took a post-programme evaluation interview with one of the ITE participants who to fully explain why this issue became so important for the group. She suggested that criticisms of the closed question format were popular because,

It was giving people a way out, if they're to be completely honest. I think that the whole area of tick the box is you don't have to put thought into it. People secretly loved it but whenever they had to go back and reflect on what they had actually done they were stuck with nothing. So they were annoyed at the fact that they couldn't look back on it and get some evidence from it of where they could fix things but they actually liked the fact that it didn't take that long to fill out. They were in catch 22, they loved it but they hated it at the same time.

(ITE Participant Interview: Appendix O)

This is an extremely insightful comment which goes to the heart of much of the discussion that took place in both cohorts relating to the ultimate purpose of the use of evaluation instruments. Essentially participants are dealing with issues of evidence of good practice and the type of information needed by professionals if they are to engage in a meaningful analysis of the quality of their work. What comments such as the last one cited above indicates is that through use of the instruments and engagement with the ideas presented during online dialogues, participants begin to come to an understanding of the underpinning

principles which guide both the development and use of the different evaluation methodologies disseminated.

Stage Two: Developing an Understanding

The two examples cited above clearly demonstrate the process whereby the use of the evaluation instruments in a variety of professional contexts causes participants to move between a stage of initial engagement and one where they are beginning to develop an understanding of both process and issues. Staying with the second theme discussed above, that of the type of questions used in a data collection instrument, in the following posting we can see more clear evidence of a participant moving beyond the surface issue of question type to what is perhaps the real issue of the type of evidence required for effective self evaluation to take place.

The fact that it's quick and simple to do makes it enticing (sic) and one might think that because of this it might encourage people to self evaluate. But it is this very fact that means you don't really have to think about it. So are you evaluating at all? Self evaluation to me is a means of trying to improve your skills as a teacher and I think a big part of that is being able to look back and see where you have failed or succeeded in the past. And what in particular aided that outcome. This evaluation sheet doesn't allow that. You might be encouraged to fill out the sheet but to do some constructive self evaluation?

(ITE Online Dialogue : Planning)

This type of analysis linking question type to evidence needed also appears in the CPD postings. In the following example, a participant contemplates the value of different types of data in a comparatively lengthy posting,

This questionnaire was useful and it helped me reflect. There are a number of things that I would do differently with my class as a result of using it - so the questions must have been relevant!

Again, I prefer closed questions to flag issues (sic) and open ones to expand and reflect. I didn't know this when I started using the questionnaire but it has become clear to me in the last two weeks that you can mix and match questions in order to find out different things. I know that it might seem obvious but I think the purpose of a lot of these questionnaires should be to find out different things. What is the point of getting the same information all of the time? We need to know things about what we do to help us get better at our work. The only way to do this is to ask ourselves the hard questions. And I suppose to ask them in (sic) few different ways to keep us honest! I think that is what I mean

about closed and open questions. I hope I am making more sense to you than I am to me

(CPD Online Dialogue: Assessment questionnaire)

A final quote along similar lines essentially summarises the general importance of the issue,

What I liked about this questionnaire was that it showed me that a few appropriate questions can be more valuable than a larger collection of waffle. I am learning the trick to this self evaluation (as in life), is to ask the right question. It is usually the direct (hard) question we do not want to ask ourselves that seems to be the most telling. Like what did I do rather than look what they done!! I am also learning that for this evaluation to be meaningful internal honesty, bravery, and self acceptance are the foundations for true development and growth.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Assessment questionnaire)

A second critical part of the understanding phase involves the user developing an appreciation of the potential of the information produced by the data collection instruments to change their future practice. At times this involves little more than a statement of some vague future intent however more often than not this is accompanied by a rationale for potential future uses. For example, one of the ITE participants indicated her willingness to use the classroom management questionnaire at a future date stating that,

I would, but not as an everyday self evaluation questionnaire. I would use for classes which i am having classroom management and discipline problems. It is limited to classroom management so i would only use it on a particular troublesome class. So if i feel i need to evaluate a particular class which im having trouble in terms of discipline i will start to use this questionnaire for a few days and sort out my problems.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Classroom management)

There are clear signs here of an understanding of the need to be sure of the reasons underpinning the use of a particular data collection instrument. In this situation future use is dependent on perceived need.

In other situations, future use is predicated on an understanding that teachers might not be fully aware of what is actually happening in every learning situation they engage in. There is an explicit statement in this next posting of the need to engage in future episodes of data

collection in order to understand what is happening in the average classroom. Asked if he would use the classroom management instrument again, the ITE participant said,

Absolutely, there is no way I can know where I will be teaching in future years and I can see myself using this a lot if I am in a certain type of school. Even if I am not I think it would be hugely helpful to use this at the beginning of every year for a week with each class just so you can get an idea of what works with them. I think the best part of this questionnaire is the fact that you have so many options and that these allow you to understand what is happening if you use them properly. As someone once said, knowledge is power. See youse next week ;_)

(ITE Online Dialogue: Week 7, classroom management questionnaire)

A different type of issue is raised by the next posting quoted. The participant here is in the process of making the explicit connection between the use of data collection instruments and the process of engaging in meaningful reflection. At an engagement level, it is arguable that the two processes could be considered one in the same. However here we have an example of a participant moving to a point where they are able to differentiate between the activity of completing an instrument and that of ascribing a meaning to that process.

I have found that while the questionnaires aid reflection, they do not guarantee it. One must really engage with the process for it to be successful. It is too easy at times to fill in a questionnaire and believe you have engaged with self evaluation when in fact all you have done is fill in a questionnaire.

(CPD Online Dialogue: General Evaluation Discussion)

This position is echoed in one of the final ITE postings quoted below.

I am really curious about the whole idea of reflection. Since I have started this programme I have been told that I have to reflect and to be honest I haven't had a clue what it meant for most of the time. I think as I come to the end of this self-evaluation project I am beginning to get an idea of what it might be. It might be easier to say what it isn't. Reflection isn'tt (sic) just filling out forms and forgetting about them. In fact I don't think it really has anything to do with filling out forms except that you get information there. From what I can see reflection is about thinking about what you do but it is pointless to do it without knowing wht (sic) you do. That is where I think the questionnaires come in. They let us know what we do and if we use them properly they should be able to let us know what to do. I think.

(ITE Online Dialogue: overall reflection)

Overall then, the process of engaging with the data collection instruments in a meaningful manner has resulted in a greater level of understanding and insight for the majority of programme participants. The development of this understanding is an essential pre-requisite for the development of the final part of the model proposed, that of ownership.

Stage Three: Ownership

Taking ownership of the mechanisms for generating useful data about ones own practice is one of the key goals of any self-evaluation process. The act of taking ownership can, and indeed probably should, take place at two levels; those of the individual teacher and the broader evaluating community. The former is important as the structure of our education system ensures that this is ultimately the level at which the initial judgements as to the quality of practice are made. The latter is essential also because, as we have seen, all individual practice contexts are influenced by the broader community of practice where they are located (Lave and Wenger 1992). In the context of this study, the process of taking ownership involved the participants altering, augmenting and adding to the instruments designed.

A significant number of the comments relating to the alteration of the data collection instruments related to individual decisions made in the context of the perceived requirements of a particular learning situation. The normal justification provided for the decision to alter the distributed instruments was that of usability. The concept of usability tended to be closely allied in the minds of many of the programme participants with those of relevance and practicality. Thus a typical posting, such as the one below, relating to the alteration of an instrument tended to indicate what was done and why

For q3,q4 I have added 'what did you incorporate into your learning session to-day to benefit your students. Because I work with 4 different classes and teach different subjects I need to write down to help me to remember what I did incorporate into the session to make it more beneficial.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Using the classroom management questionnaire)

Another CPD participant made a similar point when speaking of the planning instrument,

The planning questionnaire did prompt me to reflect on my practice in relation to planning. Not all of the questions were relevant to me and also some of them were very general. I feel that my reply to these questions (3,5,9,11 & 12) will be the same no matter how many times I complete them. For the next time I use them, I am planning to put them in a separate section and only use them when I feel that something new has happened.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Using the planning questionnaire)

At times the process of changing the instruments resulted in the participant engaging in a more considered reflection on the design philosophy underpinning the questionnaires. In her final report, one CPD participant pointed out that she,

Found using the four questionnaires after each class to be very time consuming leaving very little time for reflection. To avoid this happening again, I decided to answer only the questions relevant to my class and changed all of the questionnaires accordingly.

This process caused her to reflect on the process of instrument design and resulted in her commenting that,

If there is a problem with the questionnaires, it is that four groups designed them and then distributed them as generic items. It is my opinion that there is a real need for a personal evaluation instrument rather than a generic questionnaire that is universally applicable, to all educational establishments and to teachers in general. This is what I have tried to do for my own practice and I think it is valuable.

This comment clearly indicates how the process of using, adapting and reflecting on the data collection instruments provides participants not only with a practical ownership of the new materials developed but also with a real understanding of the rationale underpinning their own practice in the area.

Perhaps the most significant incidence of a group of participants taking ownership of the data collection instruments can be seen in the case of the ITE cohort's development of the daily evaluation questionnaire (see appendix). Having worked through three previous data collection instruments, there was a feeling in the group that while much of the data that was being produced was interesting, they needed a form of questionnaire that allowed them an overview of what was happening the course of their teaching day. Following an extensive in-class debate the participants decided to produce a collection instrument that 'combined

everything we thought was good about the previous questionnaires' (final evaluation report, ITE Student). Perhaps unsurprisingly in the light of the previously quoted discussion on question types, this questionnaire was made up entirely of open questions. The general reaction to the instrument was positive with participants going out of their way to point out what they thought was good about it. One participant zoned in on the format,

I found the latest self-evaluation sheet very useful. If you feel one part of the class went particularly well or bad you have all the opportunities to write about it and it will be there for you to look at later. And since there is no ticking boxes you will know what actually happened in the class.

(ITE Online Dialogue Using the Daily Evaluation Sheet)

Another in the same dialogue made a similar point,

I liked the evaluation sheet it was broad but had the different sections and the second page for any general comments

(ITE Online Dialogue Using the Daily Evaluation Sheet)

The next posting highlights the issue of the class generated nature of the sheet

I like the latest evaluation sheet. It's concise, easy and quick to fill out and the second page is perfect for making comments on any of the 5 areas. Also, I think it is really ours because we developed it as a class and not as groups (no offence to the groups)

(ITE Online Dialogue Using the Daily Evaluation Sheet)

The final posting quoted is a little more jaundiced about the overall benefits of the format adopted but it does choose to emphasise the action focus of the questionnaire that was seen by most users as being a positive aspect of the new design.

I was really looking forward to this weeks evaluation sheet because we put it together ourselves and I thought it would be really useful. To be honest when I used it, I found it ok but a little bit too unstructured. The best bit though was the action focus. This was really important for me because when I had a problem I was forced to think about what I was going to do about it. Well done K for thinking it up.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation Sheet)

Overall this process of taking ownership of the evaluation instruments as a whole group presents something of a challenge to the design philosophy of the programme. There is an

explicit commitment to the use of sub-groups as a methodology for designing appropriate instruments that can then be used by an entire participant cohort. On the surface at least, what these comments seem to suggest is that participants do not necessarily see this as a method that gives them ownership of the final product.

However, it is fair to argue that in a real sense, no matter what process is used ownership only comes through use and adaptation. What this example demonstrates is how the combined practice knowledge developed by a group of ITE professionals who are working very different contexts can be pooled to produce a document that encapsulates their experiences of using data collection instruments. Interestingly, there are strong echoes here of the processes engaged in Communities of Practice when seeking to codify their unique practice generated knowledge in ways that represent participants as a community. Ultimately, it can be argued that a cycle of engagement, understanding and ownership comes to an end point with a final document such as this which in its turn becomes a starting point for another round of use, reflection and revision.

In summary, the design and use of the data collection instruments proved to be an enormously beneficial experience for most programme participants. While not all aspects were considered positive by every end user, there was as general welcome for not only how the instruments were designed but also for the final results of that design process. The cycle of implementation described resulted in participants developing a critically informed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the instruments as well as a methodology for making contextually appropriate alterations. At the end of this cycle, participants had a clearer understanding of not only how data was generated but also what sort of data was useful in their own professional settings.

ENGAGING WITH SELF-EVALUATION: IDEAS, IMPACTS AND UNDERSTANDINGS

The second element of the analytic framework proposed was designed to assess the extent to which participant engagement with a structured evaluation process influenced their

understanding of and commitment to the concept of self-evaluation. While it can be argued that the design and use of the data collection instruments was critically important to the participants' experience of self-evaluation, it is ultimately their attitude to the very idea of self-evaluation that will decide whether they ever repeat such a process in their professional lives. Put simply, if participants are convinced that self-evaluation is a good idea and adds to their practice they may try it again, if not there appears to be little chance of their ever voluntarily undertaking such a process in the future. In this section we will attempt to assess participant perceptions of the value of self-evaluation as well as examining the practical impact that engaging in the programme designed had on their professional practice.

Valuing Self-Evaluation - Ongoing Commitment or Short-Term Engagement?

One of the central challenges facing any innovative programme designed to influence the beliefs and practices of educational professionals is to ensure that the changes in that practice are maintained beyond the life of the intervention. The data generated in the final evaluative survey would seem to suggest that this programme has a high chance of having a long-term impact on the professional practice of participants. Both cohorts indicated that they would continue to evaluate their teaching and training in future years. In total 100% of the CPD and 92.30 % of the ITE agreed with this statement when it was put to them.

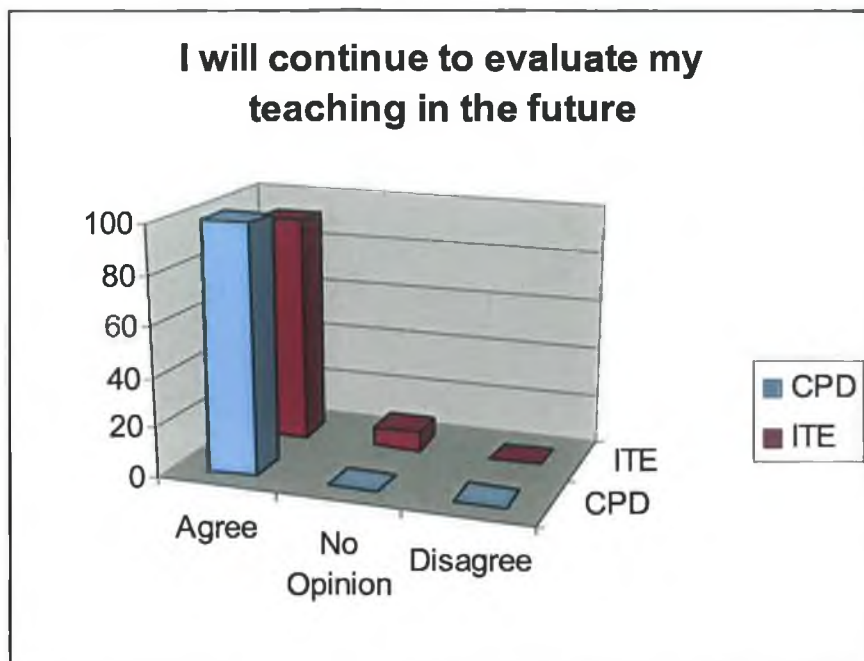


Figure 11.10: *I will continue to evaluate my teaching in the future*

(ITE $n = 13$; CPD $n = 24$)

Encouraging though these statistics may be, a researcher should always be a little wary of accepting an end of programme declaration of future intentions completely at face value. While not seeking to question the intention of participants to continue evaluating their own work in future years, it is important to examine the data in order to understand why they have made this ongoing commitment.

For most programme participants, whether they were from the CPD or ITE cohorts, the process of engaging in self-evaluation was invariably linked with the process of improving their professional practice. Virtually every respondent to the final programme survey indicated that they felt that self-evaluation was an essential element of good teaching (100% of the CPD cohort and 92.3% of the ITE group).

I basically think that self evaluation is important because it helps you to improve your teaching and especially helps you improve as a teacher... For you to improve I feel you need to be able to see what worked and why it was successful?

The MOODLE forum saw a number of participants from both cohorts agree with this general position. The point was summarised by one ITE participant in a posting where he stated,

I found self-evaluation useful as it allowed me to examine my teaching and how to better it. It allowed me to find why something went wrong and also how to correct it.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation Sheet)

There is a clear theme running through these comments which links self evaluation with the ability to access knowledge about practice. This knowledge allows participants to make informed decisions about the quality of their current practice as well as providing them with a sound basis from which to make changes in that practice. For some, as in the posting below, it is the discipline of recording this knowledge immediately after the class period that makes the information so valuable.

I've learned that self evaluation is an invaluable tool in improving your teaching. It allows you to learn from both your mistakes and your successes by giving you real information about each of them. Because you are forced to record what happened soon after it happened you get a lot of really good information that you might have forgotten.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Week 9)

For others, it is the relatively objective and original nature of the information that makes it so useful. Writing in the final evaluation survey, one CPD participant pointed out that,

The value of this whole process to me is that over a series of weeks I was able to sit down and record what I do in a way that I had never done before. This was really useful but what was more useful was the fact that when I read over what I had written down I was able to see patterns. It is funny that things I have been doing for years which I never thought of suddenly jumped out at me as being issues. Not major ones, just simple things like the fact that I always use groupwork in double classes. I am not saying that this is a bad thing but it is interesting to know. Because of the methodologies questionnaire I have started to try new things in my double classes that at least are making things different.

This is an interesting comment as it demonstrates that quite often the impetus for change comes through a cumulative development of knowledge rather than one blinding flash of inspiration. Also, the type of change being instituted as a result of the analysis of the emerging information is relatively limited in scope. In many ways this is more in keeping with the notion of incremental change that is suggested by champions of self-evaluation approaches such as MacBeath (1999). Their argument is that small scale, organic change which results from insights generated by an individual or school community is far more likely to have a long term impact than revolutionary, radical and imposed change forced on an organisation by an outside agency or individual.

A second connected theme links the engagement in the process of self-evaluation with a higher sense of awareness about the reasons for the participant's patterns of practice. One of the CPD participants explicitly acknowledged this sense of heightened awareness as being one of the main benefits of the process in her final report when she said,

I found this process to be extremely beneficial in developing my self awareness both personally and professionally. Completing the evaluation instruments raised my awareness that in turn enabled me to improve my performance. This research has proven to me the importance of the self in evaluation.

At times this awareness could be uncomfortable and led individuals to uncover aspects of their teaching that they maybe would have preferred not to address. The CPD participant quoted below encapsulates this perspective,

Taking part in self-evaluation allowed me to see things about myself and my teaching that I had never thought of before. It opened up corners of my classroom that had been in the dark for quite a number of years. While this was a good thing in the end, there were times when I was doing it that I wondered why I was putting myself through it.

Another CPD correspondent, writing in his final evaluative report, made a similar point:

The process of engaging in a self-evaluation course has impacted on my practice in ways that I would never have expected. Flaws and gaps that I have either been ignoring or hiding from myself became visible in my practice, the greatest one being a lack of awareness about why I do things in a particular way

One of the ITE correspondents, speaking at a different stage of his career, acknowledged the role of the self-evaluation process in broadening his horizons as a teacher. Here, awareness of practice was an essential pre-requisite to developing a professional identity and the beginnings of an understanding of what the role of teacher actually involved,

I feel that self evaluation was useful. When you first start out your (sic) so preoccupied with teaching you don't see anything else. That's your main focus. But gradually with the help of self evaluation you learn to look at other things, and it gets easier as you settle in. I do feel that it helped me to improve as a teacher and to understand better what it means to be a teacher

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation Sheet)

Another ITE participant taking part in the same dialogue quite eloquently makes a similar point. She suggests that the process of engaging in self-evaluation has led her to redefine herself as a learner as well as a teacher whose fundamental role is to improve her practice in order to ensure that her students succeed. Again, she makes explicit the link between knowledge, awareness and improvement.

Over the course of my teaching practice, I have come to realise that self evaluation is not only necessary but essential. The success of a class is crucially dependent on effective teacher self evaluation. I think that a good teacher will instinctively wish to reflect on their work, evaluate it and look for ways to improve it. A fundamental principle is that the teacher should see themselves as learners. I myself have learned something new after each lesson I have taught, whether it be about planning or classroom management.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation Sheet)

Of course this awareness did not always lead to dramatic discoveries. Indeed, another of the CPD participants made the point in their final report that,

Evaluation may not always result in startling findings. While they do fill in gaps in knowledge and correct misconceptions they more often than not serve to confirm impressions and affirm good practice. Yet as a result of self evaluation I think I can say that my contribution to CTSCC has changed significantly and that this change began with a simple alteration made to my planning after using the first questionnaire.

The data generated from the final programme survey would suggest that this was the experience of the majority of the programme participants. When asked whether engaging with the self-evaluation process had had an impact on their teaching, 92.7% of the ITE cohort and 72.3% of the CPD group confirmed that it did (see Figure 11.12).

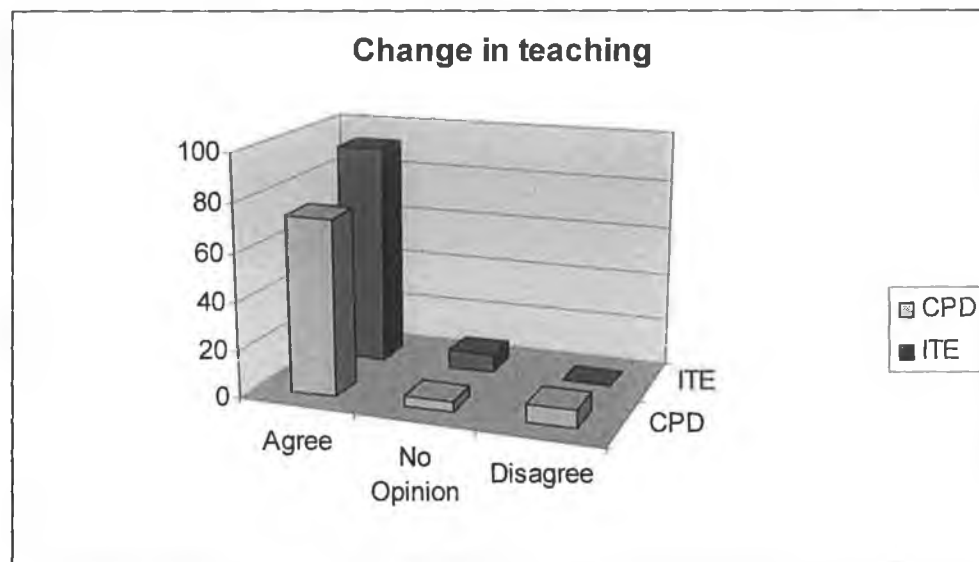


Figure 11.12: *I changed how I taught as a result of using the self evaluation instruments*

Perhaps the best overall summary of the interaction between the different aspects of the self-evaluation process was provided by one of the ITE participants in his final MOODLE posting. In it, he was trying to encapsulate his growing understanding of the importance of self-evaluation to his own professional life and he summarised it as follows,

As a new teacher i have found self evaluation to be very important and practical in becoming a better teacher. Been (sic) new to this profession my experience and knowledge is limited, but with self evaluation i have been able to improve my classroom management, class plans etc. With self evaluation i can review my performance in the class, what areas did i do well in and what areas do i need to improve in to suit the needs of my pupils and make the classroom an environment where people can learn. With self evaluation i have learnt that you can

* identify the professional education you need to further develop your capacity to teach well

*improve the educational experiences you provide for your students

* prepare for your performance review with your supervisor

So self evaluation is a beneficial and worth while aspect of teaching, with it one can only improve as a teacher.

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Here we see the combined themes of knowledge, improvement and an emerging sense of the role of the teacher as professional being augmented and to some extent challenged for this young teacher by the discipline of investigating his own work. The posting also provides three interesting summary points at the end which deal with the participants own understanding of what engaging in self-evaluation can bring to a teachers professional life.

It can:

- Identify gaps in the teachers knowledge base which might benefit from some additional CPD
- Enhance the quality of the learning experience that can be provided for students
- Prepare the teacher to meet an external evaluative body or individual

In these short points there are clear echoes of the work of the OECD (2005) and its focus on the need for continuous professional development, MacBeath and McGlynn's (2002) emphasis on the need for all evaluation to be fundamentally concerned with the quality of teaching and learning and Nevo's (1995) identification of the role of dialogue as the key determinant of the success of evaluative systems. The fact that they were generated by a young and relatively inexperienced teacher whose only significant encounter with the classroom was mediated through a self-evaluation process says much about the potential of that process to influence professional educational practice.

Broadening the Self-Evaluation Community – Valuing other Voices

The second major theme to emerge from participants' engagement with a structured self-evaluation programme was the extent to which this led them to explore the centrality of other individuals and communities to the process of investigating their own practice. For

many participants, the discipline imposed by the requirement to assess the quality of their own work made them aware, perhaps for the first time, of how such judgements rarely take place in isolation. As a result of this there were a number of individual initiatives from participants in both the CPD and ITE groups which were designed to find ways of involving others in the self-evaluation process being developed. These initiatives tended to focus on designing methodologies that brought other members of the participants school communities into the process and in particular, on how to find a mechanism for including the voices of students and other staff members.

However, there were also attempts to explore how the new relationship between individual school communities and the emerging system of national evaluation was impacting on the participants understanding of the programme. In this section, we will examine the initiatives that were undertaken and attempt to come to a judgement as to their value as mechanisms for broadening the focus of the evaluation process. However, we will start with an exploration of the reasons why participants chose to involve others in what was, at least in theory, a self-evaluation process.

Valuing Multiple Voices – Reasons and Rationale

In attempting to explain why he chose to involve other stakeholders in his organisation in the evaluation process one of the CPD participants stated that,

it was essential to get as many views as possible to get an overall picture of the situation. I discovered how many of my colleagues affect, how well I carry out my teaching practice.

This notion of the potential impact of other colleagues' actions on the professional practice of individual course participants was echoed in another CPD final report. Here the participant stated that,

I have always seen myself as part of a team and up to now would have thought that the best way for me to evaluate what I do is to ask other members of the team. My view has changed a little over the course of the programme and I can see the value in taking a long hard look at yourself first but I do still think that it is important to ask others what they think.

For some, this engagement with other stakeholders with a view to drawing them into the process is an article of faith as well as a quality control mechanism,

Once more I re-iterate the belief that involvement from all stakeholders is highly desirable if the strong forces generated by our own self evaluations that can lead to self deception are to be exposed and challenged

(CPD Participant: Using the classroom management instrument)

This theme is taken up by another CPD participant in their final report. In their opinion one of the major flaws of the self-evaluation process is that it,

Puts the onus on the teacher to judge themselves. This has the potential to cause problems around impartiality and bias, as it can be difficult to put oneself in the firing line and make objective judgments about ones own work.. (therefore) I believe that the self-evaluation process has the capacity to remain inward looking and had the potential to lack a holistic vision of the bigger picture unless others are involved in enriching the process with their views.

From this viewpoint, the involvement of other perspectives enriches the process as well as removing some of the pressure from individuals to be overly critical of their own work.

This idea of other stakeholders providing an objective, external perspective on the quality of the participants teaching occurs in a number of the online dialogues. One of the more enthusiastic ITE participants summarised both his experiences of engaging with multiple perspectives and his reasons for seeking them as follows,

‘Self-evaluation- the new miracle cure? ’

It became very apparent to me over the course of using the questionnaires that self evaluation (while it is a useful starting points) has its limitations. It is a well accepted fact that such is the nature of the human mind that often to ourselves our perceived weaknesses are magnified and often because of modesty we have not the ability or the where with all to notice our achievements and praise them.

For that reason I found using the questionnaires with my colleagues much more effective i.e. Peer or group evaluation allowing more view points which halped me so much more than individual isolated evaluation

Also what worked well for me was allowing student evaluation of the topic, what they liked, what they didn't what they would like to see less/more of etc. In summary the teacher is a part of a system involving colleagues and students and engaging the other parts of the system makes the whole work more

effectively. So don't be afraid to ask others opinions and be open to change that's what I've learned

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Aside from the slightly facetious though honest message header, this posting raises a number of interesting points. Here again we see the primary value of multiple perspectives being identified as their ability to challenge biased, personal judgements about quality. In what is perhaps a contrast to the earlier comment about 'self-deception' this posting suggests that one of the major problems faced by teachers is their tendency to be too hard on themselves. From the perspective of this participant, getting a balanced viewpoint is critical if the natural tendency to be overly critical is to be avoided.

A second important point is the acknowledgement that the process of getting a balanced perspective involves the teacher not only listening to colleagues but also to students. This was echoed by another ITE participant in the same dialogue who said,

As i have also said before i think getting students to evaluate us is a great idea as they know how much they are learning or not learning. i know it can be a bit intimidating at first to ask them to make a comment about you, but if you set down the ground rules from the beginning it works really well, i feel that i had a totally different relationship with my 6th years after i asked their opinion. They were honest, gave me good ideas and afterwards told me that they were really happy to be asked their opinion cos it had nevr happened before

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

It must be borne in mind that both of the teachers were coming to the end of their initial training period and that comments such as these demonstrate a confidence and self-awareness that is commendable. The second comment is perhaps a little more open about the challenge that this process of engaging with students poses to a student teacher. However he clearly feels that it was worth it as it not only gave him valuable insights about the quality of the learning that was happening in the class, the primary focus of any system

of evaluation (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002) it also fundamentally altered his relationship with the students.

A number of the CPD participants also chose to emphasise the vitally important role of the student voice in the evaluation process. One participant's contribution to the MOODLE forum concentrates again on the unique perspective on the quality of learning taking place that students can provide.

To promote this learning and fully engage in self-evaluation and reflection, I feel students learning must be assessed through input from them as to how they feel about the teacher, the school, and methodologies used and how they feel they learn best etc.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Final week)

Another speaks in her final report of the relational nature of teaching and of how it would not only be disrespectful but also counter productive not to include the student perspective.

In my opinion any system of school evaluation that fails to take into account the legitimate and valid viewpoints of the students will be incomplete. I have always understood my classroom to have been a place where I created a learning relationship with my students. Like any relationship that works this has been viewed as a two way reality. For this reason I listen to my students and value what they say to me. It doesn't mean that I always agree with them, but I trust them enough to tell me what they think the truth is about what they are learning.

Here there is evidence of the realisation that while the perspective of the student might be different from that of the teacher, it is a valid one that should be listened to whenever possible. However it also emphasises that listening does not always lead to action. While it is vital to hear many voices, it is also important to realise that these perspectives add to the decision making process but do not replace the teachers' role as the prime arbiter of ultimate action. Again, the contribution of one of the CPD participants in their final report summarises this point,

The approach of involving colleagues in the self-evaluation process assisted with and provided the opportunity to analyse and reflect on one's teaching style in an attempt to improve it. The direct input of the trainees were also part and parcel of this evaluation. The contributions of all research partners – trainee, trainers, training manager and critical friend were essential for self-validation purposes (Hitchcock

and Hughes 1997) and for allowing me as a trainer to come to an informed decision about the quality of my work.

Of course, not every participant saw the value of including other voices. There were a number of comments from the ITE participants which indicated a sense of discomfort with the thought of engaging with a process that they felt might leave them vulnerable.

The comment below from the final series of MOODLE postings sums up this perspective,

although i agree with eb on the whole area of peer evaluation i would consider it more when i was fully qualified. i mean it is fantastic to hear about it, but as a student teacher i would need more time to get relaxed in a classroom situation before id like my peers to studying my every move. once you feel part of the school, that the classroom is yours then maybe you have no problem with that practice. also not having them in means that if you make a mistake when you evaluate you can understand what happened without thinking your peer thinks you are an idiot.

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

This honest assessment of their own level of professional development draws attention to the sense of exposure that teachers can feel when they are asked to 'perform' in front of their colleagues or peers. The sense that external evaluation brings with it an element of discomfort and tension is undoubtedly a common one as is the fear of making a mistake in front of someone who you know. Despite the student teachers confidence that this discomfort will disappear as they become more experienced, there is a not insignificant body of evidence to suggest that for many teachers the process of opening themselves up to external scrutiny will always be a difficult process (MacBeath and McGlynn 2002; MacBeath 1999; Davies and Rudd 2000).

This sense of discomfort with looking for other perspectives can also be seen in some of the ITE participant statements relating to the process of consulting students. While most participants who had an opinion on this chose to express it in their final reports, one made a very public statement as to his concerns about approaching students,

Finally there is no chance of me getting the students to tell me what they think of me as a teacher. They would slaughter me. I have enough trouble getting them to pay attention to what I am saying without giving them another way of

causing trouble for me. What could they tell me about my teaching? That I give too much homework? That I am too tough? I have to be. I am the teacher, I am not there to be liked.

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Again there is an underlying sense of discomfort with the thought of leaving themselves open to a negative assessment by students. For this participant, and for some of his colleagues, the process of teaching is not so much relational as confrontational. Anything that gives the student ammunition for this confrontation is to be avoided at all costs. While we might decry this view of the educational process, it would be wrong not to acknowledge that it exists.

Participants on the CPD programme indicated a different set of barriers to including different voices. There was no real evidence of discomfort with the idea on their part but a number of them reported on the resistance that they encountered when they broached the subject of introducing a form of peer evaluation in their own workplace. The reactions included by one participant in his one of his MOODLE postings is instructive,

When I suggested to the other teachers they might like to use the questionnaires to evaluate their own teaching they nearly had a heart attack they responded with questions such as who would I give the results of their findings to management. I had to reassure them the evaluation would be for their own benefit. These are very good teachers but the fear of evaluation of their teaching methods was very strong. I will keep working with them to reduce the fear they have of evaluation.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Final week)

Aside from the colourful comments this posting gives a real sense of the problems faced by anyone considering the extension of an evaluation system to include a peer review element. The idea of the fear that it induces is real and permeates many other teachers approaches to evaluation as a whole and peer evaluation in particular.

What then can we say about the stated desire by a number of participants to involve others in their evaluation practice? It seems that those participants who chose to engage in the process of bringing the evaluation to others did so as a result of their desire to augment the quality of their own investigations. There is no sense from any of the cases cited that extending the evaluating community in any given professional setting removes the need for the participant to engage in rigorous and thorough self-evaluation on an ongoing basis. There is however an acknowledgement that where appropriate, and where collegial backing can be found, the inclusion of other perspectives in the process of ascribing value to the work being undertaken by an individual or group of teachers can greatly add to the quality and usability of the insights generated.

Valuing Other Voices – Addressing External Structures

There was one other set of external perspectives that was considered valuable by some members of the participant group. These were the views of the external bodies that had overall responsibility for the establishment of a national system of school evaluation. In the case of Irish secondary schools the mandated body was the Inspectorate, a division of the Department of Education and Science. Interestingly, while there was quite a significant amount of debate in the postings and final reports dealing with the inclusion of peer and pupil perspectives on the participant's self-evaluation process there was less on the potential role of the Inspectorate.

This is not to suggest that the participants were unaware of the existence of the national system of school evaluation. As we have seen, a significant part of the *LAOS* (2003 b) document in the every day evaluative practice of course participants. What it does point to is the fact that for most programme participants, encounters with the external bodies were as yet theoretical ones and while important, were less significant than encounters with their colleagues and students. For this reason, when participants chose to discuss the inclusion of external voices they tended to concentrate on those who were immediately present.

There were, however, a number of important exceptions to this rule. In the ITE group, one of the practicum schools was chosen to undergo a Whole School Evaluation (WSE) while the student teacher was there. While he spoke about it extensively in class, he made little real reference to it in his final report. Having said that, in his last MOODLE posting he did mention the external evaluation process and his impressions of the impact that it had on the school.

I also saw another version of evaluation when I was in the school and I was able to compare it to what we were doing. In my sixth week (I think) the school went through WSE. This was really interesting to me because it involved the teachers getting used to having someone looking at them. Because I was part of the school, the WSE team looked at me too. I have to say that I found it really interesting. They were very nice and professional and gave me some good advice on teaching maths. They also seemed interested in what I was doing and looked at the evaluation sheets that we were using then and thought it was good. The rest of the school did really well too but you could see that teachers were nervous. The Principal spent ages getting documents together and some of the staff went sick in the days coming up to it. I don't think that anyone got a bad report because it is a really good school but it was an eye opener to see how difficult good teachers found the whole thing.

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Despite being fragmentary in nature, this posting does make some interesting points. The first is that the WSE team observed the participant even though he was only a temporary member of staff. Secondly, he was able to make a small but real link between his own self-evaluation work and the WSE structure. Perhaps most importantly, given the comments in the previous section, he clearly identifies the sense of discomfort and even fear that the external visit engendered even among experienced teachers.

A second and more substantial analysis of the impact of an external evaluation visit was provided by one of the CPD participants. As part of her final report she produced a detailed analysis of her understanding of the differences between the self-evaluation process that she was undergoing as part of her ongoing professional development and the externally mandated evaluation that she was being required to take a role in as part

of her professional duties. The participant chose to summarise the differences in tabular form which is reproduced on the next page.

This is a fascinating and quite complex table which summarises with great originality the fundamental differences, that in the participants view, exist between an external evaluation system and a process of self-evaluation. Perhaps the most significant differences occur at the effect and outcome levels. The overall analysis of the effect of both evaluation procedures seems to indicate that the self-evaluation process produces less anxiety and is more honest. However it does suffer from having less organisational impact. In terms of the overall outcome, there appears to be less clarity about which is the most beneficial. Both result in higher motivation, one at an organisational and one at personal level. While the externally facilitated evaluation process validates the work of the entire organisation the self-evaluation process acts very much as a learning platform that allows individuals to improve the standard of their professional practice.

Perhaps the most telling comparison is made in the final comment about commonly used phrases, where the external system requires professional educators to ask whether their work is good enough; the self-evaluation system affirms their current practice but challenges them to find better ways of doing it.

	External Evaluation	Self-evaluation
The purpose	To evaluate the work of the organisation	To identify areas for improvement in professional practice
The process	A 5 day process involving 6 external evaluators reviewing all practices	A four week process involving the practitioner
The Evaluators	Six professional evaluators	The practitioner who is culturally and politically immersed in the organisation
The Effect	Anxieties very high throughout all levels of the organisation. The organisations reputation would be damaged if the report was bad. This resulted in the organisation hiding/ disguising weak areas and embellishing others. Many projects previously unfinished were prioritised and brought to completion.	No anxiety and no impact at organisational level, but high level impact on a personal level. An honest inquiry into all areas of practice Took place in practice without any preparation time or changes before inquiry.
The Outcome	External validation of the work undertaken by the whole organisation. Celebrations and renewed commitment and motivation in the organisation. Commonly used phrase 'is my work good enough?'	Review of my practice and identification of areas for improvement. Renewed commitment to my professional practice. Commonly used phrase 'How can I do this better?'

Table 11.6: *The difference between external and self-evaluation in my organisation*

In a later part of her report, the author argues that the ideal solution would be to,

Combine both processes, (as) the strengths of both will compliment (sic) each other and the weaknesses will be diminished

In the context of the broader literature regarding the range of possible relationships between systems based on self-evaluation and those based on externally mandated evaluations, this comment is significant. To an extent it echoes the position of both the

authors of the LAOS system and that of Miliband (2004) in that it suggests that external and internal evaluation need to interact in a way that ensures that they are complementary rather than competitive. However there is a strong hint of the criticisms made by MacBeath (2004) and Nevo (2002) about externally mandated systems. In particular her comments relating to external evaluators only getting to view what the school community thinks they might want to see echoes the debate surrounding the self-inspection and self-evaluation dichotomy.

In the overall context of the drive by programme participants to include alternative voices in their efforts to develop a self-evaluation process, what this case seems to demonstrate is some of the difficulties that this can generate. These difficulties seem particularly acute when the point of interface is between a self-evaluating professional who is seeking to improve and an external body who is, to an extent at least, seeking to improve. That the tensions identified mirror those in the relevant literature may be of scant comfort to practitioners however at least they can be reassured that their experiences conform to an international norm and that any solutions developed will have the potential to have an immediate impact on their practice.

Valuing Multiple Voices – Case Studies in Practitioner Led Innovations

Leaving aside for the moment the particular challenges of developing a relationship with a mandated, external evaluation body there were a number of highly successful attempts made by participants to include the perspectives of other significant stakeholders in their own self-evaluation initiatives. These attempts to include others ranged from brief one to one encounters with staff who showed a general interest in the work being undertaken to formal programmes designed to gather student opinion on the work being undertaken by the teacher. In the final part of this chapter, we will examine a number of these case studies with a view to examining their success or otherwise of expanding the community of evaluators in the organisations under investigation.

Case Study One: Informal Sharing with Colleagues

The first case study deals with the development of an informal evaluating relationship between an ITE participant and her mentor teacher. As will be seen from the material quoted below, this relationship seems to have been enormously enriching for both parties without ever really having been structured in any formal sense. The process was described as follows by the participant in a post programme interview. She began by describing how she had spent some time explaining the central ideas of the self-evaluation process to her colleague. She also shared a number of the group designed data collection instruments which prompted the following response,

(he said that) he would do the whole thing of reflective practice himself. That every once in a while he would sit down and say, this is what I wanted to get done, this is what I got done, what can I change? And he has been teaching now for 45 years and he was still doing this. So whenever I gave him, I think I gave him the teaching methodology and the combined evaluation sheet, he loved the teaching methodology one. He thought it was great. He actually sat down and said, I did this, I did this, and I did this. He said "look E, I covered all of these what did you cover in your class?" and it was a case of "oh be quiet M, you've been teaching for ages"....He was asking me what teaching methodology meant because he did his teacher training when he was 16 ... So I was going down through the whole area of teaching methodologies and he was going, "oh right, I use an awful lot of them in the class but I never knew what they meant". So the whole area of the combined evaluation sheet he was able to answer some of them but the participant learning and the teaching and learning methodologies he needed some guidance on. But he found them really useful as well. He really enjoyed filling out the sheet and then the fact that he was going to be quoted later on MOODLE, he loved that as well.

(ITE student interview: Appendix O)

At an interpersonal level it is fascinating to see how the use of the data collection instruments allowed her to develop a relationship with a colleague who was over 40 years her senior. However, there are other important insights that can be gleaned from this episode as well. The first of these is the realisation on the part of the young teacher that highly experienced teachers actively engage in the process of reflecting on their professional practice even if this is done informally. This touches on the general point alluded to by Simons (2002) that most successful teachers engage in some form of self-evaluation whether they acknowledge it formally or not.

Secondly, there was the enthusiasm shown by the mentor teacher for the data collection instrument designed by the class group precisely because it enabled him to name his practice in a way that made sense to a new generation of teachers. Here we see a strong confirmation of the point made by Barzano (2002) who argued that one of the key tasks of any system of self-evaluation is to give practitioners a vocabulary with which to engage initially with each other and subsequently with external stakeholders.

The third and final insight that can be drawn from this short vignette is the mentor teachers' happiness at the prospect of his insights being shared with a wider community on the MOODLE website. Again the notion of the public nature of self-evaluation is brought to the fore. Writers from MacBeath (1996) to Nevo (2006) argue consistently that just because self-evaluation deals with individual or single organisation practice, it does not mean that it should be completed 'behind closed doors'. There is an essential public aspect to self-evaluation that demands that some form of open sharing of the insights generated take place. In this example, the mentor teacher not only accepts that this needs to happen, he positively celebrates it!

Case Study Two: Spreading the Message

The second case study provides us with an example of how an individual with an interest in self evaluation can have an impact on the professional practice of an entire organisation. In a process similar to that described by Barzano (2002) a participant from the CPD cohort became a champion for self-evaluation in his own organisation and encouraged colleagues to begin the process of assessing their own work using two specially designed data collection instruments. The participant indicates in his final report that the initial impetus for starting this process came from his participation in the training programme under discussion. In a posting to the MOODLE discussion forum he details the different stages of the process of sharing his self-evaluation focus with his colleagues as well as the impact that it has had on his professional practice.

I will use and amend version of the four questionnaires in the future and have given a copy to the four trainers I work with. We will hopefully produce an amended version to use in training.

Self-evaluation was not always top of my work agenda in the past. In using this self-evaluation instrument it had enabled me to given more focus to self-evalutaion (sic) and I have already begun to build this into my training routine.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Using the Planning Instrument)

In a subsequent posting, he expanded on the specific details of how he encouraged others to take part in the process. He also speaks of some of the barriers that he faced, the use of the questionnaire with my colleagues was optional, a few have used it and gave me some feedback, Yes i think the culture of my own organisation has gone through change of late, in saying that I really mean the department I work within..... Our department is slowly becoming one of sharing of ideas etc. as you referred to, however, this is not without its problems, competition always raises its ugly head, which can at times be positive. The culture is very important to me in the process of self-evaluation, it needs to be supportive and encouraging, again something that is changing within my own organisation.

(CPD Online Dialogue: Using the Planning Instrument)

From the outset he seems to have been at pains to emphasise the voluntary nature of the process, possibly hoping to avoid some of the issues relating to imposition and the anxiety this can engender which were mentioned earlier. He also speaks at some length about the culture of the organisation that he works for suggesting that this had an important role to play in the success of his attempt to introduce a self-evaluation aspect to his colleagues everyday work lives. The culture as described seems to be in transition. While there is an emerging sense of the importance of collaboration and sharing of ideas he identifies the problem of competition 'raising its ugly head'. Interestingly though, he suggests that this can at times be a positive thing, although he does not develop on this. Still he is keen to emphasise the centrality of the organisational culture to the success of any attempt to encourage practitioners to voluntarily evaluate.

The end result of this process was his production and distribution of two evaluation instruments which were to be used by teachers after each class. Figure 11.13 below shows a set of sample questions from one of these questionnaires. What is interesting

in the light of the previous section of this chapter is the fact that all of the questions are either qualitative in nature or combine an initial quantitative element with a qualitative explanation.

The participant reports that,

To date these questionnaires have proved to be a beneficial evaluation instrument, which has lead to the process evaluating each module within the overall programme. At present this evaluation process is time consuming as the programme has 18 different class modules

In summary then, as a direct result of taking part in the programme under discussion in this study, this CPD participant has designed a similar intervention for his own workplace. This intervention seems, at this early stage at least, to have had a positive impact on his organisation as a whole and his colleagues appear to be interested in continuing to evaluate their own work for the medium term.

Module Evaluation Sheet	
Module	Class
Date	Teacher
<p>1. How clear and understandable was the class/ session content? Please explain your thoughts</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/>	
<p>2. Please rate the module/class preparation and organisation</p> <p>Excellent () Good () Satisfactory () Poor ()</p> <p>Would you change anything?</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/>	

Figure 11.13: Sample Evaluation Sheet

Case Study Three: Engaging with an evaluating school community

The third case study presented here deals with the experiences of an ITE participant who found himself teaching in a school which already had a culture of peer evaluation. He chose to integrate the materials that were developed by his colleagues in the programme with the culture of evaluation that he found in the organisation where he

was working. This resulted in a genuine commitment on his part to the integration of a peer evaluation element into his future professional practice.

We have already quoted extensively from this participants online dialogues in a previous section however, he also gave a post programme interview which provides significant additional information.

He began by describing the evaluation process that existed when he arrived in the school,

They engage in peer evaluation where one teacher will sit in on another teacher's class. That's the form they have that's an example of one where they have one column for teacher activities and one for students in three minutes intervals. Basically you try to keep the teachers one as low as possible and the students activities as high as possible and sort of if you have all your students one empty your running into trouble, that's just the way they do it on a very basic level.

(ITE participant interview Appendix O)

The central parts of the evaluation process as described are the peer review element and the use of what appears to be a very basic interaction analysis document. It is interesting to see that the staff equate good teaching with limited teacher activity. The next stage involved the ITE participant distributing the data-collection instruments designed by his cohort for their use and consideration.

So then I got them to use the questionnaires for themselves for self-evaluation and some of them found them more useful than others, but all of them agreed that it might be a better idea to get peers use them for you of to allow students evaluation of your lessons, they found that more helpful than self evaluation.

(ITE participant interview Appendix O)

Despite seeing a value in the instruments designed, the other teachers still valued the input of other professionals or even students over and above the information that came from the questionnaire. The participant gave the following explanation for this

They just didn't think that they themselves could be objective enough looking at their own teaching though it would be better if someone else was to look at it for them. There so involved in the lesson they don't pick up on things that someone else would pick up on you know so they felt it better for some one else to do it for them rather than do it themselves.

(ITE participant interview Appendix O)

Here again we have the issue of objectivity. Teachers are either unable or unwilling to tell the truth about their practice, even to themselves, and therefore need the discipline of having an 'objective' colleague in the room with them to tell them where they are going right and where they are going wrong. While there is a common sense aspect to this argument, it does seem to go against many of the central tenets of the reflective practice and practitioner research movement that have had a significant impact on the development of the self-evaluation approach. Ultimately it is impossible to know whether the argument is valid. Many teachers would argue passionately that they are capable of examining their own work in an honest and objective way while a number clearly feel that this is not possible.

The ITE participant was certainly convinced about the usefulness of the peer review element. As he explains,

I got one of them to sit in and I got one of them to use our questionnaires for me and I found the information I got more helpful for self-evaluation. You know they picked up on a lot of things I wouldn't have picked up on I found it pretty helpful

(ITE participant interview Appendix O)

There was a very specific culture in the school which seems to have encouraged teachers to explore their own practice. Firstly there were the expectations of a key body of stakeholders, the parents.

The parents I think are very demanding of a good service. I think the teachers are aware of that pretty much, that maybe a factor I don't know, but they definitely are.

They engage in evaluating their teaching and improving their teaching and they are open to it.

(ITE participant interview Appendix O)

Interestingly in the light of MacBeaths (2000) suggestion that self-evaluation has the potential to be harmful if the information is not handled sensitively, the ITE participant insisted that the culture was one which sought to facilitate improvement and as such the process of using the instruments lacked a reporting mechanism

I think its something they engage themselves and if something's spotted they try and improve on it. I don't think there's any mechanism of reporting it on any further or anything like that. I think you know it's very much done on closed bases, a small group of people, it doesn't go any further.

(ITE participant interview Appendix O)

Overall, this process was seen as being very beneficial by both the participant and judging from the comments reported, by his work colleagues. The culture of respect, improvement and sharing ensured that the peer evaluation element thrived and was seen as being a benefit by practitioners rather than an imposition. The distribution of the data collection instruments apparently brought a new focus to some of the classroom observations but at its core, the programme remained a peer centred rather than an instrument centred one.

Case Study Four: Involving the Student Voice

The fourth case study provides details of the design and implementation by an ITE participant of an evaluation process which sought to capture the student voice. The participant was clear about his reasons for doing this. In his final report he stated that he felt that it was wrong that 'the most informed sources on the qualities of teachers tend to be ritually ignored, that is the pupils'

In order to put this to the test, he designed a questionnaire which sought their views on the quality of their educational experiences and, quite courageously, on the standard of the teaching they were receiving. The survey was carried out among 1st, 2nd and 5th year pupils in order to get a good range of responses. The instrument that was distributed was designed by the participant and was simple and to the point (see Figure 11.14 below).

Teaching questionnaire

As part of a research assignment I am carrying out I would appreciate your help, as a secondary school student, in telling me what YOU think is important in a teacher. Below is a list of attributes (characteristics) of a typical teacher. Please rate each of these points as you see as being important for the benefit of your learning in class. 1 = most important, 2=2nd most important etc. (You may place the same number beside different points if you feel they are equally important to you in your learning)

- A teacher who gets on really well with the student ____
- A teacher who can keep the class quiet ____
- A teacher who can clearly explain information ____
- A teacher who is strict ____
- A teacher who gives a lot of homework ____
- A teacher who gives productive home work ____

xx

If you think there are any points I have forgotten to include, please list them on the back of this page and rate them.

Thank you for your cooperation
(Do not write your name on this page !!!!!)

Figure 11.14: Teaching Questionnaire

As part of the process of getting student information, the ITE participant analysed the data and fed it back to them (see Figure 11.15 below). This was considered to be quite unusual by the pupils themselves but appears to have been greatly appreciated.

Results		
<u>Pupil Teaching Questionnaire</u>		
A teacher who gets on really well with students	44	76%
A teacher who can keep a class quiet	8	14%
A teacher who can clearly explain information	25	43%
A teacher who is strict	2	3%
A teacher who gives lots of homework	1	2%
A teacher who gives productive homework	10	17%
A teacher who does plenty of practical / experimental work	8	14%
A teacher who can vary the running of the class everyday	6	10%
A teacher who carries out continuous assessment regularly	3	5%
A teacher who never raises his / her voice	5	9%
Other notes by pupils:		
“A teacher who doesn’t give too much homework and therefore allows you to study”		
“A teacher who is only strict to keep class quiet”		
“Always is in a happy mood and a teacher who can give you help when you are stuck		

Figure 11.15: *Results of Teaching Questionnaire*

The participant indicates in his final report that this process greatly enhanced the quality of his relationship with his pupils. It also demonstrates that it is quite possible to gather useful information from students of all ages and to treat it with the same respect as information generated by other sources. The particular participants experience suggests that there was no diminution of authority associated with asking their opinion. In fact the opposite was true. Students valued the opportunity to offer a

viewpoint and respected the teacher who asked them. In keeping with MacBeath et al's (2003) insight, if asking pupils to comment is so easy and so useful, why do so many teachers shy away from it?

In summary, the process of engaging with a self-evaluation programme was seen by most participants as adding to the quality of their professional practice. On a personal level, it was seen as providing them with the knowledge and awareness needed to identify and improve specific areas of practice. On an organisational level, the process of engaging in a self-evaluation process led many participants to involve other stakeholders in the task of improving the quality of teaching and learning that took place in their organisation. Many of these attempts at broadening stakeholder involvement resulted in innovative and unique organic programmes of evaluation being designed and implemented at a range of levels in organisations. These models could be seen as providing templates for other individuals or organisations who are considering adopting a localised, practitioner led and data driven approach to judging the quality of the practice taking place in their own organisations.

Conclusion

This chapter has concentrated for the most part on an analysis of the impact that the discrete elements of the programme had on the professional practice of course participants. In order to do this, an extensive outline of the programme designed was provided which sought to locate the final structure within the iterative cycle of its development. Central to an understanding of the programme is the manner in which it enabled and indeed empowered participants to become active generators of usable data in their own professional contexts. The process whereby participants were facilitated in designing their own research instruments is at the heart of the programme. This was ultimately sub-divided into three stages, each of which had a strong group focus.

The logical next step after design was implementation and the latter part of the chapter concentrates on providing a detailed analysis of participant's experiences when using the materials developed. This analysis used the framework proposed in chapter nine,

concentrating in this chapter on the initial two stages. The first part of the findings examine participants attitudes to the process of instrument design as well as detailing a very interesting three stage cycle of instrument usage. The first stage saw most participants move through a period of initial engagement followed by the development of a greater practice grounded understanding. In the final stage of the process, we saw many participants moving to a position where they took ownership of the instruments to the extent that they were willing to change and adapt them.

The final part of this chapter explored participant reaction to self-evaluation as a concept as well as assessing the extent to which it impacted on their practice. On the whole, there was a great deal of satisfaction with the process with the majority of both ITE and CPD participants indicating that they intended to continue to self-evaluate even after the programme had finished. Indeed, so taken were some participants by the process that they chose to share it with their work colleagues and the final part of the chapter provides a detailed analysis of a number of interesting case studies that emerged from this process.

In the next chapter, the third element of the analytic framework will be examined. This element, concentrating on the potential of ICT to develop self-evaluating professionals, is at the heart of the study in many ways. It can be argued that the only way to ensure that innovative programmes such as the one being described here do not disappear as soon as the programme is complete is to provide a methodology for maintaining strong links with other practitioners. In the next chapter we will examine in some detail whether ICT enabled interventions are capable of creating meaningful, reflective engagements with the key issues of self-evaluation practice.

Chapter Twelve: The ICT Enabled Self-Evaluating Professional

An earlier section of this study engaged in an extensive overview of the literature relating to the potential of ICT to facilitate professional growth and development. Focusing in particular on the role played by the communications element of emerging VLE technology this overview suggested that ICT had the potential to enable participants engage meaningfully with ideas and experiences in a reflective online forum. In essence, the argument put forward by Jonassen (2000), Britain and Liber (1999), Bradshaw (2005) was that the very discipline of acting, posting and responding led to a greater degree of shared reflective engagement that ultimately resulted in the creation of new, shared knowledge. In addition, it was claimed that the VLE platform greatly enhanced the capability of the course provider as well as the course participants to generate, share and evaluate resources. It is not coincidental that these notions of collaborating, generating new knowledge, reflecting, engaging and generating evidence are at the heart of both the concept of the Professional Learning Community (Hargreaves 2006, Bolam et al 2005) and the Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). The challenge facing the researcher is finding the evidence to corroborate these claims.

In this section the data generated during the implementation of the final version of the programme developed will be analysed with a view to assessing the claims made by ICT theorists. In particular an effort will be made to:

- a) Examine the level of engagement by analysing the rate and patterns of student participation
- b) Assess the level of reflective analysis and communication engaged in by participants using the Garrison and Anderson (2000) COI model
- c) Explore the capacity of VLE's to facilitate the development of original content and in particular to investigate the potential of DV technology to aid this process.

Analysing Engagement - Exploring Participation

In her 1992 Analytic Framework, Henri suggests that the first dimension to be explored when engaging in content analysis of online communication should be the extent to which people actually take part in the process. Lally commenting on this suggests that this level of analysis, often overlooked in other models, has the ability to 'raise questions for the teacher' (2000: 4). In the context of this present study, an examination of the rates and modes of participation allowed the researcher analyse what the course participants did and use this as a basis for coming to an understanding how this impacted on the dynamics of their learning.

Rates of Participation – Exploring What Happened

One of the enormous advantages of using a VLE in a blended educational environment is the capacity it gives course providers to examine exactly what participants did, for how long and how often. As has already been discussed, the data generated by the MOODLE VLE used in this course was analysed using the SPSS data analysis package with a view to examining emerging patterns.

The numeric data recorded, is produced by counting participant access to each particular MOODLE page. In practice this means that every time a participant, for example, uses a navigation button, clicks on a link to access a resource or makes a new posting, an individual record is kept. This provides an enormous amount of rich data however it is essential that a structured analysis take place in order to draw out usable themes.

At a global level the analysis of participation rates indicates a high level of use of the VLE by course participants. Table 12.1 below provides the raw data for the CPD and ITE courses in relation to total numbers of visits, average number of visits per student, the total number of pages visited and the average numbers of pages examined per visit.

Total MOODLE Pages Per Visit: ITE & CPD		
	ITE	CPD
Total Number of Participants	15	44
Visits	880	1272
Average No. of Visits	59	37.4
Pages Visited	6833	8641
Average per Visit	7.82	6.79

Table 12.1: General MOODLE usage data

Even the most cursory examination would indicate that in global terms at least, there was a high level of basic usage. In total the ITE group visited 6833 pages in the course of the programme, an average of 55 visits per student. While both the average total number of visits and the average number per student were somewhat less for the CPD course, as a grouping they still managed to make 1272 visits in total averaging 37.4 per student.

It is interesting to note that despite the difference in total number of visits made the average number of pages accessed per visit, 7.82 for the ITE course and 6.79 for the CPD group are relatively similar.

This generally positive trend in the usage data is for the most part backed up by other evaluative material gathered in the course of the programme. Students on both the CPD and ITE programme were asked in the course of a final evaluation survey how comfortable they were working in the MOODLE environment.

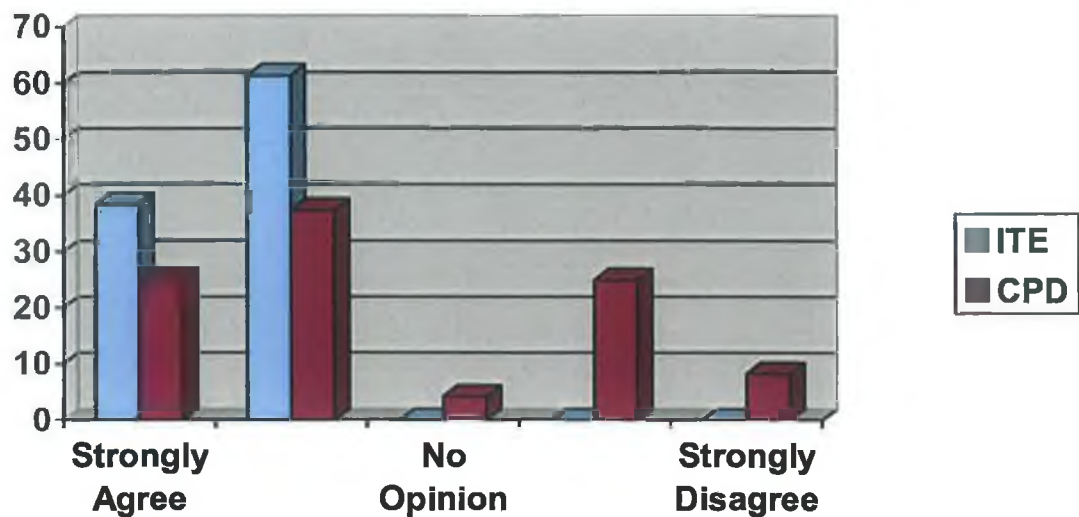


Figure 12.1: *I am comfortable working in a MOODLE environment*
(ITE n = 13 ; CPD n = 24)

Here a clear majority in both groups, 100% in the ITE and 62.5 % in the CPD, indicated that they felt comfortable working in and posting on MOODLE. An open question which followed on from that particular series of questions probed a little deeper into this area (See Appendix M). What was interesting in the ITE responses, though perhaps not too surprising given their 100% stated comfort with the MOODLE environment, was their total acceptance of the online element of the programme. There were no questions about its validity, its usefulness and certainly no indications that anyone had problems using the technology. Most participants who chose to respond explored the process side of ICT use and saw it as being essentially another mechanism for enhancing the quality of their practice based learning experiences. While this element of the programme will be explored in some detail later in this section, it is worth quoting some of the comments provided. One respondent summarised the feelings of many when he stated,

I really liked working in MOODLE. It was a good place to go for information and it is really useful and gives us a chance to share ideas and experiences with each other
(ITE Online Dialogue General Reflection)

Another echoed this when she said that,

I like the way you get a chance to put your problems in a place where people who are going through the same thing you are can read them.

(ITE Online Dialogue General Reflection)

Indeed if the ITE participants as a collective had a complaint it was not with the online environment but the failure of some people to make appropriate use of it. This position was perhaps most accurately summed by the participant who stated that,

I found the MOODLE great however I think (it) is obvious that from the length / frequency of some peoples' postings that they didn't allow themselves to be fully actively engaged in the process.

(ITE Online Dialogue General Reflection)

While many of these comments found an echo in the responses of the CPD participants to a similar open-ended question there were a number of subtle differences. Perhaps the most notable of these was the concentration on the mechanics of the online experience. A comment made by one individual in her final report summarises some of the points made when she states that,

Using MOODLE was a good experience. Many resources were readily accessible; notes and video clips and it was also easy to go on the internet to do further research. Clicking on a link for example is so much easier than trying to find a book in a library. Most of us were comfortable working with computers and had internet access at home and at work. You can contribute as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. You can choose your own time to contribute which is particularly useful for part time students.

Here we see mention of 'clicking', the extent of Internet penetration among the participants as well as the process element mentioned earlier.

The theme is continued in another response where the participant stated that MOODLE,

Has opened up new pathways of learning and provided opportunities for shared learning with colleagues. Working online has opened up a collaborative approach to a positive learning process and will now become part of the lifelong learning tool. It has also improved my basic IT skills and to date I have found it a very productive experience. It has helped me forge new friendships.

Again the acknowledgement of the skills element is important and is clearly viewed as being an essential part of the learning.

A final example of this type of analysis can be seen in the following comment. Referring explicitly to the experience of one of the sub-groups working on the data collection instruments the respondent states that,

Our group as a unit found the medium to be a very beneficial way of sharing information quickly and efficiently from a time and cost perspective. It allowed us interact from home and places of work, which helped get rid of the initial ambiguity that was felt in terms of working in teams. The most important point was that we came to understand is that this is a tool which can enhance and improve the learning experience however it cannot support every facet of the group work required.

The latter part of the last statement is a useful reminder that even participants who were generally well disposed to the online element of the programme had problems with it. In fact the evaluation survey suggested that almost exactly one third of the CPD respondents stated that they were unhappy with some aspects of the online experience. Again they chose to use the open question to expand on their initial replies.

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the major reasons given for reacting negatively to the MOODLE environment resulted from problematic experiences with and fear of technology in general. One respondent summarised this very well when she stated in her final report that,

All of us had difficulty at some point with the technical side of working online, with frustration at being cut off, losing important information or not being able to get online in the first place. Technical skills within the group differed. Some had poor keyboard skills which led to problems in fluency.

Again the theme of skills and practical activities comes to the fore but in this case it is seen as a negative contributor to the overall experience. Another participant was honest enough to admit that they found using MOODLE 'a little unnerving' as 'they had never worked on line before'. A third respondent demonstrated an ability to see the benefits of the environment in principle whilst acknowledging her own practical issues with it when she said,

I see MOODLE as a positive medium generally when access is not a problem and when I have time. My input was limited by access and time restraints alone.

However not all replies were so measured. One detailed and particularly pointed response stated that,

Another downside is the cost factor to students and college:

- Students spend vast amounts of personal time online at home. This increases the home telephone bill and engages the phone line so other family members cannot receive incoming calls.
- The college tutorial costs might be higher compared to other methods. Is the cost of MOODLE to each student justified? The lack of computer software on students' personal computers results in the inability to download online educational information. As a result, students feel very vulnerable and open to criticism.

Here we see two critical factors that have long been identified as reasons for resistance to adopting ICT enhanced learning modes, cost and time (Murphy, Walker and Webb 2001; Grabe and Grabe 1998). Cost is an obvious issue, particularly for part time adult CPD participants who in an Irish context are already making significant financial sacrifices in order to take part in skills development programmes such as the one under discussion. The second issue raised, the time investment needed to engage in online learning, is another interesting one. Certainly prior to the widespread advent of broadband infrastructure dial up enabled CMC communication could be painfully slow and frustrating. However recent years have seen a significant upgrading of the general ICT infrastructure in Irish educational institutions at all levels. While there is undoubtedly still some way to go, most

schools and FE centres in Ireland have seen a real improvement in their communications capabilities in recent years (Shiel and O’Flaherty 2006).

An analysis of an additional set of MOODLE baseline data reinforces this point. One of the categories of information that is relatively easy to identify is that relating to the time when people access the VLE (see Table 12.2 below).

MOODLE Visits by Time: ITE & CPD				
	CPD	%	ITE	%
6am-12pm	285	22.41	140	15.91
12pm-6pm	567	44.58	356	40.45
6pm-12am	274	21.54	301	34.20
12am-6am	146	11.48	83	9.43
Total	1272	100	880	100

Table 12.2: *Usage Pattern By Time*

The table above clearly identifies the 12pm to 6pm time slot as the most popular for accessing the VLE for both ITE and CPD participants. The fact that nearly half of the CPD participants (44.58 %) and four in ten of the ITE cohort (40.45 %) chose to work online at this time is potentially significant. What it seems to suggest is that the most opportune time for VLE access is during the professional working day. Indeed if you add the six hour period immediately preceding the one under discussion it suggests that upwards of 67% of all CPD access took place in a period of time where most participants were either at or travelling to and from work. The ITE figure, while smaller at combined 55% approximately, indicates a similar if not as marked pattern. It should be noted, however, that approximately one third of VLE access by the ITE course took place between 6pm and 12am. The equivalent CPD figure was a little over one fifth.

This pattern of usage is potentially important for a number of reasons. It could be suggested that the concentration of usage in a period when participants are actually working is significant given the type of activities they were engaged in. The programme as designed asked participants to reflect on their experience of engaging in self-evaluation in their own professional settings using self-designed data collection instruments. The fact that they chose to at least enter into an element of this reflection in a period close to their actual use of the instruments would seem to suggest that the opinions offered will have the benefit of immediacy. One of the many potential benefits claimed for ICT enabled communication is just this sort of immediacy.

A second, and no less important implication, relates to the technology infrastructure available in schools and education centres. The frustrations in the area of cost and technology breakdown, while obviously important to some participants, were a minority experience. It is reasonable to assume that one of the reasons for this is the increasing availability networked ICT infrastructure in their places of employment. The recent National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) 'Census on ICT Infrastructure in Schools' (Shiel and O'Flaherty, 2006) provides some corroboration for this point. Conducted in 2005, this census indicates that 79 % of post-primary schools in the state had Internet access with 80% of the computers available being networked (2006: vi).

Perhaps as significant is the comment in the report that that the 'arrival of networking and Broadband in schools had led to a need to purchase/upgrade computers' (2006: vii). While this was seen as a challenge to many schools, it is indicative of a general upgrading of the ICT infrastructure in Irish educational institutions. Again this is significant for the programme under discussion as many of the functionalities offered by the VLE demand a robust ICT infrastructure if ease of use is to be guaranteed.

Patterns of Participation: Who Went Where?

While it is undoubtedly essential to have an understanding of participants access patterns and general attitudes to the use of online environments it is arguable that it is even more important to understand exactly what they chose to do when they were engaging with the

VLE. Luckily MOODLE records just such data and in this section we will explore exactly how students made use of the many functionalities offered by the VLE.

The raw participation data is presented in MOODLE under 21 headings which have been grouped together into four categories for the purposes of this study. The categories identified are:

- Course
- Forum
- Resource
- User

The 'course' heading encompasses all student visits to the site homepage. Under the heading 'forum' a record is presented of all student activity in the area of asynchronous discussion postings including reading postings, making postings and deleting postings. The 'reference' heading includes data on all student interactions with the reference material presented in the MOODLE site. Finally, the 'user' heading deals with the visits made to the site by the course administrator.

Visits By Category CPD		
Category	Number	%
Course	1745	20.19
Forum	4182	48.40
Resource	2030	23.49
User	684	7.92
Total	8641	100

Table 12.3: Global Data on VLE use for CPD class

Perhaps the most notable piece of information to emerge from the analysis of the data presented in this table is the fact that nearly 50% of all CPD participant access activities were connected with the asynchronous discussion forum. This is significant given the centrality of the act of communication to both the development of communities (Harris and Muijs 2005) as well as the critical importance of dialogue to the idea of self-evaluation (Nevo 2006). A second interesting issue to arise is the access pattern relating to resources. That there was a high level, almost 25% of 'hits' were in this category, suggests that participants were seeking to enhance their own personal and professional knowledge with additional tailored material provided by the researcher.

Interestingly, this resource access pattern is not repeated in the parallel ITE participation data (see Table 12.4 below).

Visits By Category ITE		
Category	Number	%
Course	753	10.94
Forum	4264	61.95
Resource	62	0.90
User	1804	26.21
Total	6883	100

Table 12.4: *Global Data on VLE use for ITE class*

Here less than one percent of all visits to the VLE are targeted at accessing resources relevant to self-evaluation. This, on the surface at least, is a somewhat worrying statistic. As we have seen, an essential element of any programme designed to develop self-evaluation capacity in teachers is the presentation of key texts and information on the area (Barzano 2002, Nevo 2006). What this seems to suggest is that the ITE teachers are refusing to engage in this critical aspect of the programme designed.

However when the data produced by the study is interrogated in a more thorough manner, it is possible to see a different pattern emerging. When asked to comment on what they have learned about self-evaluation from the resources distributed in class or on the web, the majority of participants refer to a broad range of written sources. They use the material in an interesting way. For example, the participant quoted below seeks to contextualise his emerging understanding of the role of self-evaluation in the broader literature on reflective action. He then ties this into his own current and future professional practice.

The first thing i learnt about self evaluation in light of some readings I read is that self evaluation is not a new philosophy. The notion of self evaluation has been around as far back as 1933, Dewey, who contrasted 'routine action' with 'reflective action'.

This notion of reflective action has been developed and applied to teaching in the form of self evaluation. Van Gynn 1996 said that the reflective process is based on Dewey's theoretical perspective on critical inquiry and how it reflects to practice..... Also according to Merryfield 1993 perservice teachers must be exposed to reflective exerises in order to prepare them for continual growth as professionals.

Through the research above on self evaluation i have discovered more understanding of its importance, it is very important since when we finish college and begin our lifes in the work place it is our only form feedback and only way of growing as a teacher

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation)

The pattern here follows the ideal suggested by both Barzano (2002) and Hargreaves (2006). Exposure to expert knowledge leads to reflective engagement with participants own professional practice with a view to shaping future actions.

A second participant demonstrates how initial scepticism on reading the literature was changed by the filter of professional engagement with the ideas in the course of their teaching practicum.

Well I was looking around on the Internet and reading a couple of the sheets handed out in class (no really I was). Anyway it seems that they all seem to say the same things about WHY we should use self-evaluation. Its usually along the line of, helps improve the educational experience of the students..

It is essential for teaching and improving your teaching methods. It helps both you and your students.

I was sceptical at the start but I have to say it has helped me.

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation)

A final comment from this particular discussion gives some indication of how participants accessed resource material as well as demonstrating how exposure to external material can lead to an informed comparative analysis relating to the quality of the work undertaken by the learning community to which he belonged.

From looking at some stuff on the resource section of moodle and other stuff from the web - compared to some of the evaluation sheets being used out there, ours are really good (far better in some cases)

(ITE Online Dialogue: Daily Evaluation)

Here mention is made of the resource section of MOODLE. This was, as its name suggests, a specific section of the VLE dedicated to the provision of resources. In terms of the VLE architecture, it was hosted on a different part of the site and was accessed by linking to a separate homepage. Perhaps as a result of the different levels of comfort with ICT mentioned in the previous section, it was found that participants from a CPD background were less likely to transfer to a different site whereas ITE students were quite happy to migrate in order to access material. This point is backed up by the usage statistics from the resource site outlined in Table 12.5 below.

Careful interim analysis of the data emerging from the VLE clearly indicated to the researcher that the location of resources for the CPD participants was emerging as a crucial factor.

Resource Access Pattern: ITE Participants			
Participant	Total No. of Visits	Pages Visited	Average No. per Visit
A	5	18	3.6
B	4	7	1.75
C	5	10	2
D	14	97	6.93
E	8	23	2.88
F	6	18	3
G	10	30	3
H	6	33	5.5
I	7	9	1.29
J	10	23	2.30
K	6	7	1.17
L	30	405	13.50
N	13	50	3.85
O	0	0	0

Table 12.5: *ITE Resource Access Pattern*

It was decided, in direct contrast to the ITE programme, to place the resources on the home site accessed by the CPD participants. This greatly enhanced the number of hits on the resource element and is responsible for the somewhat skewed usage graph below.

This vignette provides a perfect example of the enormous advantages offered by the use of a VLE in a blended learning environment. The usage pattern of the resource site clearly indicated that there was a problem with the CPD participants access of the material placed there.

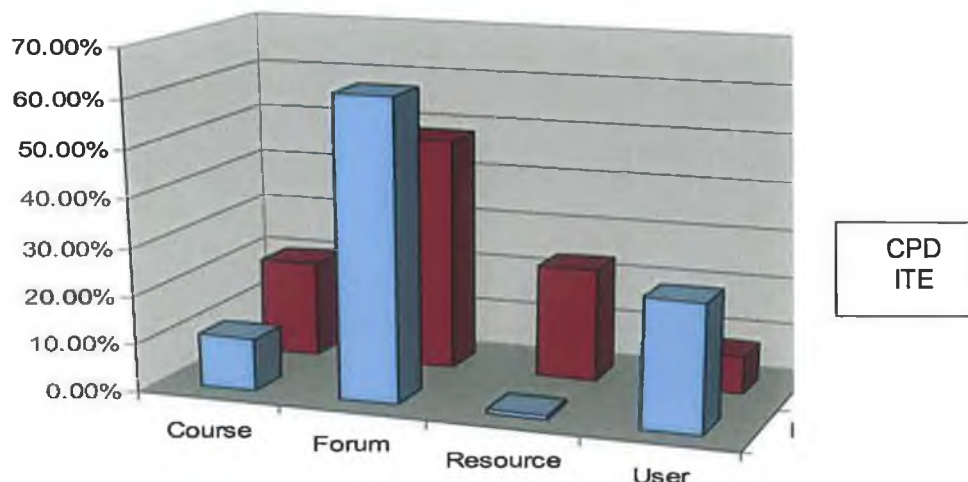


Figure 12.2: General Access Patterns
(ITE $n = 14$; CPD $n = 34$)

It was comparatively easy for the researcher to change the structure of the CPD home site in order to position the research material in a more easily accessible place. He was also able to assess the extent to which the material placed on the general research site was actually being used by the ITE students as a stimulus to reflection by asking a focused question in a discussion forum.

This latter point relating to one use made of discussion fora in the programme is important in the overall context of forum usage. As can be seen in Figure 12.2 above, and as has been mentioned earlier in this section, the pattern of online activity indicated that by far the most significant functionality of the VLE for participants was the asynchronous discussion forum. The general usage data presented earlier shows that 48.4% of the CPD and 61.95 % of the ITE access events related to forum usage. While this is interesting in itself, a more detailed analysis of the data under a series of subheadings is even more enlightening. Table 12.6 below provides a detailed breakdown of all forum related postings.

Forum Page Visits by Course				
	ITE		CPD	
Activity	Total No.	%	Total No.	%
Forum View Discussions	2038	47.81	1802	43.44
Forum View Forum	1726	40.49	1589	38.31
Forum View Forums	100	2.35	287	6.92
Forum Mail Blocked	115	2.7	227	5.47
Forum Mail Digest	0	0	84	2.03
Forum Add Post	85	1.99	77	1.86
Forum Subscribe	2	0.05	24	.058
Forum Add Discussion	163	3.82	16	.39
Forum Search	0	0	16	.39
Forum Update Post	33	.77	16	.39
Forum unsubscribe	1	.02	10	.24
Total	4263	99.955	4148	99.498

Table 12.6: Participant Usage of Forum Functionality

What is immediately obvious from even a cursory analysis of the data is that the vast majority of the activity relating to forum usage is connected to the viewing rather than adding. The statistics are somewhat startling. In the ITE course a combined 90.65 % of all forum visits are in the forum-viewing category. This is replicated in the CPD course where a remarkable 93.67 % of all activity relates to forum viewing. Given the dominance of viewing aspect it is perhaps not that surprising that the percentage of activity relating to posting or adding discussions is quite small. In terms of the precise figures 6.58 % of all forum activities on the ITE programme involved posting or adding with the CPD participants performing the same activities 2.64 % of the time.

At first glance the almost ten to one ratio of reading to writing would seem to suggest a profound imbalance in forum usage. However it is possible to argue that this is precisely

the type of ratio that should be expected in a community of practitioners who are seeking to develop their professional skills in what is for many of them a novel environment. There are also strong echoes here of the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991:129). For the most part participants are observing and learning rather than posting. They were, to use a term favoured by ICT network specialists 'lurking' (Rafaeli, Ravid, and Soroka, 2004). There is nothing to suggest that the limited of postings indicated either a lack of interest in the process of communicating in online fora or that participants failed to value the material placed online by colleagues. Indeed, participant responses in to a series of focused questions in an evaluative survey conducted at the end of the programme suggest the complete opposite. Asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to posting online participants demonstrated a clear liking for the forum as method of communication as well as an understanding of the importance of the format as a way of sharing information and enhancing practice (Table 12.7 below).

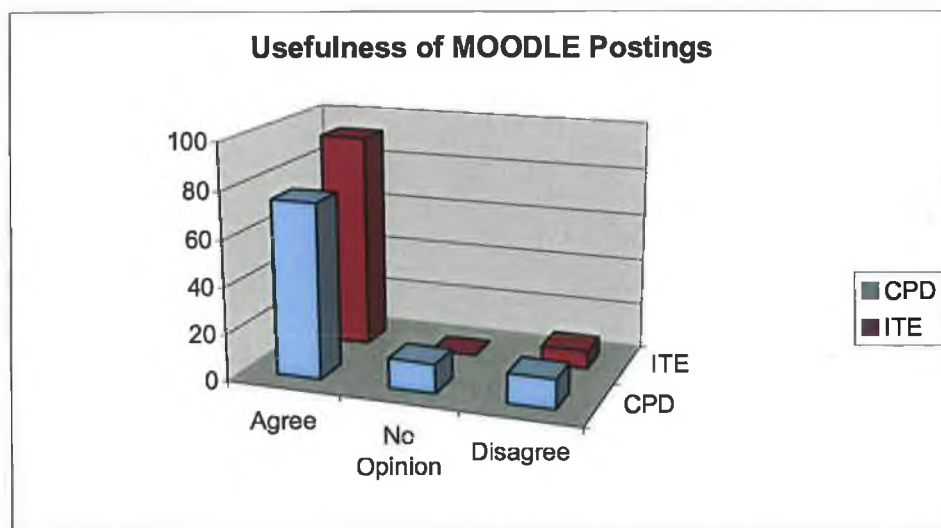


Figure 12.3: Making MOODLE Postings Was Useful
(ITE $n = 13$; CPD $n = 24$)

In this survey, 92.3% of ITE and 75% of CPD respondents indicated that they thought making MOODLE postings was useful. This is significant as it demonstrates the extent to which participants had come to value the process of communicating online. It is arguable

that without this acceptance it would be impossible to engage in any meaningful professional learning community development activities using VLE's, a key element of this study.

While seeing a value in the concept of communicating on MOODLE, a question relating to the mechanics of the process of making postings resulted in a more equivocal response. Asked whether they found the process of writing online easy, the CPD group of participants split exactly down the middle with 50% saying they agreed with the statement and 50% saying that they disagreed. The answers for the ITE group were substantially different with 77% of the respondents indicating that they were comfortable posting online and only 7.7% suggesting they were not with 15.4% stating that they were unsure. This type of response would seem to corroborate the data explored earlier relating to general comfort with technology. The ITE group, whether because of their age or easier access to PC's, are significantly more comfortable with the process of communicating online (see Figure 12.4).

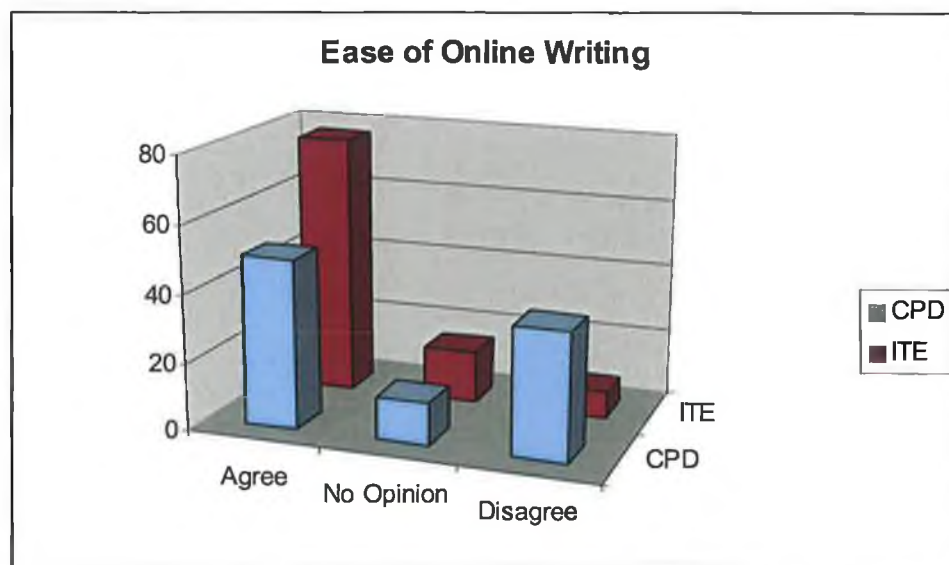


Figure 12.4: *It is easy to write online*
(ITE n = 13 ; CPD n = 24)

Having explored some of the general issues relating to online communication, the survey sought to examine exactly how the process of posting online impacted on the everyday

professional practice of the participants. Again there is a marked difference in the experiences and opinions of the CPD and ITE groups. When asked the extent to which they made use of the ideas posted by colleagues in their own professional practice, 65.2% of the CPD group indicated that they did with a significant 30.4% stating that they didn't. This is in marked contrast to the ITE responses where 92.3% of the respondents indicated that they made use of others ideas in their teaching.

A similar, though less marked pattern is discernable in the different participant groups response to a question about their actually changing their teaching as a result of posting on MOODLE. While 33% of the CPD group indicated that had indeed changed their practice as a result of posting, 45.8 % stated that they had not with a large group of 20.8% stating that they had no opinion. This high incidence of neutral statements was repeated and actually increased in the ITE class with fully 41.7% of the group choosing it as an answer when responding to this question. As a cohort the ITE participants were more positive about the transformative element of writing online with 50% stating that they had in fact changed how they taught as a result of engaging in the process.

A final process based question dealt with the extent to which writing on MOODLE caused participants to think differently about teaching. Here again the ITE / CPD differences come to the fore although in a less marked way. While 50% of the CPD participants agreed that they thought about teaching differently as a result of posting on MOODLE, 37.5% indicated that they had not. The ITE participants were more positive with 66.7% stating that their teaching had changed as a direct result of writing online with only 16.7% disagreeing.

Interesting though this data was in itself, the issues hinted at in the statistics quoted above demanded further exploration and explanation through the interrogation of some of the connected qualitative data. When the qualitative data was interrogated as to the reasons why different groups of participants found the process of posting to MOODLE useful, the results were significant. Almost to a person, the ITE students mentioned the value of the

process as a mechanism for keeping in contact and sharing experiences. In a typical observation one ITE participant states that,

i found moodle to useful, sometimes you can see that your not on your own with a certain problem, that one of your classmates is in the same boat or has encountered that particular problem and might have a suggestion to solving it.
(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Another student made much the same point saying that,

I found moodle to be very interesting. It was great to see how everyone else was getting on and what issues they were facing. At least you knew that you weren't alone and could swap ideas on how to deal with a particular issue.
(ITE Online Dialogue:General Reflection)

Another provided a slightly less enthusiastic endorsement but made explicit a concept that was implicit in both of the previous postings, the idea of community.

I don't know how useful it was for me during my time teaching. But it was nice to see how others were getting on and nice to get any problems off my chest to people who understood. It was like a nice little community with everyone in similar boats. It made me feel less isolated. But it was also somewhere that you could find a possible solution or advice to experiment with from classmates who were having similar problems, a little resource all of its own.
(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

The mention of community here is particularly important. One of the primary goals of this research was to investigate the potential of a VLE enabled blended learning programme to create a learning community for a geographically disparate educational professionals. Here we have an explicit acknowledgement on the part of one of the participants that this is exactly what happened. As importantly the participant identified, as did the other two who were quoted, the notion of shared practice based experience as being at the heart of that community. The emphasis of the importance of shared practice as a foundational element of the community echoes the work of Community of Practice (COP) theorists such as Brown and Duguid (1999), Lave and Wenger (1992).

A second key element in the process of the creation of a COP is the development of shared responses to practice based problems. This process of solution generation comes about as a result of engagement with practice and discussion of issues that arise in a shared, public forum. The data presented in the discussion fora clearly indicates that the ITE participants felt that the process of posting online impacted on how they taught and perhaps more importantly that the ideas offered by fellow participants had an impact on their own practice. Invariably participants made an explicit connection between a problem they were having, a solution offered online and the impact this had on their own practice. One participant summarised this process in the final evaluation survey when they stated,

I like the way you get a chance to put your problems in a place where people who are going through the same thing you are can read them. I also found that a lot of the answers were very useful and they helped when I was having problems.

Another, in answer to the same question, stated that,

I liked the moodle thing, it made me feel as if I was connected to the rest of the class even when I wasn't talking to them. It was really interesting to see that other people were having the same problems as I was and I learned some useful things from postings that I was able to use myself.

The following extract from a discussion that took place very early in the participant's placement gives an idea of exactly how this process developed. Asked to indicate what they considered the most important thing they had learned that particular week three participants entered into a short dialogue, name checking others ideas and proposing some of their own.

How am I supposed to limit my reply to the MOST important thing?!!! Never mind the students learning outcomes; mine have been coming by the truck load this week... I am in complete agreement with EB that students need to be kept active, especially the boys.

But the most important thing I've learnt this week is that the success of a class depends on your ability to cope with the reaction of the students. I've had some problems with discipline in my 1st year and 2nd year classes but B's idea of punishments sheets and some of my own innovative ideas have been helping. ..We'll see how long that lasts!

My week went well but I can see the discipline factor becoming an issue for me. If anyone has any suggestions to help me I'd love to hear them.
P.S Might be attending the parent teacher meeting on Thursday! Wish me luck! 😊

Re: Week 2

maybe you could bring in detention slips or something and be really strict with them and the first person to cross you give them detention, that will show the rest that they shouldn't mess with you and maybe you should try that in every class next week. i hope that my help a little bit.

Re: Week 2

There's your opportunity a parent teacher meeting for the next week or so your students will probably be little angels depending on which year the meeting is for. Make sure you hang it over them to keep them quiet.
Anyway good luck with it and dont take no.....
You know what i mean,
C 😊

(ITE Online Dialogue: Week 2)

Whatever about the quality of the ideas offered, it is possible to see a clear progression of solutions being offered to that perennial issue for all student teachers, classroom management and discipline. Even while presenting the problem, the initial posting specifically mentioned two other participants' comments and solutions. The responses built on the original problem identified and offered targeted solutions based on the participants own experience.

Is this an example of practitioner created knowledge in the sense that Lave and Wenger, Hargreaves and Hung might understand it? Well, there are a number of key elements present. Participants are drawing on their experience and collectively offering solutions to issues as they arise. While it is arguable as to whether the solutions offered are particularly original they are new to the community of learners who are suggesting them and this is vital. At the heart of the COP idea is the notion of the community taking charge of creating their own knowledge which is appropriate to their context and makes sense in the light of their experiences. The dialogue included above clearly provides an example of this process in action.

Of course not all participants were so well disposed to the idea of MOODLE and the online posting element. One of the more thoughtfully critical assessments of the process drew attention to the blended nature of the programme and the impact this had on their appreciation of the MOODLE element.

The participant said,

I feel i should be honest and not just say i liked moodle just for the sake of it. I didnt find it very helpful due to the fact i was in contact with most people anyway through meeting them in DCU or on the phone. to be honest i found moodle was something annoying i felt i had to do every week. I did like 3 though!

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Here the fact that the participant had other ways of communicating and discussing issues with fellow practitioners resulted in an appreciation of the positive elements identified by other participants being replaced by a sense of frustration.

Another participant made a similar point in a slightly more colourful though no less effective manner.

In general I think the moodle is good for conferring with other pupils with regard teaching ideas & methodologies how ever that is the only benefit I got from it. I could easily do that over a coffee or a pint though.

(ITE Online Dialogue: General Reflection)

Accepting the value of these postings it is fair to say that they are a minority view in relation to ITE participant's appreciation of the value of online postings to their personal and professional development. Both the qualitative and quantitative data seems to support the contention that the ITE participants on the course not only saw the value of the discipline of regular posting from a theoretical sense but also used this form of communication to inform and improve their own and others practice.

While the data produced by the ITE participants seemed to indicate that they were generally well disposed to the theory and practice of using MOODLE as a communications and community development medium the data drawn from the CPD participants was, as we have seen, far more equivocal. When the qualitative data was interrogated what became obvious was the extent to which the lack of familiarity with and comfort using technology mentioned earlier impacted on participants attitudes to process of communicating online. One participant stated in her final evaluation survey that she found posting difficult and that she 'at times avoided posting questions to avoid being exposed to my peers'. Another when asked to review her usage of the VLE pointed out that she was,

not a particularly literate computer person and did not feel entirely comfortable using moodle as a teaching tool.

A third response in a similar vein again highlighted the role of perceived comfort with the medium. Here the respondent stated that she,

was not always comfortable writing online. I sometimes feared what others would think about my postings. Can't really type fast and at times made silly spelling errors.

It is significant that in two of the three replies quoted the respondents mentioned the discomfort of having their peers reading their postings as being a critical part of their overall lack of appreciation of the medium. This is potentially quite important as one of the key elements of the COP idea is the honest and open sharing of information and experiences within a group of practice oriented professionals. Is it possible that the absence of relevant skills and the associated lack of confidence relating to online communication actively militated against the creation of a community of learners among the CPD participants?

The quantitative data analysed earlier is largely silent on this issue although it does indicate that a significant majority of the participants saw a value in posting online

(75%) while a smaller majority actively used some of the ideas posted by colleagues in their teaching (65.2%). Given that both of these, and in particular the latter, are critical aspects of COP notion there seems to be something of a contradiction emerging. To an extent this can be explained by expanding the quotations presented above. The participant who indicated a fear of being exposed to their peers went on to say that ‘after completing my project I would have no difficulty in posting on future moodle sessions’. The participant who was worried about spelling errors added that ‘with practice I did make improvements. Moodle is great for sharing ideas and I would definitely use it again’. What is important here is the developmental aspect associated with taking part in the course. The participants moved from a situation of discomfort to comfort, from a perceived incompetence to a evolving sense of their own competence. This reiterates the fact that for adult learners the development of base line ICT skills is one of the critical factors in ensuring that the various functionalities of VLE’s and other platforms are properly exploited.

There remains the question however as to the extent to which it can be said that participants actually formed a community of professional learners using MOODLE. Again while the quantitative data is somewhat unclear in this aspect the qualitative material throws up some interesting comments. One of the CPD participants when interviewed at the end of the programme mentioned that he found the online element ‘excellent’,

because reading other peoples comments self evaluation was interesting to see the way some people used self evaluation. Some people did some very in-depth notes on how they used self evaluation in their environment and I thought that was very good and what I really like about the online was like if I’m in work and I have a hour I can read this stuff and I can say it doesn’t have to be done at any particular time ..I thought it was excellent I found it very helpful.

(CPD Student Interview – Appendix O)

Here the sharing of ideas and experiences is brought to the fore. Another participant, echoing some of the ITE replies, indicated in their response to the final survey that,

One of the main strengths of Moodling re self-evaluation is that it gives you a chance to realise that all is well, that you share the same thoughts as others and can be given some much needed impetus during more leaner times

Another developed on this to an extent when they said that,

I really liked Moodle. I liked the way that you could share ideas with people at any time of the day or night. It was good to be able to post ideas and get other peoples responses.

A particularly thoughtful response was offered by one participant in their final report. They wrote that the MOODLE discussion forum allowed,

individuals construct knowledge from their interactions with the environment and the social cultural context ..Information was gleaned from other students on how they used their questionnaires, what they found useful...The Moodle site was a good way to elicit and share practical know-how that would otherwise remain untapped...Reading Moodle postings stimulates your own thinking to find common ground and areas of disagreement.

Again we are seeing, as was the case with the ITE students, that when participants chose to engage with the technology they began to see it as a mechanism for reflecting on their own practice, communicating ideas and sharing insights.

This is perhaps demonstrated by examining a small segment of one of the dialogues relating to the use of one of the group generated self-evaluation sheets. Here participants were asked to speak about their experience of using the instrument.

Wednesday, 11 May

I tried out this questionnaire after a training session yesterday and I think I might be overdoing the self-evaluation! I am not sure how useful it is to have 4 different questionnaires...it may lead to a reluctance to engage in thi long self-evaluaition process. It is interesting to note that most of the questionnaires led me to reflect on the same thing...even though they were all about something different. Maybe I would be more inclined to self-evaluate if there was only one questionnaire-rather than 4!

Sunday, 15 May

Hi E

I agree that four questionnaires might be too many. Time is always an issue in my job. Also I have found that while the questionnaires aid reflection, they do not guarantee it. One must really engage with the process for it to be successful. It is too easy at times to fill in a questionnaire and believe you have engaged

with self evaluation when in fact all you have done is fill in a questionnaire.

Monday, 16 May

Hi T

Have you any other ideas I found you have to complete about three Questionnaires to get the right information for evaluation findings to reflect on. During the week I tried a focus group to test the students learning I might try one for planning.

Talk again soon

Rgds M

Saturday, 21 May

Hi M

I am finding the same thing with regards the questionnaires. In relation to your other evaluation project, it might be an idea to ask people involved in the course what the focus of the enquiry should be. So maybe invite the tutor, one of the participants, the manager etc to a meeting and find out what questions they feel should be asked and take it from there. All sorted. Its great to know everything. Good luck with it

Take care

CPD Online Dialogue : Assessment

Here in the course of seven-day period we have three people sharing experiences, asking questions, coming up with solutions and offering them to each other. In other words we have the beginnings of a practice-focused community of learners who are seeking to enhance the quality of their professional experiences by sharing and interrogating the experiences of other colleagues in a similar position.

If we take an overview of both participants groups use of the VLE and in particular of the asynchronous discussion element of that platform it is clear that there is a real engagement with the technology on the part of both groups. While usage patterns and access averages might differ, each grouping has found a way of integrating the technology into their own practice in a manner that suits their own particular professional and personal contexts. Both indicate a comfort with the process of communicating online and both suggest, to admittedly different degrees, that they use this type of forum as a way of sharing and developing responses to specific practice focused problems. In each group there is a

majority of users who choose to make use of the insights offered by colleagues in their own practice. Given that the insights are often sharpened and clarified by the process of interaction that takes place in the discussion fora there is an argument to be made that these insights are the products of the group as much as of the individual. By combining the findings from each of these discrete elements it is possible to argue that both groups of participants are, in their own ways, using the technology enhanced element of the blended learning environment to create communities of practice which are practice focused, knowledge generating and fuelled by public reflection on practice. In the next section, we will examine the extent to which the public reflection actually facilitates the development of higher order thinking skills on the part of the participants by applying the Garrison and Anderson COI model to a selection of the participant postings.

Applying the Community of Inquiry Model

In Chapter ten of this study the reader was provided with a detailed overview of the different frameworks for analysing asynchronous computer mediated communication that have been developed in recent years. Following an extensive analysis of the relative merits of a number of frameworks, the researcher chose to adopt the Community of Inquiry (COI) model initially published by Garrison and Anderson in 2000. While there were a number of reasons put forward in Chapter nine for the adoption of the COI model the two most significant were the perceived strength of the conceptual underpinnings of the framework as well as the recent research published which reported on an attempt to apply the COI approach to a blended learning environment.

The conceptual strength of the model lies in its identification of the discrete elements that make up an educational experience and the manner in which it combines them into a coherent whole. Essentially the authors argue that any educational experience is made up of complex interaction of cognitive presence, social presence and teacher presence. Providing a clear definition of each of the three elements identified, the model also provides measurable criteria for analysing the presence of each in any given online learning situation.

The application of this model to a blended learning situation in recent research was particularly significant for this study. Work carried out by Garrison and Kanuka (2004) and Vaughan and Garrison (2005) suggested that this mode of course delivery was particularly effective in facilitating the development of an effective and engaged learning community when used in a professional development situation. The similarities between the research reported on by Garrison et al and the study being undertaken here were striking enough for the researcher to decide to apply the COI model. This was done with a view to assessing the extent to which the blended model designed facilitated the development of a community of learners among the different participant groups involved.

Blended Learning and Cognitive Presence

In common with many other concepts discussed in the ICT enabled learning literature, the notion of blended learning is a comparatively new one. For this reason, while there are many theoretical studies making interesting claims about its potentially transformative impact on our traditional modes of programme delivery there are comparatively few examples of research where these claims were put to the test. The work of Vaughan, Garrison and Kanuka is therefore doubly significant, as they have attempted to investigate whether there was some truth in the claims being made. What they suggest is that a blended mode of delivery is particularly suitable for programme designers who are seeking to enhance the skills of professional educators. They argue that the face-to-face element is ideal for the creation and maintenance of the interpersonal and social aspect of a learning community while the online aspect provides time and space for participants to test, explore and integrate ideas generated by the community.

To put it another way, Garrison et al suggest that the online element of a blended learning community is where a significant element of the cognitive processes associated with the development of knowledge takes place. This claim becomes more significant when viewed in the light of the work of Rovai (2002). He has demonstrated that learning communities with a significant element of cognitive presence have an enhanced sense of community which in turn can lead to improved learning outcomes. From the perspective of this study, the research cited would seem to require that the level of cognitive presence in the online

discussions engaged in by participants be examined. The discovery of a significant degree of this element would, if the research is to be believed, suggest that the community of learners created by the programme were actively engaged in creating knowledge and improving the outcome level of their learning.

Of course the first stage in examining the level of cognitive presence in the online discussions is to find a way of accurately defining it. The COI model suggests that it is a four-stage process consisting of:

- Triggering (presenting the problem or question)
- Exploration (searching for information)
- Integration (constructing a possible solution)
- Resolution (critical assessment of the solution)

As was discussed in chapter 10 the process of analysing online communications with a view to assessing the presence of any or all of these four stages involves the researcher

- a) Identifying the postings to be examined
- b) Deciding on the unit of analysis
- c) Applying the framework
- d) Reporting the findings

In the context of this study the first stage, that of deciding which postings were to be examined, required the researcher to develop a defensible rationale for the choice made. Best practice as reported by other researchers working in the area suggested that a random sample of postings from different stages of the programme should be chosen with a view to ensuring that as broad a range of usage patterns as possible were included in the final analytic group (Lally 2000, Hara, Bonk and Angeli 2000, Meyer 2005). The norm in these situations is to designate a thematic or time limited group of postings as a unit. In addition, the presence of two clearly distinguishable groups of participants seemed to require that an equal number of groups of postings be included from each. Finally, the actual topics

discussed online by participants could be grouped into different conceptual categories, for example using a group generated data collection instrument or engaging in general debate about the value of self-evaluation. It was therefore decided to include examples of each in the final choice. Table 12.7 below provides a summary of the online communications chosen.

Discussion Units Analysed	
CPD	ITE
Using the planning questionnaire	Using the planning questionnaire
Using the learning atmosphere questionnaire	Using the classroom management questionnaire
General discussion on evaluation	Overall reflections on self evaluation

Table 12.7: *Discussion Units Analysed*

Two of the thematic units dealt with the use of group generated self-evaluation questionnaires. A conscious decision was made to analyse one questionnaire from each group with a common theme and one that was dealing with a separate theme (see Appendix I). The final unit chosen from both the CPD and ITE participant groups was a general discussion relating to their experience of evaluation.

The issue of the unit of analysis was discussed at some length in chapter 10 and it was decided to adopt Henri's concept of the unit of meaning as opposed to the whole message unit proposed by Garrison and Anderson. It was felt that this was more suited to the dynamic of the fora generated by the participants and the blended nature of the programme structure.

In the next part of this section we will examine the last two stages of the process of applying the framework. These are at the heart of the model and give an overall view of the extent to which any online dialogue can be said to include any element of cognitive engagement and knowledge development.

Applying the Framework: Assessing Cognitive Presence in a Blended Environment

In line with normal practice adopted when analysing postings, the three individual discussion units analysed for each participant group were combined in order to give an overall sense of the level of cognitive presence (Meyer 2004, 2005; Hara, Bonk and Angeli 2000, Pramanee 2003). Table 12.8 below provides a summary of the findings for the two groups of participants.

Rates of Cognitive Presence				
	CPD		ITE	
Category	Total Units of Meaning	%	Total Units of Meaning	%
Triggering	33	18.2	16	9.8
Exploration	64	35.35	62	38.2
Integration	80	44.25	82	50.67
Resolution	4	2.2	2	1.23
Total	181	100	162	100

Table 12.8: Rates of Cognitive Presence

What is immediately evident is that the vast majority of postings cluster around the two middle categories of the process, those of exploration and integration. Among CPD participants' postings, approximately 80% of codes were made in one of these two categories while 89% of ITE codes were made here. These two categories correspond to very specific cognitive processes. The exploration category records attempts by individuals and communities to brainstorm, exchange information and where necessary, disagree. The integration category is characterised by a push to synthesis and convergence and the development of tentative solutions on the part of the learning community. There is a clear need for both processes to be present in any community which is seeking to develop new and contextually appropriate approaches and solutions to practice generated challenges. Indeed there is an argument that these processes should be viewed as occurring in a cyclical rather than a linear manner as quite often the process of clarification and solution

proposition leads to further challenge and the need for further elucidation. There is also a clear echo of the concept of collective reflective engagement with practice that characterises Hargreaves (2002) and Bolam et al (2005) notion of the professional community of knowledge generating learners.

Developing the analysis a little further and examining the amount of engagement at the level of individual categories, a similarly interesting pattern emerges. In both the CPD and ITE programmes we see a preponderance of the postings being assigned to the integration category (44.25% CPD postings and 50.67 % ITE). This is interesting, as it seems to suggest that the primary focus of online interactions engaged in by both cohorts of participants in the programme under investigation was a synthetic one. If we accept the accuracy of the pattern, it points to the emergence of a solution focused community of learners using their own experiences as resource base from which to develop common positions on issues related to the task at hand.

However we are left with a finding that suggests that a smaller proportion of the online communication engaged in was concerned with the process of brainstorming and challenging ideas than was spent coming to agreements and tentative solutions (35.35 % of CPD and 38.2% of ITE postings respectively). To an extent this seems counter intuitive as one of the common views of an online discussion forum is that it is a place where individuals freely offer ideas and engage in heated debate regarding the relative merits of their stated positions. As we have already seen in the previous section of this chapter, this notion of free flowing online conversation does not necessarily correspond to a reality where individuals spend significant periods of time carefully planning what they are going to say and working out exactly how they will come to terms with the technological challenges of actually saying it online.

What the research evidence would seem to suggest is that the requirement to communicate online leads to a situation where individuals engage in a period of detailed reflection and planning which can, and at times does, lead them to produce a message that focuses more on resolving issues than challenging positions. Research conducted by Meyer (2004)

makes much the same point arguing that the very process of posting leads to a level of engagement with ideas over an extended period of time that results in a higher level of conceptual engagement at the integration level. Her analysis of 278 postings using the COI model resulted in 32.4 % being assigned to the integration category with 27% being placed in the exploration grouping (2004: 109).

Stepping back a little from an exploration of the reasons for the dominance of the exploration and integration postings, it is interesting to examine the numbers of postings coded in the first and last categories of the cognitive presence area. Of the postings analysed for this study, approximately one in ten of the ITE cohort and one in five of the CPD group's postings were at the triggering level (9.8% ITE and 18.2 % CPD respectively) while a remarkably small 2.2 % of CPD and 1.23 % of ITE postings were categorised at the resolution level. Given that the model purports to provide a coherent, staged explanation for the development of cognitive engagement in CMC communication, this pattern would appear to be somewhat worrying. At an initial reading at least, it seems to suggest that a comparatively limited amount of either groups time was spent triggering or changing the focus of discussions or indeed coming up with clear defences of the tentative solutions adopted based on their own professional practice.

This reading of the statistics, although apparently a coherent one given the figures quoted, is deficient insofar as it fails to take account of the blended mode of programme delivery adopted. The programme as designed required participants to:

- Engage with a series of formal inputs on self-evaluation theory and practice
- Develop data collection instruments in a group environment and use them in their own work settings
- Report on their use in a structured online forum
- Produce a final written report assessing the value of the process

Of the four stages set out above, only the third required any meaningful engagement with an asynchronous CMC environment and that was, in most cases, a highly structured one.

There is a strong argument to be made that the initial problem setting and triggering events actually took place during the questionnaire design and engagement with theory phases. In addition to this, the type of structuring messages used by the researcher served to act in such a way as to initiate and guide the discussion (see Appendix J, K and L). In a similar manner, the resolution phase, or that phase where solutions were tested and defended tended to take place in the final reports produced by participants after they had completed all stages of the programme.

This argument is substantially backed up by the work on blended learning environments carried out by Vaughan and Garrison (2005). Their research into a faculty development programme found that only 8% of the postings could be categorised as triggering event with only 1% being designated as being part of a resolution phase. Their argument, based on interviews with course participants, was that face to face interactions tended to be dynamic and often resulted in ideas being produced that initiated a reflective process that was carried on in the online element of the programme. Similarly resolution, when it happened, tended to be completed at an individual level or in an environment where the outcomes could be controlled and not necessarily communicated.

While this argument focusing on the importance of the blended mode of delivery appears to have a conceptual coherence at the level of global postings analysed in the course of the study, it was considered important to see whether the micro level analysis would support it. For this reason two of the individual discussion units originally chosen were examined in greater detail with a view to identifying not only the individual levels of cognitive processing that were present but also to see if it were possible to uncover the structural and external factors that might impact on those cognitive elements.

ITE Discussion Unit One: Classroom Management

The learning atmosphere data collection instrument was designed by a sub-group of the ITE cohort and was the second such instrument used and reported on by all participants. The process for designing the instrument was explored in some detail earlier in the chapter. Stage one involved students being asked to brainstorm around the idea. Following this the

instrument was designed, distributed to all CPD participants who were asked to use it and report back on their experiences in a designated MOODLE forum (see Appendix I).

The forum discussion was initiated by a series of questions from the researcher and participants were encouraged to answer each as full as possible. The questions posed were:

- a) Did you find using this questionnaire useful?
- b) Did it cause you to think about issues of classroom management in a different way?
- c) Did the way you approached the classroom management issue change as a result of thinking about it in a more structured manner?
- d) Would you use it again?

(ITE Online Dialogue: Planning)

When analysed using the COI model, the following cognitive presence profile emerged.

Classroom Management: Cognitive Presence		
Category	No.	%
Triggering	4	10
Exploration	16	40
Integration	18	45
Resolution	2	5

Table 12.9: *Classroom Management Cognitive Presence*

In many ways the cognitive presence profile presented matches the overall combined profile perfectly. At a triggering level, 10 % of postings fall into this category. The exploration and integration categories make up the vast majority of the coded postings

(40% and 45 % respectively) while just 5 % of the recorded units of meaning can be coded in the resolution category.

CPD Discussion Unit One: Learning Atmosphere

The learning atmosphere data collection instrument was designed in exactly the same manner as the ITE instrument. One significant difference occurred in the course of the design process however. As a result of this brainstorming session, the subgroup here sought to change the focus of the instrument from classroom management to learning atmosphere. This was done because as a group they claimed that, 'we see the classroom management as being one part of the learning atmosphere and would prefer to work on that' (Brainstorming Outcome, Appendix H). Following this the instrument was designed, distributed to all CPD participants and a MOODLE forum was established to (see Appendix I).

As was the case with the ITE forum, the researcher produced highly prescriptive questions to initiate the dialogue. The questions posed were,

- a) How did you use the evaluation instrument?
- b) In your opinion, was the area relevant to your education practice?
- c) In what way was it different to using other self evaluation instruments?
- d) Did using it encourage you to think about the whole area of creating a positive learning atmosphere / classroom management in a different way?
- e) Was it helpful?
- f) Did you change it? If so, how?
- g) Do you think it is a good way to encourage you to self-evaluate?

(CPD Participant Dialogue: Learning Atmosphere)

When analysed using the COI model, the following cognitive presence profile emerged.

Learning Atmosphere: Cognitive Presence		
Category	No.	%
Triggering	19	31.1
Exploration	16	26.3
Integration	26	42.6
Resolution	0	0

Table 12.10: *Learning Atmosphere Cognitive Presence*

In contrast to the ITE profile examined, the coding of this discussion does not conform precisely to the macro norm presented earlier. Here we see a high level of triggering activity with 31% of all communications being coded at this level. The exploration and integration categories still account for the majority of the coding at a combined total of approximately 69%. There are no coded examples of the resolution phase in this discussion.

Examining the Discussion Units: Assessing Similarities / Exploring Differences

There are a number of obvious similarities that emerge when the two units of discussion analysed are examined together. In terms of initial external or initiating influences, both discussions are focused around the use of a data collection instrument designed by members of participant group. The instruments were produced using the same design methodology and the final product in each formed that basis for the subsequent discussion.

A second similarity can be seen in the type of structuring questions provided by the researcher at the beginning of each dialogue. Focused, directive and clearly designed to shape the type of reflection undertaken, these questions became the initial triggering mechanisms in both discussions and are recorded as such in each. They also structure, to an extent, the types of responses provided and by extension the cognitive category of these

responses. To take an example, in the ITE cohort one of the participants chose to answer each question in turn, responding specifically to the question asked. When analysed, the interaction of her mixed experience of the instrument with the specific questions posed led to a situation where a number of her responses were coded in the exploratory category as they exemplified 'divergence within the online community' (Garrison et al 2004: 18). Equally, a number of her responses were coded as integrative as the questions posed caused her to produce 'justified, developed and tentative' solutions (Garrison et al 2004: 19) (see Figure 12.5 below).

Classroom management evaluation	
by Student A - Tuesday, 26 April 2005, 05:54 PM	
(a)Did I find this useful? Well not really, I don't have any problems with classroom management in my classes (touch wood!).I suppose if I did it would have been more useful. But it wasn't really any use to me focusing on an area that, at the moment I'm having no problems with. But I did like it.	Exploration
(b)I think that it gave some ideas of what you could do to improve discipline in your class. Things you mightn't of thought of yourself. So, yes it did help me think differently about CM I think the box ticking suited better here than the planning ones, plus there was room to expand. I think responses of agree, disagree etc. are a no no.	Integration
(c)No	Exploration
(d)If I was having problems with classroom management in the future I would root it out to give myself some ideas of different tactics and approaches. Things I didn't do that I could try out next time. But only in conjunction with overall evaluation. Again though I would like it in the format of the original evaluation sheet with the questions and responses available listed as a set of guidelines, together with those from the planning sheet and whatever else. Then you can write what is relevant and is going to help you. So your not focusing on an area that isn't causing any problems, you can focus on the areas that are. If I was having severe or persistant problems with classroom management I would probably use this one as it is to monitor my progress.	Integration

Figure 12.5: Classroom Management Evaluation ITE Student

A similar dynamic can be seen at work in the CPD cohort. Again, one of the participants chose to use the questions asked as a structuring focus, responding directly to the questions asked which again resulted in a very pronounced coding pattern that was concentrated

entirely in the exploration phase of the cognitive presence model. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the divergence element was clearly present and understandable given the general tenor of the response. The second reason is potentially more interesting, as it appears that the format, multiple short questions posed by the researcher, resulted in short, underdeveloped and ultimately 'unsupported conclusions' (Garrison et al 2004: 18).

Questionnaire

by CPD Student Z Monday, 18 April 2005, 09:45 PM

I used this questionnaire today directly following a class with my

Q) In your opinion, was the area relevant to your education practice?

a) Yes in some ways

Q) In what way was it different to using the other self evaluation instruments?

a) It wasn't as good as the others, more on your own self reflection

Q) Did using it encourage you think about the whole area of creating a positive learning atmosphere / classroom management in a different way?

a) No as I am very aware already of classroom and learning atmosphere (you have to be being a literacy tutor - one of the first things you learn).

Q) Was it helpful?

A) No it was boring.

Q) Did you change it? If so, how?

A) No didn't change it as it just didn't excite me in any way to do so.

Q) Do you think it is a good way to encourage you to self-evaluate?

A) No not in a questionnaire format - this should be done on observation of learners - how they feel in the class - safe?

Sorry for such negative outcomes on this one - just saying the truth.

Figure 12.6: *Questionnaire - CPD Student Z*

What both of these examples clearly demonstrate is the importance of the initiating activity in any CMC setting. In both situations analysed, the responsibility for initiating or triggering the discussion was taken by the researcher. While there are understandable

reasons for doing this, there needs to be an awareness of the fact that the implicit or indeed explicit themes chosen by the discussion initiator could have a significant impact on the final level of cognitive engagement discernible in the dialogue (Meyer 2004).

Perhaps the most striking differences that emerge when examining the cognitive profile of the two discussion units analysed occur in the triggering and resolution categories. To focus on the latter initially, it is interesting that this dialogue sees one of the few examples of resolution in the entire ITE CMC experience. In the light of the previous point regarding the role played by structuring postings in determining the cognitive level of responses, it is noteworthy that the participant in this dialogue chose to ignore the implied structure imposed by the triggering questions completely. As Figure 12.7 below demonstrates, the respondent chose to interpret her experiences using the general themes of the initiating questions without slavishly responding to each one.

<p>I found this evaluation sheet much more useful than the last, as it gave me the chance to evaluate the students' behaviour in the class rather than just my own performance. I found it easier to remember the issues regarding behaviour using this sheet and I was able to pinpoint exactly what I needed to do to resolve the issues raised in the class.</p> <p>I used it a few times earlier in the week and then decided to ask my cooperating teacher Milo to help me with it. Between us we had a look at it and decided what we would keep in it and what we would get rid of. M was really helpful and had some good ideas about the type of questions to ask. He sort of said that checking the same thing day after day would become repetitive so I decided to see if I could change some of the questions or make them optional. What I did in the end was similar to what I think B was saying and use the open ended types of questions that we had in the earlier sheets. This was really helpful and got away from the mechanical thing that we have all being complaining about a bit. I will e-mail the sheet to the rest of the class if anyone is interested. It think it really works and gets over some of the complaints people have about it.</p> <p>I realised using these sheets that my discipline problems were not as bad as I thought and that the few problems I had were caused by the time of the day. I would use this sheet again if I needed to work out exactly what was wrong in the class that was causing the discipline problems.</p>	<p>Resolution</p>
--	-------------------

Figure 12.7: Example of Resolution Phase

The example of dialogue above demonstrates how a participant used a single paragraph to present a context, synthesise previous postings, report on her own professional experience and give an example of how a solution to a real world problem was tested.

While there were no examples of this type of cognitive presence in the CPD discussions, there were a large number of similar observations made by participants in their terminal reports. Although these reports are outside of the scope of the traditional application of the COI model the very fact of their presence is important. What they appear to do is to provide another forum for participants to provide solutions to problems identified in the course of their use of the instruments developed. They therefore use the fora to explore ideas, provide initial thoughts relating to potential solutions which are normally posted immediately after an experience of using a data collection instrument but wait for the final written report before providing a coherent, practice supported resolution.

The second significant difference that emerges from the comparison of the two discussion units relates to the number of codes assigned to the triggering category. There is a comparatively simple explanation for this which relates to the online behaviour of the researcher. In the ITE example, all triggering codes occur in the initial series of questions posted by the researcher. He has no additional role in the forum following that. In CPD example, the researcher is heavily involved in the developing dialogue and is responsible for generating a significant number of additional triggering codes. The different approaches adopted can be seen clearly when the interaction / social presence diagrams for each discussion are examined (see figures 12.8 and 12.9).

Learning Atmosphere

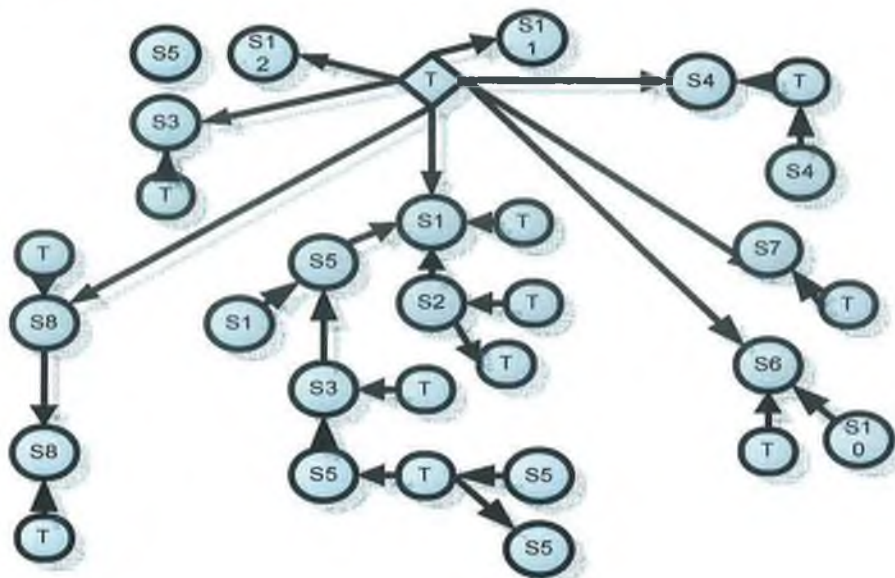


Figure 12.8: CPD Learning Atmosphere Interaction

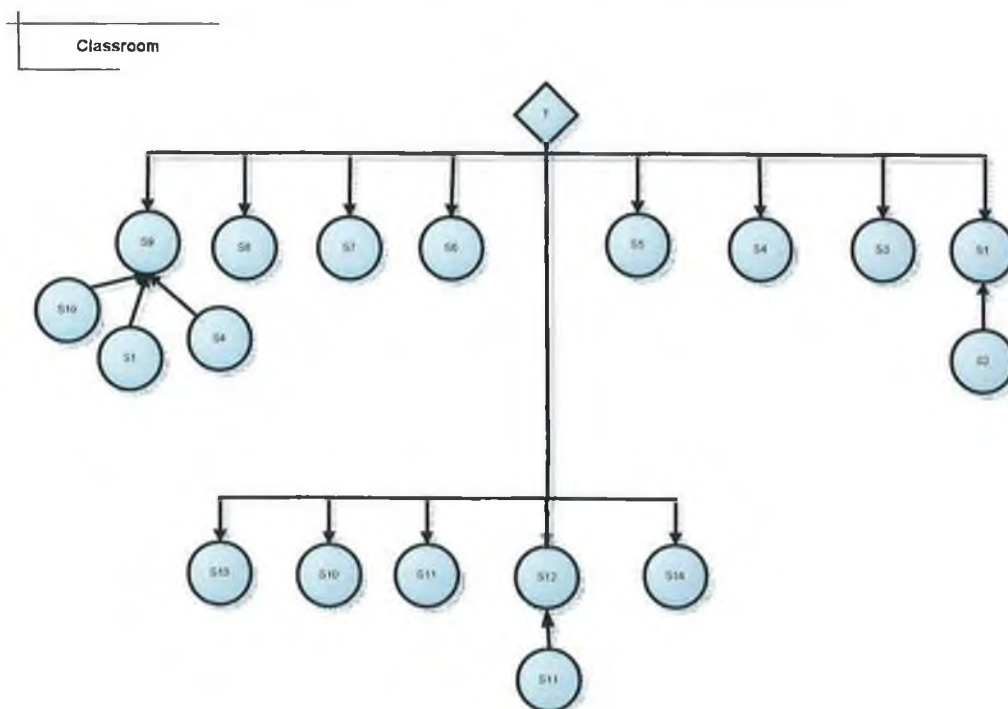


Figure 12.9: ITE Classroom Management Interaction

The learning atmosphere discussion is clearly more organic in structure and involves a high level of instructor participation which in turn is responsible for the presence of a high degree of triggering activity in the discussion. This is largely absent from the ITE Classroom Management diagram and results in a more linear and less engaged discussion for the most part.

In summary then, what we can see is that in a blended learning environment the existence of other learning fora has a significant impact on the type of cognitive engagement undertaken by programme participants. In addition, a detailed analysis of the individual units of discussion gave a strong indication of the potentially vital role of the researcher or learning facilitator in determining the type of cognitive presence in evidence in any given set of discussions. We will examine this point in some detail in the next section of this chapter which will specifically examine the role of what Garrison et al call teaching presence in the facilitation of enhanced cognitive engagement in a blended learning context.

Teaching Presence and Cognitive Engagement

For the designers of the COI model, teaching presence plays a vital role as a unifier in the learning process. It acts as an initiator and a sustainer of investigation and inquiry and provides a superstructure within which both social and cognitive engagement can take place. In terms of direct functions, teaching presence influences the other phases of the learning cycle through direct inputs, learning facilitation and crucially, programme design. While traditionally teaching presence could be said to have been primarily embodied in the person of the researcher or course teacher, the COI model can envisage situations where responsibility for teaching presence is taken on by course participants and they become the facilitators of the learning experience. Vaughan and Garrison argue that this latter point is 'particularly true in a faculty development context where considerable expertise exists in the community' (2005: 14).

We have already seen a number of examples of how researcher or teacher activity can have an important impact on the extent to which and the level at which individuals engage

cognitively in a CMC setting. Garrison and Anderson argue that teaching presence is a crucial determining factor in the level of engagement found in all learning experiences. This understanding of its importance can be seen in the definition they provide in their most recent work on the subject. They define teaching presence as,

The design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes

(Garrison and Anderson 2004: 66)

It should not come as too much of a surprise then to discover that the COI model suggests that teacher presence can be subdivided into three categories:

- Instructional design and organisation
- Facilitating discourse
- Direct instruction

Each of these is seen as representing a different aspect of the educator's role in an online or indeed blended learning environment. The design and organisation category deals with structuring issues such as the setting of curricula, designing methods, giving an overview of course content and where necessary moderating the discussion. The discourse facilitation category sees the teacher actively engaging in shaping and building understanding. Activities here include the identification of agreement or disagreement, encouraging, acknowledging and reinforcing participants, drawing out the 'lurkers' and building consensus. The final category, that of direct instruction, allows the teacher exhibit what Garrison and Anderson term 'scholarly leadership' (2004: 70). Essentially the teacher is expected to get involved at a deep level with the dialogue offering ideas, focusing the discussion specific issues, summarising key points and making scholarly inputs based on his or her own reading and understanding.

In the context of this particular study, a decision was made to analyse the examples of teacher engagement with a view to examining how different patterns and categories might impact on the global quality of the educational experience. In addition, the researcher was heavily influenced by the analytic work of Meyer who suggested that 'the solution to raising the level of online discourse may be more faculty intrusion by setting the

discussion's agenda or actively moderating the discussion' (2004: 112). In order to assess the validity of this analysis, a decision was made to adopt different online behaviours with different participant groups. Essentially this meant that teacher interaction with the ITE group was largely confined to the initial triggering activities whereas activity with the CPD group was far more hands on and involved. In the next section, the initial findings of the analysis of teacher presence will be discussed and this will be followed by an examination of two of the individual units of discussion with a view to comparing the micro and macro levels of teacher impact.

Analysing Teacher Presence in a Blended Learning Environment

Again adopting the current best practice model suggested by Lally (2000), Hara, Bonk and Angeli (2000) the analysis was carried out on a combined series of three discussion units from both the CPD and ITE programmes. The initial findings of this analysis are presented in Table 12.11 below.

Rates of Teacher Presence				
	CPD		ITE	
Category	Total Units of Meaning	%	Total Units of Meaning	%
Design & Organisation	7	8	6	31.6
Facilitating Discourse	30	34.5	1	5.2
Direct Instruction	50	57.5	12	63.2
Total	87	100	19	100

Table 12.11: *Rates of Teacher Presence*

What is immediately noticeable about the rates of teacher presence recorded in the table above is the difference in global numbers between the CPD and ITE groups. As mentioned, this was as a result of a conscious decision on the part of the researcher to model different types of teacher presence in the programme. The resulting coding pattern in the ITE programme sees the teacher intervening on only 19 occasions in the course of three discussion units. When the individual data is examined, it becomes clear that 16 of

those 19 interventions took place at the initial triggering level. In terms of the actual codes assigned to the ITE postings, 12 of the 19 or approximately 63 % are in the direct instruction category with only one belonging to the facilitating discourse area. The remainder of the codes occur at the macro or design and organisational level. These are the general housekeeping instructions that establish ground rules and set initial parameters.

In contrast to the ITE element of the programme, a pattern of enthusiastic engagement on the part of the teacher can be seen in recorded interactions with the CPD cohort. A total of 87 postings have been coded demonstrating a substantially different profile of engagement. What is immediately noticeable is the comparatively small numbers of postings categorised at the design and organisation phase. Given the importance assigned to it as a structuring phase, it is interesting to note that only 8% of postings are made in this category. A second notable issue is the relatively high level of posts coded at the discourse facilitation category. As we have seen this category encompasses activities that represent the lifeblood of an active learning community. In many ways, the postings coded here provided the glue for the community aspect of the COI and it is significant that there nearly one third of the postings in this category.

Given the role of the facilitating discourse level in maintaining ongoing communications between group members, it is perhaps not too surprising that the communications patterns of the CPD group are substantially different to those of the ITE cohort (see figures 12.8 and 12.9 above). However there is a commonality in terms of the percentages of messages coded at the direct instruction level. In both groups we see the teacher intervening at this high end of the process spectrum around 60 % of the time (57.5 % CPD and 63 % ITE). What this would seem to suggest is that teacher engagement with these dialogues tended to concentrate on expertise type interventions, challenging interventions and focusing the discussion on specific areas.

Assessing the Impact of Teacher Presence on Cognitive Presence

On of the more interesting comparative analyses that can be undertaken in a study such as this is one that involves an examination of the impact of different patterns of teacher

presence on the type of cognitive presence coded in CMC discourse. To do this we will again explore two of the individual discussion units, concentrating on discussions relating to the use of the planning data collection instruments in both the CPD and ITE cohorts.

ITE Discussion Unit 2: Planning

The process of developing, distributing and discussing the planning instrument followed the same pattern as that outlined earlier in this chapter. When the asynchronous forum related to this instrument was analysed for both cognitive and teaching presence the following data emerged.

ITE Planning: Teacher Presence		
Category	No.	%
Design & Organisation	1	12.5%
Facilitating Discourse	1	12.5%
Direct Instruction	6	75%

Table 12.12: *ITE Planning – Teacher Presence*

ITE Planning: Cognitive Presence		
Category	No.	%
Triggering	6	11.7%
Exploration	28	55%
Integration	17	33.3%
Resolution	0	0%

Table 12.13: *ITE Planning – Cognitive Presence*

Two issues are immediately apparent. The first relates to the number of teacher presence postings coded. There were eight in total, all of which came in the initial structuring posting by the teacher (see Figure 12.10 below).

<p>Hi all,</p> <p>I re-read the brainstorming documents that you produced when developing the planning instrument with some interest. I know that a number of you were concerned with the move away from the more generic forms of self-evaluation that we had been doing up to now but I think that the work you have put into this is really going to pay off.</p> <p>I will be happy to discuss the issues with you on Wednesday, particularly after you have had a chance to actually use the instrument in practice.</p> <p>To help the discussion, I would like you to answer the following questions at some stage during the week.</p> <p>a) How did you use the evaluation instrument?</p> <p>b) Did using it encourage you think about planning in a different way?</p> <p>c) Was it helpful?</p> <p>d) How would you change it?</p> <p>e) Do you think it is a good way to encourage you to self-evaluate?</p> <p>f) Would you use it again?</p>	Facil.
	Discourse
	Instruct. Design
	Direct Instruction

Figure 12.10: *Levels of Teacher Presence*

The majority of the codes were in the direct instruction category as they sought to focus the discussion on specific issues (Garrison and Anderson 2004).

The second issue relates to the related cognitive presence coding patterns. Here we see a dominance of postings in the exploration and integration categories. What is noteworthy is the reversal of percentages of postings in these categories from the macro level postings discussed previously.

The question arises as to what extent the high level of direct instruction postings influences the large number of coding examples in the exploration categories? The equivalent data from the CPD cohort does not seem to support a direct relationship between the two coding levels (see tables 12.14 and 12.15 below)

CPD Planning: Teacher Presence		
Category	No.	%
Design & Organisation	1	2.5
Facilitating Discourse	14	36
Direct Instruction	20 & 4	61.5

(note: figures in red indicate codes drawn from initial teacher forum posting)

Table 12.14: *CPD Planning: Teacher Presence*

CPD Planning: Cognitive Presence		
Category	No.	%
Triggering	8	7.8
Exploration	42	40.7
Integration	49	47.6
Resolution	4	3.9

Table 12.15: *CPD Planning: Cognitive Presence*

Again we see a much higher number of postings coded in the direct instruction category over and above those assigned to the facilitating discourse area. However, while the majority of cognitive presence coding events remain in the exploration and integration categories, the reversal of the macro pattern is not present here. In addition, this discussion has a number of postings coded at resolution category level which is relatively unusual both in this and other uses of the COI model.

The structure and number of the teaching presence postings is also substantially different. Here, while five of the postings coded were in the initial instructional message from the course facilitator, there were thirty-four other examples of teaching presence coded. The difference in numbers was, as we have seen, a result of a deliberate decision on the part of the researcher to try out different patterns of interaction.

This latter area of investigation may begin to provide an explanation of the relationship between teaching presence and cognitive presence. In essence what it argues is that any examination of the impact of teacher presence on cognitive presence has also to take into account the structure of the discussions taking place. In other words, the patterns of social organisation and the nature of the social presence profile adopted by the teacher becomes critical.

Teaching Presence, Social Structure and Levels of Cognitive Engagement

Social presence is the third interlinking concept of the COI model and is simply defined by Vaughan and Garrison as ‘the context that makes possible critical discourse and reflection’ (2005: 2). They identify three categories of social presence and argue that they are an important element of any online CMC setting. The categories identified are:

- Affective – use of humour, self disclosure, expression of emotions
- Open communication – expressing agreement, continuing threads and quoting others etc.
- Cohesive – using language to create a sense of cohesion e.g. use of names, we etc

While this element is certainly still important, to an extent it can be argued that the active creation and analysis of a social space in a blended learning community is less critical than in a pure online setting (Reece and Lockee 2005). There is an emerging consensus that in blended communities, much of the social presence is invested in the face-to-face encounters between participants. In other words, the social context that makes possible the discourse is actually generated and maintained in the physical encounters between course members.

This was certainly the experience of the programme under discussion in this study. The programme designed was deliberately given a significant, upfront classroom based content delivery element. One of the purposes of this part of the programme was to give participants an opportunity to network and create interpersonal relationships. This process was enhanced by the use of a group focused materials development methodology which sought to enhance the quality and quantity of interpersonal and social encounters between subgroups of individuals. At the heart of this approach was the attempt to create the social context of the programme prior to the introduction of the online element.

This of course does not deny that there is a social aspect to the communications recorded in the discussion units analysed for this study. However what it does suggest is that the blended context demands a slightly different approach to exploring the influence of the social element. It is suggested that it is more appropriate to explore the pattern of social interactions between all online community members, participants and teachers / facilitators with a view to analysing the impact of these patterns on the levels and range of cognitive engagement present in the asynchronous discussions.

The framework used to track patterns of social interactions was adapted from Hara, Bonk, Angeli's, 'Electronic Interaction Patterns' model (2000: 13). It essentially sought to map graphically the relationship between the different message units with a view to discerning any emerging pattern. At a conceptual level, as has been discussed, the argument being put forward is that a social pattern characterised by a high level of teacher activity and enhanced teaching presence will result in a greater amount of enhanced cognitive presence, the ultimate purpose of any blended learning space.

In order to assess this argument, the interaction maps of the two discussion units analysed on page 357 were examined (see figures 12.11 and 12.12 below).

Planning Questions

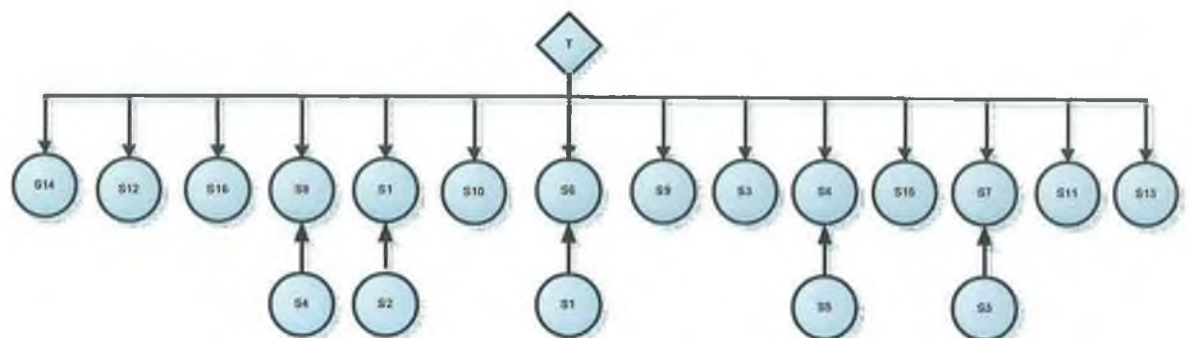


Figure 12.11: ITE Planning

Evaluating Your Planning

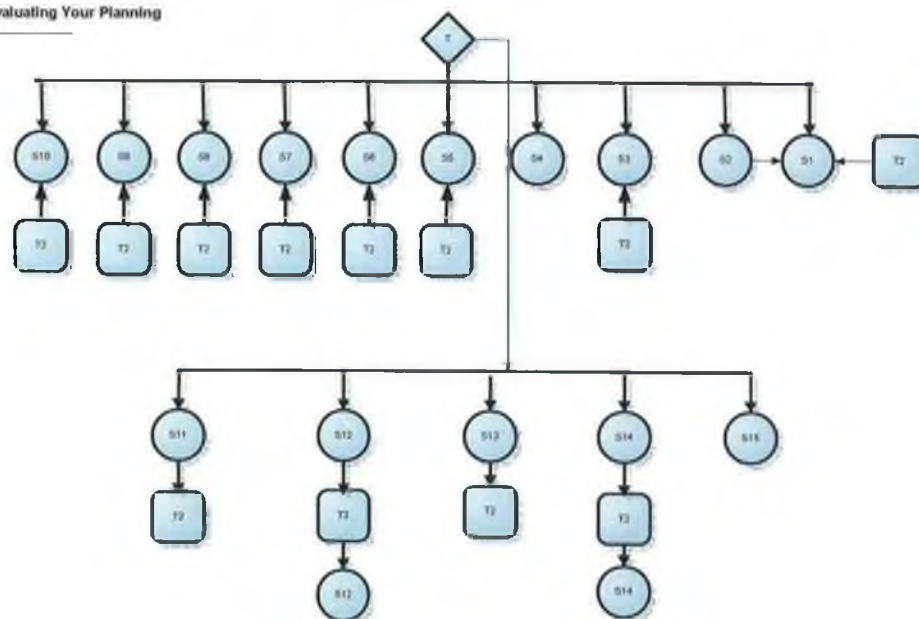


Figure 12.12: CPD Planning

The diagrammatic structure of the ITE discussion demonstrates that while the majority of the posting units were single responses to the initial teacher posting, five of the nineteen postings units were student-to-student dialogues. By way of contrast, only one of the CPD posting units came as a direct response to a fellow student's communication. In this latter case, there were twelve teacher posting units which were made as a direct result of student comments.

A general argument can be made to suggest that an engaged online teacher challenging students through direct instruction causes a higher level of cognitive engagement on their part. The qualitative evidence from the discussion units analysed provides some backing for this position. Figure 12.13 below presents an example of an element of the ITE dialogue where a participant initially responded in a very limited response directly to the triggering questions which in turn elicited a rather limited affirmation of the position from a fellow group member that provided no justification whatsoever for their position.

<p>Planning Questionnaire</p> <p>Sunday, 10 April 2005, 06:21 PM</p> <p>How Did I Use It - Quick ticking of the boxes after each lesson</p> <p>Using it didn't make me think about planning in a different way</p> <p>Was It Helpful - Not Very</p> <p>How would I change it - Go back to the old one of just simply looking at the strengths and weaknesses of a specific lesson</p> <p>Good way to encourage you to self evaluate - Yea because its compulsory wouldn't use it if I was a qualified teacher</p> <p>Would I use it again - Not unless I was made upon pain of death; nothing personal to the people who composed it its a good piece of work just I didn't find it beneficial to me</p> <p>Re: Planning Questionnaire</p> <p>- Monday, 11 April 2005, 08:43 AM</p> <p>hey i agree with you enda i didnt think it was very helpful at all. Not on its own anyway</p>	<p>Exploration – Information exchange</p>
	<p>Exploration – Information exchange</p>

Figure 12.13: *Impact of teacher presence on cognitive engagement (i)*

This can be contrasted to the interaction between the teacher and participant in the CPD unit of analysis. Here the participant is challenged to clarify his position and ultimately develops, implements and justifies a stance which was coded as an example of resolution.

NOTE: Initial posting consisted of answers to individual questions posed.

Re: Evaluating your planning

by Teacher - Tuesday, 14 June 2005, 10:01 AM

Hi ,

Thanks for this. It was worth the wait 😊. I am particularly interested in your use of the questionnaire outputs with your colleagues. By the way you talk about it, it seems to have been a very natural and not in any way threatening. Do you think that this is as a result of the particular type of culture in your organisation? There is, as I am sure you are aware, a lot of material written regarding the types of cultures that exist in educational settings. For many the ideal is one of a real collegiality where people are free to share ideas, concerns, problems and innovations in a safe environment. Many writers would suggest that this is rare. Do you feel that this is the type of supportive culture that you work in? I ask because I sometimes think that it would be very difficult to engage in a genuinely, open and collegial self evaluation if the culture is negative and at times fault finding. What do you think? How important is the culture of an organisation to the process of self evaluation?

Just a few thoughts. Happy cogitating.

Show parent | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Evaluating your planning

by - Thursday, 23 June 2005, 09:10 AM

Hi

Thanks very much for the questions, it got me reflecting at lot and has added to my project! Been mulling over your reply and also trying to try out a few ideas in work! the use of the questionnaire with my colleagues was optional, a few have used it and gave me some feedback, I intend to write about this my report. Yes i think the culture of my own organisation has gone through change of late, in saying that I really mean the department I work within. I feel this is partly due to me attending the degree course, again I will briefly discuss organisational culture in the project. Our department is slowly becoming one of sharing of ideas etc. as you referred to, however, this is not without its problems, competition always raises its ugly head, which can at times be positive. The culture is very important to me in the process of self-evaluation, it needs to be supportive and encouraging, again something that is changing within my own organisation. What I tried to do to change it was use the re-organisation of the questionnaire as a way of getting them to talk about how we do things. This worked really well and reduced some of the elements of competition that were present earlier.

I haven't had real time to converse in detail on moodle and will attempt to report further before completion next week.

Thanks and regards

Show parent | Split | Delete | Reply

Direct
Instruction

Figure 12.14: Impact of teacher presence of cognitive engagement (ii)

Overall the data seems to demonstrate the high level of teaching presence in terms of absolute numbers of teacher interventions made seems to have a positive impact on the number of meaning units assigned to the cognitive presence categories. In all of the examples analysed, the preponderance of the cognitive presence codes were made in the exploration and integration categories. In terms of absolute numbers of codes made, a high number of teaching presence codes seemed to indicate a high number of cognitive presence codes irrespective of the actual numbers of posting units analysed. In addition, the qualitative material analysed suggests that focused teaching intervention at the direct instruction level can result in participants being challenged to move through the stages of the cognitive process from exploration to integration and even at times to resolution.

Online Presence and the Critical Friend

The final part of this section will broaden the analysis of the number and meaning of online interactions to examine, albeit briefly, whether it can be claimed that the online fora developed the characteristics of the 'critical friend' as identified by MacBeath and Swaffield (2005). Defined quite simply by MacBeath and McGlynn as someone who can 'ask difficult questions' (2002:87). The critical friend acts as a guide and an encourager who at times cajoles, at other times challenges but always tries to facilitate quality self-evaluation either at individual or organisational level (Swaffield 2005). In the context of this study, it was assumed from the beginning that one of the central functions to be performed by the asynchronous discussion element of the programme was to act as a 'virtual critical friend'. The application of the COI model provided the raw data to analyse whether this CMC actually turned into fora which challenged and 'asked difficult questions'.

In order to assess the presence of the 'virtual critical friend' aspect of the asynchronous fora analysed, the researcher decided to engage in a relatively detailed investigation of one particular discussion unit with a view to analysing the extent to participants were challenged by the teacher or indeed each other. The discussion unit chosen was the general evaluation discussion forum of the CPD group. This was a voluntary forum which ran for

the length of the programme and where individuals were free to post ideas, thoughts or questions.

As a first step to understanding what happened in the forum, an interaction outline was drawn up (see Figure 12.15 below). What this demonstrated was that there was a high level of involvement and interaction on the part of both the participants who chose to engage and teacher. While the total number of participants was only ten, from a class group of 34, the quality of the interactions was quite high.

An examination of some of the qualitative data demonstrates how responsibility for guiding and challenging oscillated between teacher and participant throughout the discussion and that at times, teacher interventions led to the completion of a series of postings rather than a beginning of a new set (see Figure 12.15 below).

CPD General Evaluation Discussion

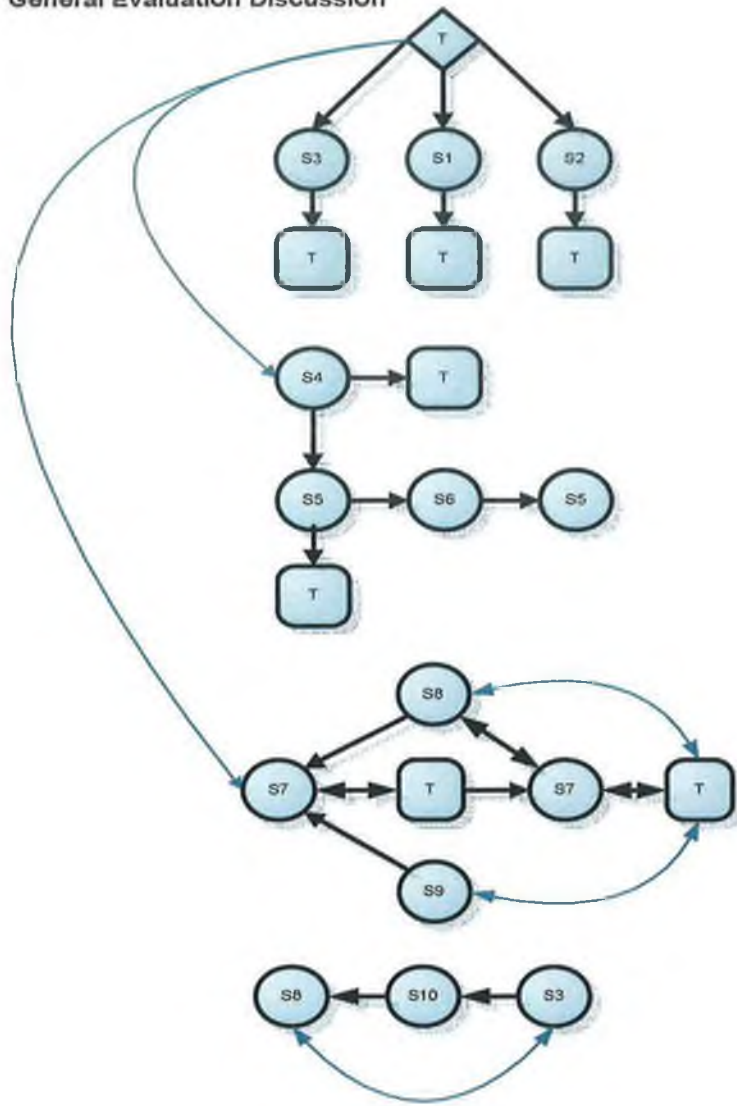


Figure 12.15: CPD General Evaluation Discussion

External/Internal/Self-evaluation
- Wednesday, 8 June 2005, 07:41 PM

Hi,

I think I understand the concept of the continuum of evaluation with external at one end and self at the other and with internal in the middle. However, on reviewing literature by Arnold Love and other literature on self-evaluation I feel that schools (Looking at our school/secondary and primary) talk about partaking in self-evaluation but are probably only doing internal evaluation.

It is not 'self' as in the 'individual', the self is the organisation, so is this not internal? Some teachers that I have asked about self-evaluation say that they do not engage on an 'individual basis' in the formal process of self-evaluating.

I would be grateful if you could clarify this for me!

Kind regards, M O M

Re: External/Internal/Self-evaluation
Thursday, 9 June 2005, 12:16 PM

Hi M

I agree with your point, I have slowly come to the realisation that the self evaluation talked about in most of the literature is the school (or organisation) itself. I presume!! (careful now) that for this type of self evaluation to be genuine the individual stakeholders within the school have to self evaluate, big presumption!! From talking with teachers, colleagues and peers I realise that as often is the case, the theory bears little resemblance to the practice. I have not come across any evidence yet on the ground that teachers are widely supported or engaging in self evaluation, as described by Macbeath. In my work practice we regularly get calls from teachers asking advice on delivering the FETAC child care modules very often they cite their feeling of professional isolation within their schools. Researching both the INTO and the NUT (England) websites and papers there appears to be a climate of fear, frustration, and stress around external evaluation processes and a lot of ambiguity about self evaluation. Has anybody else found that?

Hi C

I am beginning to find as I COMPLETE the questionnaires just how isolated I am in the centre. I have asked the other part time teachers how they feel and the agreed they arrive at the centre take their classes and go home some days they never even meet each other or management. The training manager only comes to them when there is a problem with their class. To address this we have agreed to meet once a fortnight. I also found completing the planning questionnaire how little contact I HAVE WITH MANAGEMENT. When I suggested to the other teachers they might like to use the questionnaires to evaluate their own teaching they nearly had a heart attack they responded with questions such as who would I give the results of their findings to management. I had to reassure them the evaluation would be for their own benefit. These are very good teachers but the fear of evaluation of their teaching methods was very strong. I will keep working with them to reduce the fear they have of evaluation.

Regards for now,
M B

Hi M

Thanks for the reply Sounds like your doing good work, I am beginning to realise how much support people need to self evaluate. I am lucky in my work that I have a lot of support from my colleagues and management we often plan together and we could talk for Ireland about our teaching practices and how we want to improve childcare, our problem is getting the time to do it. Even with all this support self evaluation is a difficult process - good luck with the meetings. they will be a doddle after the project!!!!

C

Initial
statement of
problem and
posing of
questions

Response,
amplification,
explanation of
context,
affirmation and
request for
more group
input

Explanation of
context,
description of
solution

Affirmation,
restating of
position,
opening up

Figure 12.16: *Impact of critical friend persona on online discussions*

In the first set of dialogues seen above it is clear how an initial participant posting leads to a series of supportive, clarifying and at times challenging responses from colleagues. The set of postings below is completed below by an extended, and in the event, summarising posting from the teacher.

Hi M,

These are really good questions and I would not in any way be worried about placing them on Moodle. You have raised a few points that quite often cause confusion. The first is the imprecision in the terms used to define and explain approaches to evaluation. You are right to think of a continuum from external to self evaluation. As to placing internal evaluation in the middle, definitely Love would argue that but others would suggest that this is not quite correct as often what he is talking about is an organisation setting up an internal evaluation unit which could be seen as an external body to other sections of the organisation.

In terms of the LAOS document, it has a number of purposes. It is designed to act as an aid to self evaluation i.e. the themes and categories developed can be used by individual teachers to examine their own work. As well as this (as you identify) it can be used as a methodology for the whole school to evaluate its work. The latter is normally done in preparation for the visit of an external evaluation body, namely the inspectorate. Here you could indeed argue that LAOS could be used as a methodology for encouraging organisation wide, internal evaluation but remember, the body engaging in the evaluation is external (unless of course you consider that education system as being one diverse organisation with the inspectorate being an element of it. I think that this is an unconvincing argument myself).

We have used the LAOS categories as an entry point into self evaluation. We have done this by asking you as a class to generate evaluation instruments that you are to use individually (at least some of the time) to evaluate your own training. This is probably different to how most people use it, however as I said it is a starting point. Some of you work in sectors that are not covered by LAOS so I don't see a real problem with this.

Hope this clarifies things

Best wishes

Support and
clarification

Clarification
and
extension

Figure 12.17: *Development of online critical friend persona*

Again, the general point to be made here is that the essential elements of the critical friend role are clearly present in the dialogue presented above. What is perhaps more significant is that the most successful question posers are the participants and not necessarily the teacher.

It is possible to argue, of course, that this was a unique type of discussion in that it was voluntary, relatively unfocused discussion and therefore resulted in a more open dialogue between participants and the teacher. While there is undoubtedly an element of truth in this contention even the most cursory examination of the examples of initiating questions quoted throughout this chapter will indicate the extent to which an online forum can be used to set difficult tasks and, when needed, pose difficult questions. To take an example, the initiating question below (Figure 12.18) is taken from the last ITE posting when students are asked to reflect on their overall experience of self-evaluation, using self evaluation instruments and indeed the process of posting on line.

At long last... the end!

I would like you to get a little reflective this week (or maybe should I say a little more reflective) and to comment on the processes of teaching and self evaluation. I will divide the posting into two.

1) Teaching practice

A few questions here.

- a) At the end of the teaching practice period, what do you now think the key skills of teaching are?
- b) What were the most important issues to arise for you and how did you address them?
- c) Any general comments?

2) Self evaluation

- a) Was it useful?
- b) Did you find Moodle useful? Why?

Thanks again for all the time you have taken to write in these pages and best of luck for the next few days.

Questions
focusing
discussion on
what
participants
learnt about
teaching

Questions
focusing
discussion on
what
participants
learnt about
self-evaluation

Figure 12.18: *Impact of focusing questions*

As an aside, the effect of these questions can be seen by analysing the profile of cognitive presence in the postings made in response.

CPD: Final Reflection		
Category	No.	%
Triggering	6	8.5
Exploration	18	25.3
Integration	47	66.2
Resolution	0	0

Table 12.16: *CPD Final Reflection Data*

Any analysis of the data presented above demonstrates that the participants were sufficiently challenged by the structuring questions at the beginning to engage at a comparatively high cognitive level with the ideas advanced and with their own professional practice experiences.

Finally, at a most basic level, these questions force participants to engage and to produce material that is then presented online. The five questions posed above led to fifteen direct participant responses and three further internal responses (see Figure 12.19 below). Each of these responses dealt, to some extent, with the type of issues raised in the initial questions and as such participants engaged with the issues considered important by the teacher and researcher.

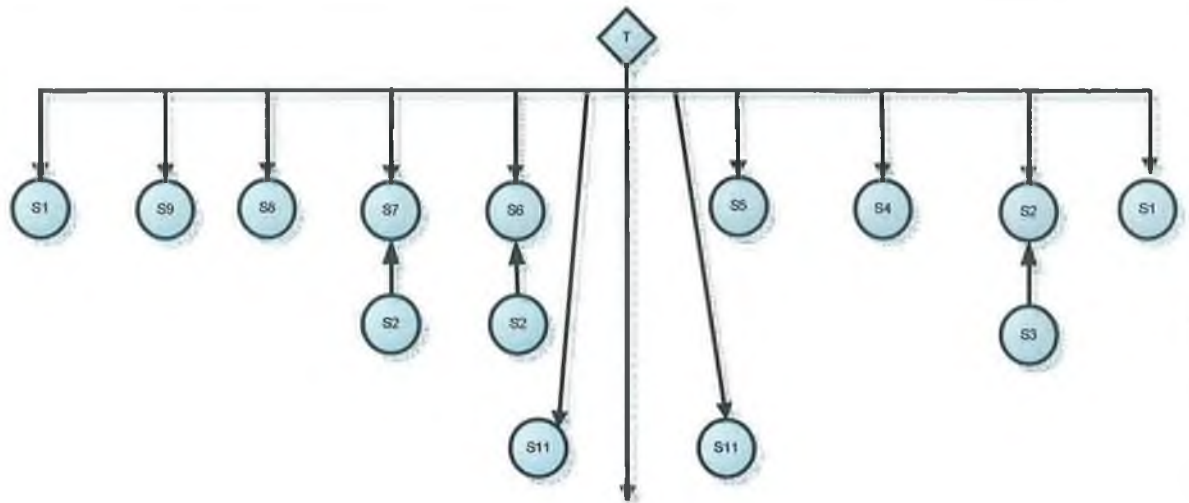


Figure 12.19: *Impact of questions on interaction patterns*

Overall, there is a strong case to be made that the online forum model acts in precisely the same manner that a traditional critical friend as envisaged by MacBeath et al suggests. In fact, it is possible to argue that the question and answer dynamic of the fora combined with the participant interaction that characterises at least some of the online dialogues analysed make this type of communications medium ideal for creating a critical friend culture.

Tentative Summary: Blended Learning, Cognitive Presence and the COI Model

This section has concentrated on exploring the linkages between the mode of learning, type of cognitive engagement and the range of influences that make up a learning experience. Particular attention has been paid to the type of learning community created by the blended mode of programme delivery. The contention of Vaughan and Garrison (2005) that a meaningful and engaged professional learning community can be best created by concentrating on developing and enhancing both the rates and levels of cognitive presence within any given learning programme was very influential. A range of data was analysed from both CPD and ITE participants with a view to initially assessing the extent to which cognitive presence could be said to exist within different elements of the training programme designed although particular attention was paid to the asynchronous discussion element of the programmes. The process of analysis was expanded to include other

elements of the COI model and in particular the potential role to be played by the teacher in facilitating the development of cognitive presence within a learning situation. A tentative model linking teacher presence, patterns of social engagement to the quality and quantity of cognitive presence was developed and tested. Finally, the study was broadened out to examine the potential of the ICT element of a professional learning community to take on the role of critical friend considered so important by a number of self-evaluation theorists.

Ultimately the application of the COI model demonstrated that there was a high level of cognitive presence observable in the data generated by the programme participants in the course of their engagement with the materials and processes developed. The blended mode of delivery ensured that the online element of the programme performed a very specific yet important role as a sounding board for issues that arose in the course of participant's professional engagement with self-evaluation. Participants were encouraged and in some cases forced to engage cognitively with ideas and concepts as a group and as a result of this they laid the foundations for a practice based, knowledge producing, reflective community of self-evaluating professionals. In the next section we will look at the final element of the impact of ICT on the development of a learning community when we examine how one cohort of the participants used the VLE to create and share new knowledge artefacts.

Using a VLE to Generate and Distribute Practice Grounded Digital Video Content

One of the most important capabilities of a functioning Community of Practice is its ability to generate and disseminate unique, practice oriented and contextually relevant content (Hung 2005, Lave and Wenger 1992). As we have seen recent developments in VLE technology, and in particular in multi-media content authoring functionalities, would seem to suggest that this emerging technology platform might have a role in facilitating the production and distribution of such content. In particular, the emerging nexus of digital video and asynchronous discussion technologies apparently offer both the ability to develop practice based content and the forum in which to discuss it. Assessing the validity of such claims is undoubtedly an important task for any researcher interested in the potential of emerging technologies for the development of communities of professional learners. For this reason, the programme developed deliberately included an aspect which focused on the

design and distribution of digital video content and in this section we will assess the impact of this element on the type of professional learning community created.

The research work of Bonk (2004), Ferdig and Roehler (2004), Perry and Talley (2001) and Brophy (2004) discussed at some length in Chapter 9 of this study provides a relatively comprehensive overview of the current attitudes to potential of web enhanced digital video in education. Tracing a developmental line from the earliest innovations in video technology in the 1960's Brophy demonstrates how video has changed with the times and has remained a key element of most teacher education and professional development programmes to this day. With its most recent developmental iteration, Digital Video (DV), the technology has, at least in the opinion of a number of the researchers cited above, moved to a new plane of functionality. It is now possible to easily record, edit and perhaps most importantly distribute practice based video recordings in a number of technological arenas (Perry and Talley 2001). This ability to seamlessly integrate DV technology into multimedia enabled VLE's is seen as opening up a whole range of possibilities for those involved in teacher professional development (Bonk 2004).

In attempting to summarise the potential benefits of recent developments in digital video and web based technologies it is possible to see a number of themes emerging. Firstly, the intersection of the two technologies is seen as potentially providing a forum which will allow participants to 'create a common knowledge base' (Ferdig and Roehler 2004: 131). It is suggested that the ability to record practice and then discuss it in a public forum with other engaged professionals will allow educators to begin to generate a readily accessible stock of examples of good practice which can be drawn upon, challenged and ultimately owned by the host community. A second, and connected theme, relates to the grounded nature of the video material generated and the potential this has to provide a window on actual as opposed to perceived professional practice. This theme of course assumes that what is being recorded is an actual representation of professional practice rather than a staged reconstruction. A third theme relates to the role of web enhanced video as an, 'anchoring event' for reflective engagement with practice (Bonk 2004:98). It is argued that

the ability to replay individual segments of practice until the full richness of the learning event is understood adds a unique element to the reflective process.

Given the interest of this study in facilitating reflective engagement with practice situations in order to generate unique yet relevant professional knowledge which can be used to dialogue with a variety of internal and external stakeholders it is perhaps unsurprising that there was a keen interest taken in digital video as a content authoring medium. In order to examine its potential, a subsection of the overall programme was developed which focused exclusively on training participants to record, edit, post and defend examples of best practice in the area of teaching and learning. It is to this element of the programme that we will now turn.

Developing Digital Video Content: Outlining a Training Intervention

Given the research claims that were beginning to be made for web enhanced digital video technology there was a genuine interest on the part of the researcher to integrate it into the programme being developed at some stage. Following a number of initial 'false starts' which saw the researcher record and distribute scripted video segments as part of an attempt to stimulate practice based reflective dialogue, a decision was made to experiment with digital video in the final year of the programme development cycle.

Essentially the researcher decided to create a subset of the overall programme which would allow participants to develop their own digital video segments for distribution and discussion. For logistical reasons it was decided to target this intervention exclusively at ITE participants. While there would undoubtedly have been an appetite for exploring this type of intervention on the part of CPD participants it was felt that the lack of baseline skills on the part of some members of the group combined with the relative scarcity of the necessary technology were complicating factors which could have created insurmountable obstacles in a comparatively short programme cycle.

Whether this position was justified or not, the decision resulted in the intervention being developed and put into practice with the 15 ITE participants on the programme.

The primary aim of the intervention was to facilitate participants in creating and distributing digital video clips that contained some element from their professional practice that they felt was worth recording and sharing. Naturally, there were a number of design parameters that had to be set in place prior to the introduction of the programme. The first, and in many ways the most important, was the decision as to where exactly this professional practice would be captured. While there was an initial interest in recording actual examples of the participants teaching in the course of their practicum logistical and legal concerns prevented this from happening. The logistical issues centred around the easy availability of DV recorders and while significant might possibly have been overcome. However, the legal and indeed ethical complications thrown up by any attempt to record school children and then place their images on a website were considered to be too difficult to address within the relatively limited timeframe available.

This led to a decision to locate the recording of the video material within the University in a simulated classroom setting. In order to enhance the realism of the teaching situation contact was made with a local post-primary school who agreed to provide junior cycle secondary school students for at least some of the classes. The parents of these students were fully briefed in relation to the project and were asked to sign a release form relating to the subsequent use of the recordings made. The remainder of the sessions were designed to be peer taught.

The second design issue related to an aspect of professional practice that was to be investigated. Given the breadth of the practicum experience, it was considered essential that some thematic structure be created for the participants. It was decided therefore to concentrate on the teaching and learning area as this was the theme from the *LAOS* document which acted as a backdrop to the entire programme. Within this broad field the area of teaching skills development was considered the most appropriate to explore. As well as providing a clear structuring issue for the participants to use, it had the added advantage of fitting neatly into an existing skills development aspect of their practicum programme. This skills development programme was based on the microteaching model developed by McIntyre (1977) and normally involved ITE students practicing discrete

teaching skills in a controlled environment. The particular programme delivered during the ITE student's practicum experience was actually a refresher programme as they had covered the microteaching skills in the first two years of their course. It sought to use their ongoing classroom experiences as student teachers as a reflective context and did not involve the intensive teach, observe, re-teach cycle of traditional microteaching courses. There seemed to be a natural fit between the overall goals of this programme and the training intervention being designed and it was therefore decided to merge the two for the duration of this study.

Having decided the who, the where and the what of the programme, a decision had to be made as to the structure and outcomes expected. After a period of consultation it was decided that participants would be required to:

- Record up to five of their skills development sessions
- Edit and produce three digital video clips of between thirty seconds and one minute long which they considered to provide an example of good practice in teaching
- Post the clip online and provide an explanation as to why they considered this to be best practice.
- Engage in debate and dialogue with fellow participants about their decision.

Prior to their beginning the programme, the participants were given a brief though intensive introduction to video editing as well as some additional sessions on using digital video cameras. Finally, for practical access as well as research tracking reasons, it was decided to establish a separate MOODLE site for this intervention.

This process was completed in the latter part of the year and the participants proved to be very enthusiastic video producers for the duration of the programme. Upon completion, the intervention was intensively evaluated and the data generated by the online forum was analysed using the tools discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

Exploring What Happened

Following on from the insight of Henri (1992) cited earlier in this chapter, it was considered important to analyse the rates of participation with a view to understanding exactly how participants made use of the VLE when working with digital video material. As can be seen from Table 12.17 below, patterns of access were almost identical to those demonstrated by the ITE participants in the main programme site.

MOODLE Visits By Category		
Category	Number	%
Chat	109	1.35%
Course	1145	14.16%
Forum	4839	60.49%
Resource	343	4.24%
User	1599	19.77%
Total	8089	100%

Table 12.17: *DV production site*

Again we can see that visits to the various aspects of the discussion forum are responsible for marginally over 60 % of all visits to the site. In addition, the resource site gets comparatively few visits at only a little over 4 % but it is probably safe to assume that the same access dynamic that was discussed earlier was at play here. The only slight difference that is obvious between access patterns in this and the main site is the emergence of a 'chat' category. The term, 'chat' is the one used by MOODLE developers as shorthand for synchronous discussion or live online interaction. The 109 visits in this category correspond to an unsuccessful attempt by some participants to use the functionality to keep in touch while in schools.

Forum Page Visits: DV Production Course		
Activity	Total No.	%
Forum View Discussions	2439	47.81
Forum View Forum	1857	40.49
Forum View Forums	115	2.35
Forum Add Post	74	.91
Forum Subscribe	12	15
Forum Add Discussion	163	3.82
Chat Talk	84	1.04
Chat View	21	.26
Forum Update Post	69	.85
Total	4834	97.68

Table 12.18: *Forum Page Visits: DV Production Course*

With regards to the specific ratio of forum postings to forum viewings, again we see the pattern of a high number of viewings resulting in a comparatively small number of postings emerging again. This acts as something of a corroboration of the value of the data produced by the main site as it matches the data generated by that site almost exactly.

Undoubtedly the most important product to come out of this programme was the participant video clips. Each produced three ranging in length from 11 seconds to 1 minute 49 seconds. In total then, there were 45 videos produced with a combined total running length of 38 minutes and 10 seconds, a not insignificant record of good teaching. Each video was self produced and was edited using the QuickTime 7 Pro package (see Figure 12.20 below).



Figure 12.20: *Video Clip Screen Shot*

Clips were placed online with an explanatory comment and participants were invited to engage in discussion about the issues raised by the selections of teaching chosen.

Perhaps the most surprising outcome from the analysis of the discussion postings came when the cognitive presence data was explored (Table 12.19).

Cognitive Presence: Developing Digital Video Material		
Category	Number	%
Triggering	11	7.3
Exploration	19	12.6
Integration	34	22.5
Resolution	87	57.6
Total	151	100

Table 12.19: *Cognitive Presence: Developing Digital Video Material*

In direct contrast to all of the other discussion units analysed for this study by far the majority of the units of meaning coded were assigned to the resolution category. This is the

category of cognitive presence model which sees participants 'critically assessing... viability' (Garrison and Anderson 2004: 62). It often involves 'vicarious application to the real world' (Garrison, Anderson and Archer 2000: 20) which 'could take the form of a presentation and defence' (Garrison and Anderson 2004: 62). This is exactly the process that participants in this training intervention engaged in as can be seen from the example explored below (Figure 12.21).

<p>Friday, 6 May 2005, 02:15 PM</p> <p>clip3.mov</p> <p>This was taken from the second extended session. I like this clip because it really emphasises student involvement in the class. It's obvious from the concentration of the participating students that they like the hands on approach, and they are taking an interest in the results of the experiment. The students sitting down are also eager to see the outcome. This is something that I have found on teaching. It is important to keep everyone involved if possible.</p> <p>I use questioning to deepen the understanding of the students. Rather than just carry out the experiment and note the results, I encourage them to anticipate the results. This broadens their understanding of the pH scale and makes them question the strength of the different substances from their everyday experiences. It also lets me know that they understand what I am teaching.</p> <p>The clip shows how effective a simple variation of stimulus can be during the class. It focuses the students' attention on something different and gives a bit of life to the class if the topic seems to be becoming a little irrelevant (not that any of our classes are ever irrelevant!).</p> <p>I also like the way I involved both the students doing the experiment and those sitting down by aiming most of the questions at those sitting down. This meant they couldn't drift away while the experiment was going on!</p> <p>Monday, 9 May 2005, 11:16 AM</p> <p>Well done, I think you picked out a really good example of teaching. The class seemed to really learn a lot as well as have fun. You seemed to be enjoying it too. I am planning to steal some of your ideas for my next junior science class, I think they work really well. Altogether it was a class anybody would have liked to participate in!</p>	<p>Explanation of context. Use of school experience to state problem</p>
	<p>Development of solution and defence</p>
	<p>Conclusion</p>
	<p>Response – invoking school experience</p>

Figure 12.21: *Cognitive presence: Moving towards resolution*

In this example, the participant provides a detailed analysis of the importance of involving students in classes in as many ways as possible. Drawing from her practical classroom experience, the literature associated with microteaching and her understanding of the subject content she puts forward a convincing argument. The video clip in this example provides the anchor which allows the participant to reflect on her practice drawing in what she has identified as significant external evidence. The video provides the context for her solution focused content and as such provides her with an opportunity to expand on her practice in a way that creates a written and multi-media artefact that explains a key element of the teaching process.

The latter part of the example chosen is also important as it provides an excellent exemplar of the type of dialogue initiated by the placing of such material online. The response from a fellow participant is affirming, complimentary, and humorous. It also indicates that viewing the clip and reading the explanation will probably lead to a change in practice on the part of the respondent. While each of these must be considered important, and in particular the latter point, there is no real evidence here of what Garrison and Anderson identify as a key element of the resolution category of the cognitive presence phase of the COI model, namely 'other participants critiquing the suggested application' (2004:62). Again this is reinforced by the data relating to the exploration phase of the model with only 12.6 % of the units being coded to the category that is marked by debate, disagreement and discussion. The majority of units, when they come, are in the integration or agreement and solution-focused category with 22.5% of the total being placed in this category.

This pattern of dialogue and response is reinforced by an examination of the interaction analysis diagram (Figure 12.22). This diagram clearly shows a pattern where individual postings predominate with limited interaction taking place after the initial online event.

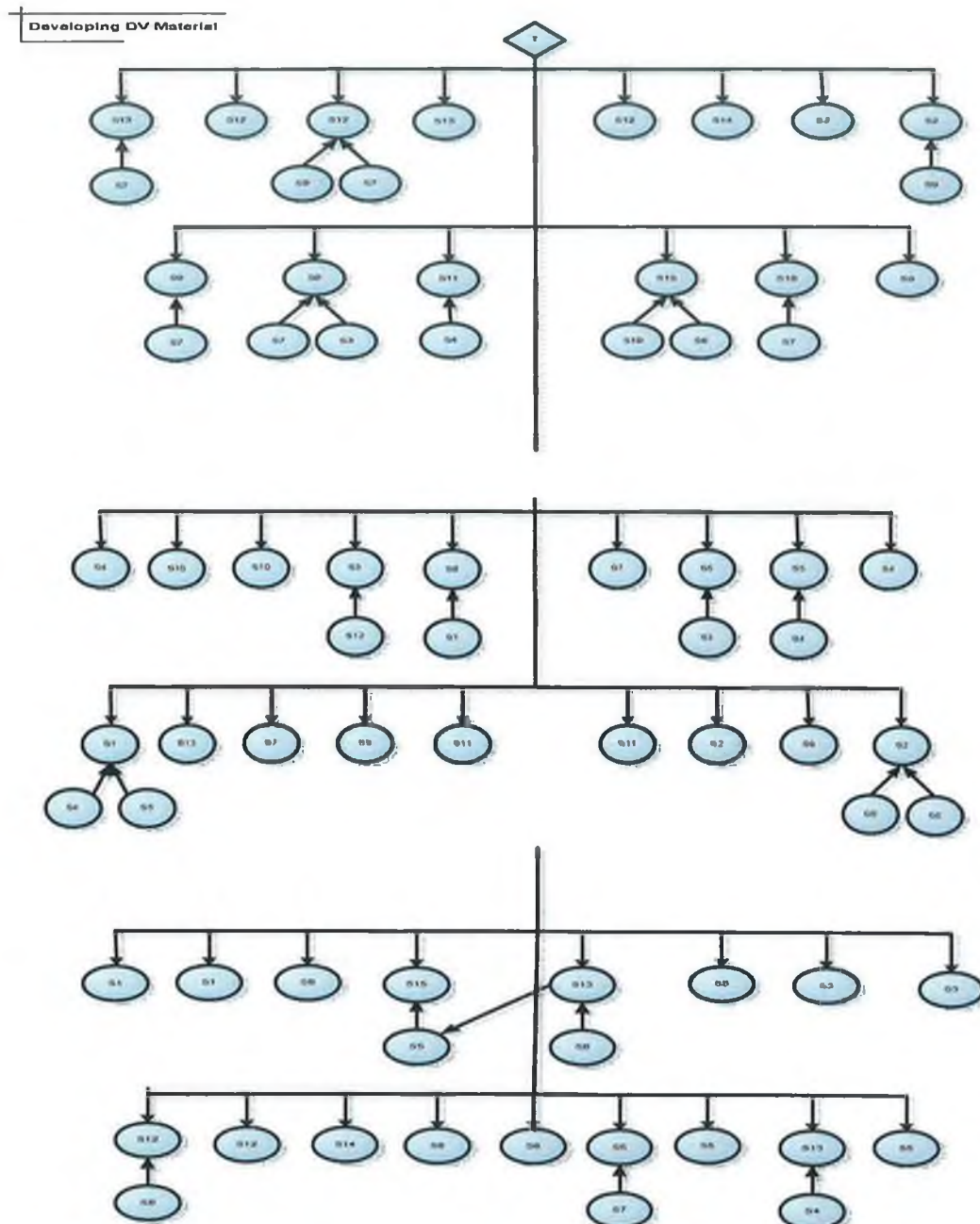


Figure 12.22: Developing DV Material Interaction Pattern

Notwithstanding the relative lack of interaction, the number of basic posting units recorded in the above diagram bear testament to the popularity of the forum for presenting and explaining examples of good practice.

The Role of Participant Generated Digital Video in Self-Evaluation – Towards an Understanding?

Is it possible then to come to a position on the value of including a digital video production segment in a programme designed to allow professional educators to develop a self-evaluation capacity? To do so, it is necessary to examine what exactly the DV development process brings to the dynamic of professional development. At the outset we can say that it does not seem to add significantly to the level of inter-participant engagement with the element of professional practice recorded in the segment. This may be due to a lack of desire on the part of an emerging learning community to actively criticise what they see as a piece of highly personal work produced by one of their colleagues. Equally, it may be that the initial direction given to the participants was either too vague, too prescriptive or indeed a combination of both. There is an argument to be made that the task set and support given ultimately led to the pattern of interaction that favoured declarative postings and the production of video over and above the development of a process of dialogue. By asking participants to record, edit, produce and explain examples of good practice, providing them with equipment, training, a structure and other supports to do so and only at the end of the process asking them to respond to others, it is perhaps natural that they failed to see the importance of the latter aspect.

Significant though these issues may be, to focus on them exclusively would be to lose much of the importance of the data generated during this phase of the programme. In many ways, the process of training participants to produce DV segments was a great success. The global numbers of clips produced, the amount of interactions recorded and the enthusiasm for the process evidenced in the participants online contributions are noteworthy. In addition, the level of cognitive engagement that emerged following the application of the COI model to the postings was particularly significant. A graphic summary of the process involved is provided in Figure 12.23 below. Here the three key

elements of the process are located within a general context where their peers are at very least observers and at times active participants.

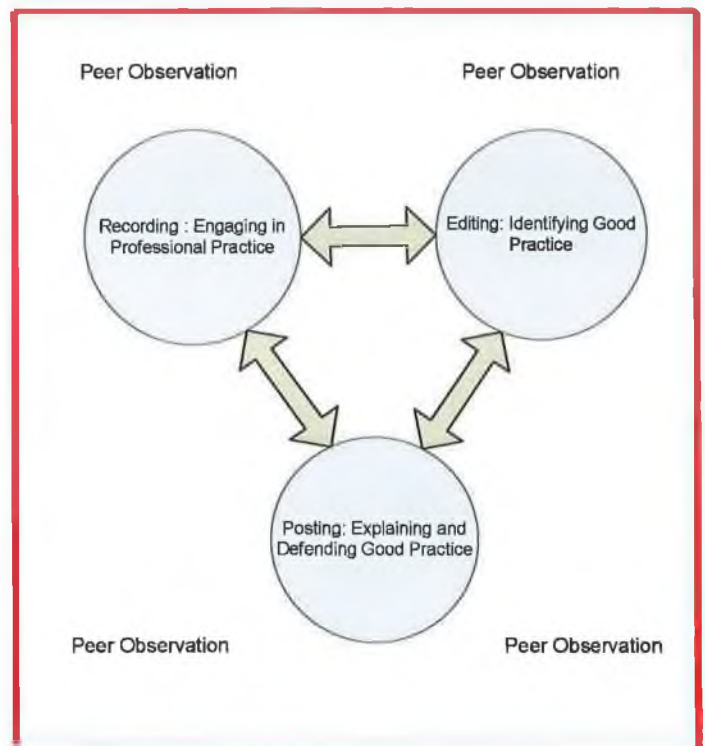


Figure 12.23: *A model of DV use in professional development programmes*

What this intervention seems to have produced is a way for educators who are engaging in a professional development process to purposefully reflect on their practice and to generate a multimedia artefact that provides evidence of the outcome of this reflection. This artefact also manages to encapsulate what they consider to be good about their professional practice and as such becomes a statement of professional quality and confidence. The process further provides participants with an opportunity to develop a vocabulary to explain exactly what it is about these examples of their practice that they consider valuable. Finally, participants are provided with a forum where they can present their own interpretation of quality to a group of their professional peers.

The following example illustrates a number of these stages and provides a clear sense of how the production of the video segment acted as an integrating factor for the participants understanding of his practicum experience, the formal academic input he was receiving and his efforts to engage in a skills enhancement programme.

Student 12's Clip One.

by - Thursday, 21 April 2005, 12:30 PM

This is a clip I had from the first teaching session. I chose it as We were varying the stimulus and I felt this was the most effective variation I used.

Firstly, it was an cheap and effective demonstration of forces in work.

Secondly also explained clearly how by lying it on the table, there were no forces working on it whilst excluding gravity.

Finally, when a teacher takes out a football in class, most of the time, the students have an interest in football and will pay attention just to see what the teacher does with the ball so it is useful in keeping their attention!

Re: Student 12's Clip One.

by - Tuesday, 3 May 2005, 11:28 PM

Just to expand on my previous point.

Cheap and Effective Demo:

As we found out in schools over the last few months , some of us are unfortunately going to get jobs in a disadvantaged school where the equipment is going to be worth about as much as a big-mac meal. It will be important for us to be able to improvise our own demonstrations to compensate for this. We have all being trying over the past few weeks to do this and I thought that tis was a good thing to think about I know that my demo was rather simple but in fiarness, alot of the things we will be demonstrating would be easier for students to understand if we made them as simple as possible. In the clip, I had already told the students what a force was. But I re-emphasized my explanation with a simple diagram. And I remember when doing it watching a few people get a tiny little fright. It was a simple demo that was

cheap, got the attention of the class and made my point with ease.

Explained Clearly:

The ball was on the table. I pointed out at what times, what forces were acting on the ball, what forces weren't acting on the ball. Again, it was just using a simple situation to explain a simple concept. I always found keeping things simple is the best way to get students to follow what you're doing.

I'm of the opinion that if I were to do something like this in class, then the students would pay attention. I know that they would definitely look at the ball as they did when I took the ball out doing my first extended class using the ball as heat.

ITE DV Dialogue

This is a fascinating posting for a number of reasons. The initial section provides a brief, functional description of what went on in a teaching session. There are two main elements:

1. Mentioning the skill focus
2. Detailing a three stage implementation process that can be seen in the clip

This is a minimal though functional posting. Where it becomes interesting though is in the addendum, posted two weeks after the original. Here we have a much more considered posting and one which demonstrates a trainee teacher trying to come to terms with what exactly will be expected of him in the 'real world' of teaching. The new posting begins with an explanation of the teaching context that he has experienced and in particular with a frank acknowledgement of his understanding of the under funding experienced by many teaching practical subjects. This experience has led him to consider the best, most cost effective and efficient way of teaching his subject area. He translated these ideas into a very simple experiment that could be carried out in any given class with minimal cost. There is also a development in language and in the vocabulary used with an attempt being made to engage with important educational issues using a language that makes sense to the participant, and it has to be assumed, to his peers.

What this represents then is a practical example of the Bonk's conception of video as a trigger for multiple cycles of reflection. The anchoring event here is the production of the video. The stimulus to further reflection is the need to enhance the initial posting with ideas drawn from the participant's practicum experiences. The underpinning structure is provided by the input on teaching skills delivered during the formal session inputs.

The overall cycle of development represented by this clip involves a reflective engagement with practice, the integration of external subject knowledge, the production of unique, practice focused materials and the development of a language with which to express the insights generated by the process. It is significant that each of these discrete elements is also seen as having a vitally important part in the creation of communities of practice. Perhaps more importantly, they are also core aspects of the programmes for training self-evaluating teachers developed by Borzano (2002), Nevo (1995) and Simons (2002). In particular, the development of a visual and verbal vocabulary which allows professionals express their informed understanding of what represents quality in their own work is important given its potential role in facilitating conversations between reflectively engaged professionals.

In earlier chapters of this study we examined the centrality of dialogue to emerging notions of self-evaluation. Nevo's 1995 analysis of the place of evidence informed dialogue has been very influential particularly in systems of school evaluation that are seeking to find a way of facilitating the development of an effective working relationship between external school inspectorates and internal school evaluating communities. One of the key complicating factors is the knowledge and information differential between the two parties engaged in the conversation. Nevo (1995), Barzano (2002) and others have identified the bridging of this gap as being a core requirement of any programme for developing self-evaluation skills among education professionals. In order to achieve this, both suggest that teachers be trained not only to collect data on their own practice but also to discuss the data they have collected in a way that makes sense to multiple audiences. To date, while there have been a number of attempts to create such a programme, none seem to have made use of the intersection of DV and web technology suggested by this programme.

The argument being made here is that this combination of technologies is particularly suitable for the task, as it not only facilitates the creation of data artefacts that demonstrate good practice. It also provides a forum to allow individual professionals to explain exactly what they understand by quality in education in a language that is at once natural and data enriched. The fact that this forum is public and that the visual artefacts are accessible to all members of the community ensures that by the end of the intervention cycle an accessible common knowledge base has been developed and is available to the developing community for as long as it wishes to make use of it.

In summary, the DV development intervention seems to have been ultimately beneficial for the participants although not necessarily in the manner initially envisaged. They have been required to engage in a process that has allowed them to:

- Reflect on their own teaching experiences
- Analyse academic and other literature through a lens of practical experience
- Generate a unique series of artefacts which encapsulate their understanding of what good professional practice is
- Present this in a public forum and explain their reasons for choosing it using a vocabulary appropriate to the topic and to their experience

While the dialogue and interaction did not take place to the extent that was hoped and indeed expected, the production of the video clips did have a positive impact on the participants. The analysis of the data generated not only indicated a genuine interest in the process but also that the participants were using the video development cycle to engage at a high cognitive level throughout. In particular, they were using the production and dissemination of the video clips to provide application based solutions to perceived problem areas in their professional practice. The intervention ultimately proved successful in producing data bank of examples of best practice that have been tested by experience, analysed by professionals and offered for consideration as part of the overall knowledge base of the professional learning community. This alone would seem to suggest that the intervention was worthwhile.

Does ICT Facilitate the Development of Self-Evaluating Professionals?

At the beginning of this section a question was posed relating to the potential of ICT to enhance a process of training self-evaluating professionals. Essentially what the researcher wanted to find out was whether the extensive use of ICT in the self-evaluation training programme had had in any discernible impact on the participants. Following an extensive analysis of data generated by the programme the answer to the initial query posed must be yes, but a qualified yes.

In order to assess the impact of the use of ICT on the programme it was decided to examine three specific areas, each of which was deemed to be centrally important to any overall evaluation of the importance of the ICT element to the ultimate quality of programme outputs.

The first of these elements dealt with usage patterns and participant attitudes to ICT. While there was a generally high level of usage among both the ITE and CPD participant groups different access patterns and levels of comfort with the technology employed did emerge. Put simply, while the ITE participants were so comfortable with the ICT environment that they rarely mentioned it, a significant number of the CPD participants were concerned with a perceived skills gap and lack of comfort with the whole process of interacting online. While this lack of comfort diminished as the programme progressed it did suggest that the level of base line skills among participants was an area that might need to be addressed in the future.

The second element to be investigated was the extent to which participants actually used the technology to engage reflectively with theirs and their colleague's practical knowledge. Assessing this extent of reflective engagement was considered essential as it represented one of the key underpinnings of the community of practice concept which was so important to this study. The process of evaluating the extent of reflective engagement involved the researcher applying the Community of Inquiry Model to a series of web discussions produced by programme participants. The application of the model indicated that there was a high level of reflective engagement in evidence throughout the discussions analysed. In

addition, it also provided an interesting overview of the range of potential influencing factors on the type and extent of reflective engagement entered into by course participants. In particular, strong evidence emerged relating to the importance of the mode of course delivery and the interrelationship between teacher activity and patterns of online interaction to the final level of reflective engagement. The analysis conducted seems to corroborate the recent research relating to the suitability of blended learning environments for producing high levels of cognitive engagement on the part of course participants. This was potentially significant as the course being described here was deliberately designed to be delivered in a blended mode. This aspect of the study concluded with an exploration of the possibility developing a 'virtual critical friend' using the discussion forum element of the programme. Ultimately it was decided that this would be quite feasible to do and that the current usage patterns of the fora demonstrated by both participants and teachers suggested that this type of supporting and challenging relationship was already present.

The final aspect of ICT use to be analysed was the extent to which it facilitated participants in the creation and distribution of new knowledge. Concentrating in particular of the potential of Digital Video as a mode of knowledge generation the data analysed indicated that this form of technology did indeed have a positive impact on the ability of participants to create and disseminate knowledge artefacts. Where the technology proved less successful was in generating a dialogue around the quality and applicability of the artefacts created. However it was acknowledged that while dialogue was a critical part of the process of the developing self-evaluating professionals the generation of DV artefacts added quite an amount to the programme as a whole. The developmental process facilitated a great degree of reflective engagement as well as assisting participants in the development of a new vocabulary for discussing their professional practice. Ultimately encouraging participants to produce and disseminate their own video clips created a library of examples of best practice which can be used by community members as a resource and a stimulus for the indefinite future.

Overall therefore it can be said that the ICT element of the programme was successful in establishing the conditions to allow participants develop as self-evaluating professionals. It

provided them with a forum with which to engage with ideas and experiences and a methodology for creating unique knowledge artefacts that could be shared with all members of the emerging community.

Chapter Thirteen: Conclusion**The Self-Evaluating Professional - Charting the Way Forward.**

This work divides into three parts. Part one is concerned with the worldwide growth of an evaluative culture in recent decades. In many areas of life, but particularly in the public service and even more particularly in education, there has been an intense push to develop systems of accountability and increasing concerns with obtaining 'value for money'. In the opening chapter the roots of this movement are explored. In the case of education these policy directions have been compounded by the immense importance which governments worldwide attribute to student achievement and effective schools. A successful education system is now widely seen as an essential component of economic success without which countries cannot hope to compete for the mobile capital which characterises the modern world economy. In consequence in virtually every country in the developed world, and increasingly in the developing world, the State has systematically sought to improve the quality of education and training, not only as in the past by increased expenditure, but also by attempting to increase 'output' through systems of evaluation and surveillance. However it is also noted that these same developments are being increasingly challenged in society in general and in education particularly as the serious consequences of such policies gradually become apparent.

In chapter two the arguments, both philosophical and practical, in relation to the evaluation of schools and teachers are thrashed out. It is suggested that much of the policy direction described in the previous chapter is founded on two fundamental flaws. The first of these is that evaluation systems, which by their nature must be founded on data and information acquired through social science research methodologies, can ever in fact produce clear, unambiguous and implementable results, policies or plans. This is simply because, as a great deal of work in the social sciences in the past thirty years has shown clearly, complex systems with wide and various goals such as education are hugely resistant to quantifiable measurement. The second fundamental flaw alleged against the neo-liberalist approaches to evaluation and appraisal is that these policies

downplay or totally ignore the serious side effects inherent in unduly interfering in the reasonable exercise of professional autonomy by such groups as teachers. It has become increasingly apparent that, in a nutshell, such policies when implemented in certain forms do more harm than any demonstrable benefits that may result.

In consequence, while governments in many countries are actively creating or restructuring school and teacher evaluation systems what is emerging in fact is surprisingly sophisticated and nuanced. In chapter three it is suggested that emerging evaluation systems in many countries represent a series of compromises which while involving significant increases in the oversight of schools and teachers yet are based fundamentally on the premise that these groupings should primarily evaluate themselves with a degree of external monitoring. This concept of self-evaluation, virtually unknown ten or fifteen years ago, has now become the dominant force in the discourse on school and teacher evaluation. In consequence most evaluation systems have now become a hybrid involving internal or self-evaluation by individual teachers or entire schools with a greater or lesser degree of external inspection. In part two of the book Ireland is presented as a case in point.

Chapter four describes the 1996-1999 pilot project during which a new system of school and teacher evaluation was tested by the DES in Ireland. The extremely cautious consultative and iterative nature of the developmental process is spelled out and the evaluation of that pilot which was published in late 1999 is considered in some detail. In chapter five the new national system of whole school evaluation which eventually emerged from the pilot project is described. It is argued that the DES saw the implementation of a new approach to school evaluation and inspection as potentially deeply difficult and controversial. The system developed therefore placed a strong emphasis on schools and teachers evaluating their own performance but being subject to regular inspections by the national inspectorate of the DES. In many ways the hybrid of self-evaluation and external inspection which emerged was it is argued closely in line with similar compromise systems in other jurisdictions and was strongly influenced by

such developments across Europe. However it is also pointed out that the evaluation of the pilot project threw up unmistakable areas of concern for the future. While on the positive side it was perhaps remarkable that the new system attracted so little outright opposition it became clear that this was, to a significant degree, due to the non-pursuit of several key elements which were theoretically built into the scheme. These included the key fact that in practice neither schools nor teachers were expected to produce data or evidence to support the judgements which they made on their own performance. This, as the response of the Inspectorate to the pilot project makes clear, made it very difficult to come to any objective conclusions regarding the effectiveness or otherwise of particular teachers, subject departments or schools. Other flaws clearly highlighted in the evaluation report of WSE in 1999 included the very limited role accorded to key stakeholders including parents, pupils and the wider community and the bland and superficial nature of the final evaluation reports produced. None of these flaws it is argued were dealt in the new WSE framework entitled *Looking at Our Schools* which has become the basis of national school evaluation policy and practice. School evaluations under this framework began in 2004.

Chapter six reports on case studies in twenty-four schools involving both school leaders and teachers. The schools chosen have all recently undergone whole school evaluation and the research was designed to evaluate responses to the system as it operated in practice. The outcome of this research is very mixed. On the one hand the WSE system has proved highly acceptable to both schools and teachers, is regarded as necessary and is seen as an aid to improvement. It is also perceived to have direct and indirect benefits. Direct in the sense that it encourages collegial responsibility and cooperation and indirect in that certain practices, for example wider use of ICT and more regular teacher and department meetings have resulted. The inspection teams are respected for their professionalism and for their sensitivity to the particular organisational realities that they encounter.

On the other hand the research also reconfirms serious weaknesses in the WSE scheme. As already indicated difficult issues such as an appropriate role for parents and pupils

have not been addressed and the final evaluation reports, although now published, remain extremely bland and difficult to read for the non-expert. These shortcomings can perhaps reasonably be attributed to the fact that the system is in its infancy and it is perceived that great care must be exercised in order not to damage school and teacher morale or interfere with reasonable professional autonomy. However the other fundamental flaw identified, namely that theoretically at least, the framework is built on a self-evaluation capacity that largely does not exist, continues to undermine the effectiveness and credibility of the system. Developing a self-evaluative capacity in teachers and schools is certainly not something that could be achieved overnight but it does seem unfortunate that there is no discernible move by the DES in this direction..

In contrast it is interesting to note that projects to develop self-evaluation capacity in schools and teachers have become very common in recent years right across Europe and beyond. This is because as suggested earlier in this work virtually every emergent school evaluation system is predicated to a greater or lesser degree on the concept of self-evaluation. Of course what has become clear in virtually all of these cases is that the idea that such capacity exists is dubious at best and moreover that developing it is a difficult and complex process. Chapter seven describes several different approaches in a number of countries to ways in which schools and teachers can be helped to systematically research their own practices and produce rigorous and defensible evidence to support their professional judgements. Such systems vary from external agencies, whether state or other, gathering substantial data from schools and feeding it back in a format suitable for self-evaluation to more modest projects involving groups of individual teachers or schools being trained in the philosophy of self-evaluation and in research methodologies.

Chapter eight describes such a project recently undertaken in Ireland. It was designed to produce, implement and test an experimental training programme for teachers around the concept and practice of self-evaluation. The project involved practitioners in developing self-evaluative research tools, testing these tools and reporting on their use in an online environment. The chapter describes the gradual development of a three-year programme involving teachers in initial teacher training and more experienced practitioners involved

in continuing professional development. The project proceeded through various stages involving introducing the participants to the concept of self-evaluation, placing them in the context of the newly emerging system of Whole School Evaluation in Ireland and introducing them to research methodology. It sought specifically to facilitate the development of contextually appropriate self-evaluative research instruments, the systematic use of these instruments over time, the use of a Virtual Learning Environment to create communities of practice and finally a rigorous evaluation of the extent to which the participants became both committed to and skilled in the art and science of self-evaluation.

In chapter nine the outcomes of this project are evaluated under three main headings. The first two of these deal with emerging teacher competences in research design and implementation and teacher responses to their first experiences of using self-evaluation. The third phase was concerned with the participants moving beyond the original project structures and describes their innovations in the field of self evaluation through the use of a number of case studies.

Project Outcomes and Recommendations

The outcomes of the project described in part three of this study were very positive in the sense that the teachers trained in self evaluation techniques demonstrated a good understanding of the concept and a willingness to extend it into their own work. The research reported in chapter nine above shows teachers enjoying and seeing the value of developing and using research instruments to analyse their own professional practise. Over time, their skills in this regard grew steadily as did their self-reported feelings of engagement, ownership and implementation of self evaluation. Moreover, as they grew used to it, teachers in the project developed a sophisticated understanding of the philosophy of self evaluation, seeing it as a way not only to improve professional practice, but also as a means of collaborating with other stakeholders such as colleagues and pupils and to respond to the national system of WSE. In some cases, teachers

involved in the project became very active advocates for self evaluation in their schools and made extensive efforts to spread the idea among colleagues.

All of this, of course, does not mean that this project has discovered some foolproof way of developing active self evaluators who will consistently monitor their own practice and convince their schools to adopt an extensive research-engaged focus. Many apparently successful projects, including many around practitioner and action research, have faded away when the impetus for them has been withdrawn. What may be different here is that the impetus in this case, namely the arrival of a school and teacher evaluation system which places emphasis on self evaluation, is not likely to disappear. In fact, exactly the opposite, in that, as this work demonstrates, WSE may well fall into disrepute in the medium term if a more substantial evidence-based approach to support inspectorial judgements cannot be created. There must be a limited lifespan to any system of evaluation which is, in effect, evidence free, and thus it would appear to be in the interests of the DES to actively, as opposed to rhetorically, support the creation of research engaged schools and teachers. In this context, the self evaluation training module described above seems a good place to begin. The steps underpinning it, introducing the concept of self-evaluation, developing and using research instruments and engaging in collaborative debate, either face to face or through the medium of a virtual learning environment, have been shown to work very effectively. Such training could be built into the education of new teachers quite easily. Serving teachers are more difficult to reach, but a good model already exists in the training of teachers to support development planning in their schools. This could be replicated for the purposes of WSE. In fact, this research makes a strong case to integrate these two processes – WSE and SDP - more closely, and the training of teams to work on both simultaneously would be a good start. Of course, self evaluation in schools requires more than training. It also requires a rationale which teachers buy into, which this project seemed able to provide. It requires an immediate focus or purpose for self-evaluation, but this is provided by WSE. Finally, it requires a communications platform or mechanism. For time and resource reasons, this can be problematic in schools, but here this project demonstrates the wide possibilities offered by a virtual learning environment.

In summary, it is certainly not beyond the bounds of possibility to engage teachers in schools in self evaluation and to make schools more research engaged institutions. Our research has left us in no doubt that schools in other countries, more noticeably England, have developed a capacity to collect, analyse and use data which is invaluable and goes far beyond the present capacity of schools in Ireland. It might be argued that this development was forced on English schools by the unwise early iterations of OFSTED, but, be that as it may, the range of self-evaluative research now being undertaken in English schools has revolutionised the data and evidence on which planning, development, decisions and judgements can be based. It is, in our view, perfectly possible to replicate this positive outcome in Ireland without engaging in destructive conflict and without changing the essentially negotiated and collaborative nature of the WSE process as at present structured. Our work shows that teachers and schools come quickly to see the value of research led practice, provided it is in a context of professional development devoid of threatening elements.

Finally this work represents a key developmental experiment in the growing field of practitioner and school self-evaluation. The work shows that it is widely accepted virtually everywhere that, to paraphrase Professor John MacBeath, schools must speak for themselves. Virtually every education system in seeking to make a reality of this proposal is in the process of designing teacher and school evaluation systems predicated on the concept of self-evaluation. Part two of this work shows that Ireland is in common with so many other countries engaged in exactly this process. However from this research it is clear, as it also is in many other countries, that self-evaluation will not happen simply because it is mentioned in documents. There must be a concerted effort to inculcate the values and methodologies of self-evaluation through specific, targeted training programmes during initial teacher education programmes and continuing professional development. Part three of the work describes one such project. It shows beyond doubt that practitioners quickly come to see immense developmental potential and possibilities of empowerment through the process of investigating their own practice.

This has also been shown to be true in other similar projects. However unfortunately research also shows that these processes are hard to sustain since isolation and lack of ongoing motivation seems to gradually erode early enthusiasm for reflection and self study.

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