

Pedagogy: What's my purpose?

An investigation of the impact of the learning community Institute
professional activities on pedagogical practices across a rural Catholic
Schools system.

Submitted by

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This work is dedicated
to the memory of my Dad
Kenneth Mowett
1926 – 1997

and my Grandson
Mac Kenny Joseph Smith
Stillborn 5 March 2008

R.I.P.

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Statement of Sources

This study contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or part from a thesis by which I qualified for or was awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety committees.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'K. D. Mowett', with a long horizontal flourish extending from the end of the name.

K. D. Mowett
19th June 2011

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to report the impact of the pedagogical processes and organisational changes made as a result of professional learning strategies that have been adopted and developed by the Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office (CSO) primary schools. Since 1994, more than 95% of primary school teachers of the twenty seven primary schools in the Wagga Wagga CSO system of schools have participated in a targeted and intensive professional learning program called an "Institute". Within each Institute, participant teachers were encouraged to adapt and implement learning community philosophies and strategies under the direction of external consultants. From these activities, a CSO core document, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* was developed, which defined the principles and practices for effective learning and teaching to be adopted within all CSO schools.

This study investigates how the Learning Communities Institute became a means of effecting educational change. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was employed to collect data for this research. Teachers, students and parents were provided with an opportunity to reflect, dialogue and comment on their experiences of effective learning and teaching strategies identified in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

The data collected for this investigation indicated that varying degrees of success were observed in pockets across CSO primary schools. Where the Institute experience was followed by spaced, on-site follow-up and professional dialogue with the external consultants over a period of time, teachers became confident and prepared to take risks by embedding the learning and teaching principles and practices of *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* into their classroom structure and planning. It was also observed that these pockets of success were found in schools where the principal was leading and supporting the school's learning community journey. Additionally it was found that attending an Institute alone does not guarantee educational change. This experience, however, gave participants strong professional support. This was seen in the context of the study to promote collaborative leadership practices which have in time led to substantive educational change within the Wagga Wagga system of Catholic Schools. Change becomes a reality when there was a whole school approach to learning and teaching supported by collaborative leadership practices, structures and encouragement, while at the same time accompanied by system leadership, financial and policy support.

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Definition of Terms

Cadre: a support group for teachers who trialled and modelled ideas and practices to further create and maintain effective learning and teaching communities.

Clan: a Learning Community Institute term to describe a small group who would work, discuss, plan and share ideas during the Institute.

CSO: Catholic Schools Office (Diocese of Wagga Wagga)

Covenant: an agreement between the CSO and Principal that supports mutual professional development, care and commitment. A document that replaces the traditional employment contract and duty statement.

Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP): provided additional Commonwealth funds for identified schools to engage in professional activities.

Documentary Evidence: is gained from documents that were not prepared specifically in response to some requests from the researcher.

Learning Community: is a group where all members (students, staff and parents) are seen as learners. They work together towards a common end. All members are respected and all contributions valued. Such groups are inclusive and reflective. In a learning community, a group of people build quality relationships together for a purpose in an environment of trust, support and challenge. It is part of a lifelong journey.

Learning Community Institute (LCI): a five-day professional learning program conducted by the CSO and Hands on Consultancy within the Diocese of Wagga Wagga. Teachers develop, model and experience immersion in the practical skills and strategies and increased understandings associated with learning communities.

Middle Years of Schooling: is the designated stage of schooling that caters for the developmental needs of young adolescents. In New South Wales, it is Years 5 – 8 of schooling.

PLOT: Professional Learning On-line Tool sponsored by Education Queensland at [http:// www.plotpd.com](http://www.plotpd.com)

Project Advisory Team (PAT): an invited group of key stakeholders designed to meet on a regular basis to discuss, reflect, and provide feedback, support and planning during the research and analysis phase of this research activity.

School Executive: the Primary School Executive consists of the Principal, Deputy/Assistant Principal, Religious Education Co-ordinator, Infants' Co-ordinator and Primary Co-ordinator.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Catholic Schools Office Wagga Wagga Learning Community History

The Catholic Schools Office (CSO) Wagga Wagga, NSW, manages twenty-seven primary schools and five secondary schools in a rural setting. Since 1994, there has been a program creating structures for a school system and school communities which value the principles and practices of Learning Communities. This initiative resulted in the CSO publishing a core statement, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* which documents its principles and practices of effective learning and teaching. It was expected that these published strategies would be observed in the classrooms of the CSO system of schools.

In the two years prior to 1994, the Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office undertook a review of its primary school operations. The primary schools consultant report to the Wagga Wagga Catholic Education Commission, an advisory committee to the Bishop, had indicated that the Catholic Schools Office primary schools were operating (traditional classrooms being content driven and teacher-focused classrooms) The report further recommended that there was a need to engage our teachers in a range of professional learning experiences which would transform classroom learning and teaching and emphasise the pedagogical focus on the learner rather than the curriculum content. (Wagga Wagga Catholic Education Commission Meeting Paper 5. July 1993) The problem for the Catholic Schools Office was about the learning in their

schools. It was not about the learning of the content of the curriculum, rather the delivery of the curriculum and the use of a range of engaging pedagogical strategies that would change classroom practice.

The beginning of this professional development strategy for the CSO came through the initiative of the Catholic Schools Office primary schools consultant. Four small rural schools wished to learn about co-operative learning and these schools attracted a Disadvantaged Schools Program grant from the Federal Government to explore co-operative learning. A professional consultancy organisation, "Hands On Consultancy", (Appendix 1), was contracted to facilitate a professional learning program that focused on co-operative learning strategies. The program was run over four weekends, one per term over two years, commencing in 1994. In between the weekend workshops, the consulting group provided in-school visits and expressed needs of participants from the four schools. These needs revolved around mentoring co-operative learning strategies, classroom lesson observations and reflective conversations about classroom management and practices, and participating in focused staff and parent meetings about co-operative learning and collaborative classroom practices. During the second year of the program, other Diocesan schools expressed an interest in this process and so two program centres were established, one in the nearby rural centre of Albury and the other in Wagga Wagga. Teachers from all over the Diocese attended workshops voluntarily during 1995. During 1996, a Disadvantaged School Program conference, called an Institute, was held in a centre near Wagga Wagga for those teachers who wished to familiarise themselves with concepts of Learning Communities.

At the same time the NSW Department of School Education released a discussion paper in 1995 entitled '*Schools as Learning Communities*'. In the foreword to this discussion paper, Ken Boston, at that time Director General of School Education, wrote: "*This paper is designed to challenge us to think more about our assumptions and current practices and to promote the building of learning communities throughout all sectors of the Department as a basis for enhancing professional development and student learning outcomes.*"

The discussion paper was well grounded in research and clearly described the learning community concept. In this discussion paper, the transformation potential of Learning Communities for Schools was reported as characterised by a shift in our mental model from "some learn" to "all learn", a reconsideration of current understanding of learning, the learning process and the learner, and the development of an understanding of and commitment to the concept of team learning (*Schools as Learning Communities* 1995:4).

The *Schools as Learning Communities* paper was intended to be a focus for discussion at all levels within the NSW Department of Education and its schools across the State. *Schools as Learning Communities* became politicised the following year. Questions were raised in the NSW Parliament about the concept of Learning Communities and, as a consequence, the discussion paper was not supported and was withdrawn. Nonetheless, the Department of Education's discussion paper, along with what had already been done in the CSO Schools, formed the substance of a CSO-organised three-day conference into Learning Communities. With funding supplied to the CSO through the Disadvantaged Schools Program, the conference was facilitated by the CSO Primary School Consultant and the 'Hands On' Consultancy group. Principals, teachers and

CSO personnel were involved. This was the first time within the system of Diocesan schools that an initiative and conference about learning had been undertaken by the CSO. One outcome of this conference was that the CSO decided to support the first Learning Communities Institute later that same year, 1996. It is worth noting that as recently as July 2007, the Director-General of New South Wales Department of Education and Training again raised the concept of Learning Communities, claiming that the learning community represents the future of schooling in New South Wales, offering broader curriculum and re-energising teaching. (Patty 2007:3). As outlined earlier in this chapter, this supported the 1995 calls by the then Director General of School Education for NSW, to commit schools to becoming learning communities.

In June 2000, the CSO officially launched a publication entitled: *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* (Appendix 2). This document is subtitled: *Principles and practices for learning and teaching in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga*. It is organised into the following sections: Rationale: Guiding principles for the adults our children will need to become; Learning Communities: a 'big picture' framework; Effective learning and teaching practices. (CSO Wagga Wagga 2000).

The document clarifies the commitment to achieving a system of Catholic schools which prepares students for the future and lifelong learning in a particular way: through the educational experience of being part of a learning community, guided by recognisable principles and practices. This document lays out the long-term goals teachers and principals share for their students, and the pedagogy necessary to implement and achieve that purpose.

The significance of this framework as stated in '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*', (CSO Wagga Wagga 2000), was the transition from voluntary involvement in Learning Communities to an expectation that teachers and schools would actively support Learning Community theory and practice. There was no longer an invitation to 'try things' but an explicit expectation of participation and effort towards becoming a Learning Community. After almost ten years of support through a professional learning and development initiative by the CSO, that challenge to change, according to Goonan (2001), was timely. This support will need to be maintained as schools work to continue to transform themselves into learning communities through the understandings and practice of the '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*' pedagogy. (Goonan 2001)

The research problem revolves around the intention of the CSO to embark on an innovative project to change traditional learning and teaching in classrooms. Traditional methods of teaching found in the classrooms of the Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office primary schools, as documented in the Wagga Wagga Catholic Education Commission Meeting papers of July, 1993 is defined as teacher-focused and determined, with no classroom input from parents, students or peers. Further, it is "where teachers teach defensively and control knowledge in order to control students" (Marsh 2010:355). This is the situation that the Learning Community Institute professional learning experience aimed to challenge and change.

The CSO have indicated that their preferred strategy is for schools to become a learning community. This has been supported by the publication of a document about

the principles and practices of effective learning communities called *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*. There has been an expectation that teachers within their primary schools would adopt and implement these CSO identified practices.

1.2 Context of the Study

The CSO, through its own internal review system, conducted by the Primary School consultant and reported in the Catholic Education Commission Meeting papers, July 1993, had recognised and identified that the majority of primary school teachers were operating in isolation. Within each school environment, teachers were developing, for example, their own learning and teaching programs, assessment activities and codes of classroom behaviour. There was a general lack of cohesion, and whole school policies, philosophy and procedures, especially for learning and teaching, were absent. Under the auspices of the CSO and with the collaboration of principals, teachers and parents, the cultures of twenty seven local Catholic primary schools have been undergoing changes designed to apply the principles that support good practice implicit in the knowledge of what works well and what is needed for future success. These principles focus on inquiry, constructivist learning, human development, collaboration, communication and self-responsibility that is congruent with Catholic Christian values and is nestled within the concept of a student centred "learning community" (Stoll and Lewis 2007).

Goonan (2001) claims that gradually from 1994, staff, students, parents, the CSO Consultants and Education Officers became actively involved in this co-operative learning venture. Since 1994, the Wagga Wagga primary systemic schools have undergone a program of change. Every primary school and the majority of the primary

teachers have been involved in a series of professional learning and development exercises presented as a CSO initiative known as Learning Community 'Institutes'. Goonan further states that there were some observable changes where the local primary school organisations re-conceptualised themselves into effective learning communities, resulting in the collaborative development and publication of a statement of beliefs about effective learning and teaching principles and practices called '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*'. Observations by the principals and CSO staff highlighted a view that the philosophy of inclusiveness, building relationships, support and community were not being met by the traditional learning and teaching methods. Across the Wagga Wagga CSO system of schools, students were taught in the traditional teacher-centred way, which followed a highly structured scope and sequence of knowledge and skills with a strong emphasis on 'getting through the curriculum', completing the traditional half-yearly and yearly activities as their major form of assessment, as well as participating in an ever growing and extensive range of sports and extra curricula activities.

At the same time as this CSO initiative was commencing, but unknown to the CSO, a national project undertaken in Australia in 1993 by the Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training identified and funded a number of projects of national significance. Of special interest were the research projects completed on student alienation. It has emerged from these projects, and from international studies, that traditional school structures and classroom strategies used as a basis for the learning and teaching process were preventing many students from achieving their potential (Cormack 1996). These national project about student alienation concluded that there was a need to improve learning environments and provide better curriculum articulation, and enhanced pedagogy and organisation that

was flexible and appropriate. These conclusions became a focus for the CSO to explore options for improving learning and teaching through the Learning Community Institute process.

Consultants (Appendix 1) were engaged by the Diocese to introduce to teachers an interactive model of learning and teaching. At the start of the activity, teachers in the Wagga Wagga CSO schools referred to these styles of learning and teaching as co-operative learning, then collaborative learning, and more recently, learning communities (Goonan 2001). To date, there has been no study and investigation of these professional learning activities to establish if this approach has been successful for effecting sustained change.

In addition to the developments with the school communities, the CSO took steps to align its own practices more closely to the practices of a learning community in order to substantially progress this learning community philosophy. There are a number of school system changes that are worthy of identification. Mid-way through 1998, a new Director of Schools was appointed. Over a relatively short period of time, the new Director achieved a significant change in the culture of the CSO. The movement towards schools as learning communities was maintained and enhanced after his appointment. The CSO began a plan to reshape itself into a learning community that would interface with the schools and personnel of the Diocese in a way consistent with the philosophy of learning communities. Structure, practices and processes demonstrated a greater congruence with learning communities. In tandem with this change was the creation of a new vision and mission statement for the CSO that was arrived at through wide consultation and collaboration with every school community of

the Wagga Wagga CSO. The notion of service to church, students, families, and school staff underpinned these statements and demonstrated a significant change in the direction and operation of the CSO.

This change in Catholic Schools Office leadership direction and the explicit professional learning support for the learning community philosophy added the energy, passion and commitment of the Catholic Schools Office consultants and school staff to be encouraged to actively engage in the Learning Community Institute experience.

There was a sharp edge to the restructuring of the CSO. Some senior CSO staff were made redundant. The roles and responsibilities of others were changed for the purpose of attempting to deliver better, less bureaucratic service to schools. Rather than there being one primary schools consultant with responsibility for twenty-seven schools, the Diocese was nominally divided into two sectors and an education consultant appointed to each sector with responsibility for schools. A Secondary Schools Consultant, who focused on supporting the five secondary schools within the Diocese of Wagga Wagga, was also appointed. The creation of a new Learning and Teaching Officer position followed. Previously there had been some 'specialist' consultants for special education, literacy, mathematics, and information technology. These personnel were all reappointed as Learning and Teaching Officers with a wide brief to assist schools achieve their goals to becoming effective learning communities. Other additional support positions were established as the need arose. The CSO began to introduce a range of measures, promoted through the work of the Learning Community Institute that targeted more explicitly students with additional needs, Aboriginal students and using funding for inclusiveness, with a focus on collaborative learning, literacy and

numeracy. Additionally, each school developed a Parent Council as an advisory body to the Principal, and to help build, maintain and understand the 'big picture' of the purpose of schooling.

There has been an investigation of the concept of 'covenant' between the organisation and the individual as opposed to traditional contracts for principals. This idea is supported in the work of Sergiovanni (1996) and Cotter (2003), who explain that a covenant consists of statements of individual responsibility and a commitment to share responsibility as a member of the community. These changes were built into principals' contracts where the contract is a small part of a relationship. "*A complete relationship needs a covenant ... a conventional relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals and to management processes ...*" (Senge P. 1998:145). The term 'covenant' has a biblical as well as a legal connotation. Previous contractual arrangements specified an initial contract period of five years with appraisal during the fourth year. Successful appraisal of the principal led to a further contract of five years being offered. During this second contract period, appraisal was set for the fourth year. (That is the ninth year of tenure.) There was the expectation that principals would move after the second contract period. This move may have been within the Diocese but that would be the result of application and successful interview. The mooted change to contracts for principals is underpinned by the principle of reciprocity and relationship. A mutually agreed covenant, which specifies what the employer can expect from the employee and what the employee can expect from the employer, is under development. None of the award protections are displaced. The period of tenure for the Principal is not specified in terms of years, as the covenant is entered into for as long as both parties remain faithful to their part of the agreement. A representative group of principals met with

CSO senior staff and the Director of Schools, to develop the idea and examine the practical consequences of this new arrangement. These changes illuminate the context of the schools and the CSO Wagga Wagga at this point in time.

Likewise, movements internationally have influenced educational reform. A major initiative in North America has been the Effective Schools Movement (Lezotte and Cipriano-Pepperi 2001), Character Education Partnership (Davidson 2004), while in Singapore, the Thinking School, Learning Nation Initiative (Senge 2000) has promoted greater awareness of learning and teaching strategies aimed at raising the performance levels of students in the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions. These reform frameworks, and the learning community philosophy, apply common themes and key dimensions (Bliss, Firestone, Richards 1991).

Within Australia, the Tasmanian government produced *Essential Learnings* (2001), the Victorian government released its *Blueprint for Government Schools* (2003), and Education Queensland published *New Basics* (2003) in which it is recognised that schools of the future will be places where students will develop a positive attitude towards all areas of learning. Similarly, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training launched the Futures Project (2004) to review public education for the future. Thus, national and international studies have influenced CSO attempts to develop a framework for pedagogical change in their schools.

It is through the learning community experiences and the development and publication of 'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults' framework document that the CSO Wagga

Wagga primary schools have attempted to articulate a set of beliefs, values and principles that drive their learning and teaching agenda. This, according to Goonan (2001), has now resulted in the engagement of primary school teachers in understanding and articulating a particular focus on pedagogy as documented in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

On the international scene, Lezotte and Cipriano-Pepperi (2001) found that the North American schools participating in the Effective Schools Movement likewise indicated that there existed a commitment to developing a learning community as a way to encourage genuine reform, improve learning and enhance teacher professionalism.

The view that a learning community approach to schooling improves the learning environment, provides better curriculum articulation and enhances pedagogy and school organisation, is further reinforced by the work of Giles and Hargraves (2006), Young and Braund (2007), Avenell (2007), Topper (1995), Cumming (1998), Earl (2003), Arnold (2000) and the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (2000). Additionally, it was found that learning community approaches encourage schools to seek flexibility and relevance in the way in which schools organise themselves to deliver curriculum outcomes to students.

In particular, the research supported by Geijsel and Meijers (2005), Lezotte (1991), Topper (1995), Cumming (1998) and Earl (2003), identified student needs to include: identifying (knowing who I am), building (feeling like I belong), empowering (thinking and acting confidently), promoting success (confirming that I can do certain things well), promoting rigour (feeling appropriately extended), and promoting safety

(knowing I will be all right). These recognised needs align with those identified by the supporters of learning communities, such as Retallick (1999), Lashway (1998), Hearfield (2001), Simpson (2003), Norman (2000) and Stoll and Lewis (2007). Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office primary schools, in adopting reform, have likewise identified goals for their school communities that are supportive of the learning community philosophy. In the learning community model, students are seen as having opportunities to learn, relate and grow in ways that recognise and respect their unique and special phase of development. Students are also seen as having particular characteristics as well as personal, social and learning needs. Among these is the students' need to become independent and competent in a fast changing world so that they have a sense of themselves as thinking, knowledgeable people who relate well to others. As Cummings (1998:15) states:

"Schools should be founded on a commitment by teachers to advance the learning capacity of all students and to achieve outcomes that are meaningful and beneficial to their students."

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to establish whether the Wagga Wagga CSO primary teachers' participation in the Learning Community Institute as a professional learning and development strategy impacted on teaching practices and understandings and influenced their classroom and school adoption of the effective teaching practices documented in the CSO document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

A variety of data collection instruments were used, and included semi-structured individual interviews with CSO Education Officers, principals and teachers; a survey

issued to primary school teachers; and group interviews with parents and senior primary students. Based on the data collected, the research problem for this thesis is thus to determine whether Learning Community strategies and teaching practices make meaningful changes to the educational experiences of students compared to the current pedagogical practices. Very little qualitative or quantitative data existed that measured the quality of learning and teaching across the Catholic Schools Office schools prior to the 1990s.

The need for change grew from the Catholic Schools Office Consultant and a number of principals and staff who had, over time, voiced concerns about some classroom practices. Additionally, there was an emergence of a growing sense of identity and community which developed as religious congregations gradually departed from Parish schools, and the CSO took greater control over and influence in the administration of schools.

The various data gathering instruments were used as a means of collecting information about the success of Learning Community Institutes and the engagement of teachers with what had been identified in the publication *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* as effective learning and teaching practices.

1.4 Research Problem

The major purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the learning community Institute process on teacher practice and to establish the extent to which the effective learning strategies as outlined in the CSO document *'Today's*

Children, Tomorrow's Adults' have been operationalised within the primary school classrooms across the CSO system of schools.

1.5 Significance of the Study

There has been no rigorous investigation of the CSO Learning Community project since its inception in 1994. This study and investigation will critique, for the first time, the contextualised Learning Community project developed by the CSO, as a professional learning model which assists teachers to engage with, and sustain effective classroom pedagogical practices in a rural Australian Catholic context.

Through careful analysis of quantative and qualitative data collected from participants in the Learning Community Institutes, this study is designed to provide feedback that will empower educators to make judgments regarding the use of strategies that may assist a school transform itself into an effective organisation that focuses on the learning, growth and development of young people. This study and investigation will explore the impact of the interaction called an Institute on how teachers experience classroom learning and teaching, as well as their use and understanding of effective learning and teaching strategies. Given the commonality of Australian schooling, the learning and teaching experiences by the teachers and students in the Wagga Wagga CSO schools can have broad application for classrooms, schools and teachers elsewhere.

1.6 Conclusion

This study will establish a comprehensive body of knowledge concerning effective learning and teaching strategies and the impact of the intervention strategy known as

the Learning Community Institutes for the Wagga Wagga CSO system of schools, to draw on. It will provide implications for other research, and will generate professional learning, reflection and dialogue and will develop resources for future use by other rural school communities wishing to embrace learning community concepts and enhance learning and teaching. Additionally, this research is significant in that there has been no qualitative or quantitative study and investigation of the learning community approach as applied to Catholic systemic primary schools within the Australian context. Such an investigation will be provided in this study.

The next chapter will explore the literature related to the field of school reform.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of current research relating to contemporary ideals that create the philosophical basis for schools to operate as a Learning Community. It will also examine an overview of effective schools research which has helped to identify those pedagogical strategies and dimensions that have been proven to make a difference, in the classroom and beyond, to student learning growth. Additionally, the review of literature focuses on identifying appropriate professional learning strategies to assist teachers to reflect on their learning and teaching strategies and to implement sustained pedagogical change.

Within the CSO Wagga Wagga's primary schools, the learning community philosophy and the involvement of teachers in Learning Community Institutes was the model utilised to engage teachers in professional dialogue about learning and teaching, and to effect educational change in the classroom. The CSO's promotion of pedagogical change through Learning Community Institutes processes has been reinforced by many contributors nationally and internationally to the discussion and support for new models pedagogy.

This literature search on educational change and reform uncovered a range of views relating to effective schools and learning communities. This chapter has been arranged

into three key themes covering Pedagogical Effectiveness, Schools as Community, and Professional Learning for Sustained Change.

2.2 Pedagogical Effectiveness

Changing social needs has Australia moving into a knowledge and services based society. This has created pressures on schools to adapt to these changes. Giles and Hargreaves (2006), McNeill and Silcox (2006), Avenell (2007) and Hough (2004) envisage that for schools to be successful, survive and thrive in a change-based society, they need to adopt the characteristics commonly associated with a learning organisation. Further, it is advocated by Kimonen and Nevalainen (2005), that schools need to become active learning organisations where collaborative partnerships are developed and encouraged among students and teaching staff. It is agreed that these are the schools that can adapt and change.

Rapid changes in society today have been linked to the explosion of information and the growth and expansion of technology. This has caused educators to reconsider their views and images of schools as organisations. Wide and diverse educational change processes have been attempted locally and internationally, (Australian Curriculum Studies Association Inc. 2001; Catholic Education Office Sydney 2005; Education Queensland 2003; Effective School Movement 2001; Kosky 2003; NSW Board of Studies 2002; Tasmanian Government 2001; Victorian Government 2003) and all tend to share similar characteristics in their pedagogical initiatives in an effort to improve the quality of school learning and teaching. The constant message of these processes, according to Hargreaves and Goodsan (2006), is that our images of schools will need to

change if we are to meet the challenges of the information and service society of the 21st century.

Nationally and internationally researchers were contributing to a range of ideas that were supporting a greater emphasis and understanding of the learning and teaching process. Additionally, the researchers were beginning to identify strategies for organisational change that would further support effective classroom learning and teaching.

21st century learners were referred to by Senge (2007) at the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) International Conference, Sydney, Australia, as the 'net generation' who learn differently. This idea was further explored at the same conference by Michael Furdyk (2007) who indicated that the 21st century learner was concerned with multiprocessing, multimedia literacies, discovery based learning and action, being digitally connected, looking for recognition and interdependence while exploring self-determination and supporting diversity and tolerance. Additionally, these learners showed compassion for others by supporting rights and interests, respect and integrity. These learners were also active co-learners and collaboratively demonstrated self-responsibility and passion for what they believed.

Loretta Giorcelli (2002) and Chapman et. al. (2005) had likewise supported a similar view and believe that the 21st century demands students be lifelong learners who are more imaginative, creative, speculative, innovative, critical and ethical in their thinking, conciliatory and negotiable, independent, team oriented, diagnostic and research savvy,

able to project consequences as well as being able to project into the feelings of others. Similarly, Australian Council of Deans of Education (2001) states that twenty first century learners will be able to navigate change and diversity, learn as they go, solve problems, collaborate and be flexible and creative.

The US Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report (1991) likewise attempted to address an understanding of the skills and knowledge that students will need for the 21st century. This report indicated that students need to be able to direct their own learning, communicate and work with people from diverse backgrounds and views, and develop ways of dealing with complex issues and problems that require different kinds of expertise. Senge (2000) further adds to this challenge by suggesting that schools need to educate students to be continually prepared for the future. However, such challenges include, for the most part, skills and ideas that are not being promoted currently by many educators, in our competitive, teacher-centred traditional classrooms. These findings are reflected across Australian state education systems as they attempt reform, and can be found in the reports of, for instance, Education Department of Western Australia (1998), Department of Education and Training NSW (2005), NSW Board of Studies (2002) and Education Queensland (2003).

There is frequent evidence that students blame their dissatisfaction with learning and teaching on their teachers, (Edwards 1991, Goonan 2001) who reduce learning to a process of 'force feeding' curriculum into the minds of young people for measurable assessment strategies, rather than developing an atmosphere of creativity, joy and love of learning and teaching. Goonan (2001) further suggested that the Wagga Wagga CSO

wanted to make a difference to the lives of young people in their primary classrooms by changing the focus on what students learn to how students learn.

Bourke (2001), Hayes (2006) and Kosky (2003), for example, supported the views that by recognising the kind of world in which our present students will be adults, educators are charged with the responsibility of preparing young people to thrive in a world characterised by rapid and accelerating change, an amazing explosion of information and choices, and an urgent need for people and nations to work together for worthwhile, ethical purposes. Likewise, the researches of Kruse (1998), The Learning Federation (2006), Victorian Government (2003), Hayes (2006) and Education Queensland (2003) also indicate that these are challenges for educators. Traditional theories and practices of learning and teaching are being challenged with ideas from a variety of theoretical bases, including the Effective Schools Movement, Charter Schools, Learning Communities, Constructivist Learning Theory and Learning Organisation Research.

School improvement research intertwines with organisational development, research and practice, and has assisted our present understandings of learning processes and schools. Fullan (2001) synthesises the views of educational change and identifies school capacity and system sustainability as the means to ensure sustainable educational reform. School capacity refers to teacher knowledge and skills and professionalism, curriculum and material resources, supported by principal leadership, while sustainability refers to the system-supported training, resourcing, incentives and recognition of the efforts of the change process.

Effective educators, including primary and secondary school classroom teachers, generate momentum, working purposefully to expand understanding and links of how learning works. Carlin (2002:173) explains the work of such educators

“They are passionate about learning and have a knack for engaging students in that passion. In the classroom learning becomes collaborative where individuals begin to search for insights, patterns and strategies for working purposefully and creatively, while enjoying the experiences. Effective learning and teaching is about how the learning community gathers and applies knowledge and skills. It is where students have opportunities for deeper understanding and integration while interacting with one another and teachers.”

In supporting the view of Carlin, above, Senge (1998) explains that through learning, we recreate ourselves by extending ourselves and our understandings of the skills needed to facilitate this process. As humans, this is the generative and essential process of life, as learning occurs within a social context. Knowledge is shared socially by members of the community. Edwards (2001) states that there is a reservoir of talented creativity that can be found in all individuals. This view of learning represents a fundamental change from the more traditional theories of learning. Learning is a process of knowledge construction, not knowledge recording or absorption. Learning becomes knowledge dependent, and individuals are able to use their existing knowledge to construct new knowledge. Edwards (2001) further indicates that constructivist learning represents a fundamental change from memorising data and facts found in the more traditional learning theories, and offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how humans think and learn. Constructivist learning, as described by Geijssel and Meijers (2005), contributes significantly to the understanding of the learning process and has provided a basis for the Wagga Wagga CSO's statement about effective learning and teaching, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

Constructivist learning occurs when individuals develop their own new understandings through interaction with knowledge already internalised. As the word suggests, it is a building process. Many believe that learning occurs through social interaction where individuals are actively engaged and often included in inquiry thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration with others. (Topper, 1995; Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Richardson, 1997; Abdal-Haqq, 1998).

Additionally, researchers believe there is a body of knowledge developed from various sources that gives direction in developing more effective schools for all students. The literature (Fullan 2000, Retallick 1996, Senge 1998) suggests that schools can become more effective in promoting student learning if they focus on the principles and strategies of learning organisations. This view is further supported by Hall and Shieh (1998), who understand that for schools to focus on effectiveness in a rapidly changing world, they need to develop a set of collective norms and beliefs that enhance interpersonal relationships within a learning organisation. Relationships, according to Geijsel and Meijers (2005), develop through participation, leadership and dialogue which assist in a deepening of individual and group understanding about the nature and process of effective learning.

A further aspect, according to Aspin and Chapman (1999), Bartunek (2003), Butt (1999) and Dalton (1996), is developing personal interactions and positive relationships enable learning to take place in individuals, teams and the organisation, and even within the communities with which the organisation interacts. Similar views are presented in the works of Hough (2002), Khamis (2004), Norman (2000), Retallick (1999) and Lashway (1998), who found that the relationship between teachers were

very influential on developing a classroom where challenging student learning can occur in a safe and supportive environment.

Senge (1998) argues that a learning organisation is an organisation that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future. The school approach to being an organisation can have a significant impact on its attempt at educational change. Geijsel and Meijers (2005) indicated that when the focus of educational change is to create a more effective learning environment, this can be assisted by the organisational structures operating within the school. Additionally, Geijsel and Meijers support the view that by creating a strong learning environment, teachers and school leaders will be assisted in implementing change, and thus are able to engage students in the educational change process more effectively. Learning needs to be the core purpose, the focus of a school. This purpose should be driven by school and system leaders as well as classroom teachers. It should permeate every level of the learning organisation.

Johnson (1995) uses a definition by Senge (1990:14) to provide readers with a deeper understanding of learning organisations:

“... an organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where people are continually learning how to learn together.”

This is again supported by Garvin (1993) and Stacey (1992) who understand learning organisations to create and transfer knowledge and to be continually modifying and re-ordering themselves to reflect their new understandings and insights. This is Constructivist learning in action.

The pedagogical initiatives identified in the above research for schools to improve learning and teaching result from professional reflections and dialogue, skills development and interactions focusing on students and the understanding of the learning and teaching process. Ellsworth (2000) explains that by uniting a range of tactics into a systematic strategy, schools can improve their chances of effective and lasting change. Gordon (2001) in his research on educational change also found that through collaboration, opportunities are provided for improving learning and teaching.

These resulting understandings are based on shared vision, where school community members have committed to, rather than having to comply with, the shared values and norms of the learning organisation. Co-operation and collaboration develop as the school journeys and adapts its understanding of what it means to be a learning organisation. These viewpoints have been influential in encouraging the CSO to undertake its educational project to revitalise learning and teaching across its system of schools. This study will investigate the extent to which the interactive professional activities of the teachers through the Institutes, and the publication of the CSO core statement identifying effective learning and teaching practices, have assisted or hindered the improvement of learning and teaching in the classrooms.

Obstacles are likely to be encountered as schools attempt to effect lasting change. Ellsworth (2000) mentions that some resistance will occur as individuals see change as eroding their status, or lack the knowledge and skills to make the desired changes. Opposition may also come from those holding entrenched beliefs and values, or from a

lack of confidence that the school is capable of such changes. This investigation will gather details and identify the personal and structural inhibitors to pedagogical initiatives designed to stimulate educational change.

Elements of effective learning and teaching have been the focus of much discussion, observation and research during the past decade. It is interesting to note the similarities that exist in the literature regarding what elements contribute to effective schools. Table 1, below, summarises from the literature the various elements of effective schools, using the organising themes as a strategy to systematically unite a range of pedagogically related elements identified by the researcher, as community, collaboration, connectedness, curriculum and capacity as a measure of comparison.

These elements, listed in Table 1, form the basis of understanding a significant number of characteristics of successful learning communities and should be considered by teachers and school leaders as they engage students in purposeful learning, enhanced through relationships which support and challenge learning growth. They provide schools, teachers and individuals with a framework for reflecting on and strengthening their pedagogical practices and to ask themselves “what’s my purpose” when considering their own pedagogical beliefs and practices. These dimensions provide a different language to that being undertaken in the current CSO’s core statement *‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’*. There is a significant alignment between the identified dimensions in the CSO publication with the range of characteristics identified by various researchers, in Table 1, in the recognition of conditions necessary for effective schools. Additionally, there is a general agreement that the goals for developing schools as communities are also supportive of the learning communi

Dimensions of Learning and Teaching	Community	Collaboration	Connection	Capacity	Curriculum
Hearfield 2001	Learner centred Community oriented	Collaboratively organized	Ethically aware Strategically linked	Adequately resourced	Outcomes based Flexible
Campbell 2004	Deep commitment	Enthusiasm	Passionate concern for young people		Innovative and co-operative teaching practices
De Courcy 2006	Relationships	Passion	Feedback to students		Time on tasks
Lezotte & Cupriano-Pepperi 2001	Safe and orderly environment	Clear focused mission	Positive home-school relationships	Instructional leadership	High expectations for success Opportunities to learn Student time on task Frequent monitoring of student progress
Beare 2001	Shared vision	Student rights & responsibilities honoured	Strong home-school relationships	Professional leadership	Focus on learning Regular monitoring & assessment Purposeful teaching High expectations
Education Department of WA 1998	Supportive learning environment	Action & reflection Independence & collaboration	Connection & challenge Motivation & purpose Exclusivity & Difference		Opportunities to learn
PLOT 2005	Supportive environment	Inclusivity	Understanding the needs of the learner Development of skills & transfer of knowledge	Intellectual quality	Understanding pedagogy
Retallick 1996	Empowering individuals to a collective vision	Promoting enquiry & dialogue Encouraging collaboration & team-building	Connecting school to its environment	Creating continuous learning opportunities	Capture & share learning
Gore et. al. 2004	Supportive classroom environment	Working with, and valuing differences	Connectedness		Intellectual quality
Department of Education and Training Victoria 2006	Supportive & productive learning environment	Promotes independence, interdependence & self-motivation	Learning connects strongly with communities & practice beyond the classroom	Students challenged and supported to develop deeper thinking & application	Student needs, background, perspectives, interested reflected in learning program Assessment integrated into learning & teaching
ASCD 2007	Safe & orderly environment Classroom management	Collegiality & professionalism Motivation	Challenging goals & effective feedback Parent & community involvement Home environment	Classroom curriculum design Learned intelligence & background knowledge	Guaranteed & viable curriculum Instructional strategies

Table 1: Learning and Teaching Dimensions Literature Comparisons

philosophy, including engaged, focused, achieving adults and students who require genuine partnership and long term support, and effective curriculum, teaching and organisational practices.

There is a strong belief, according to Lorna (2000), that learning can be controlled and enhanced by focusing attempts to make sense of information, by relating it to prior knowledge and by mastering the skills that are involved through the leadership and delivery of quality pedagogy. This view is further illustrated by the PLOT (2004) approach shown in Figure 1: Effective Learning and Teaching.

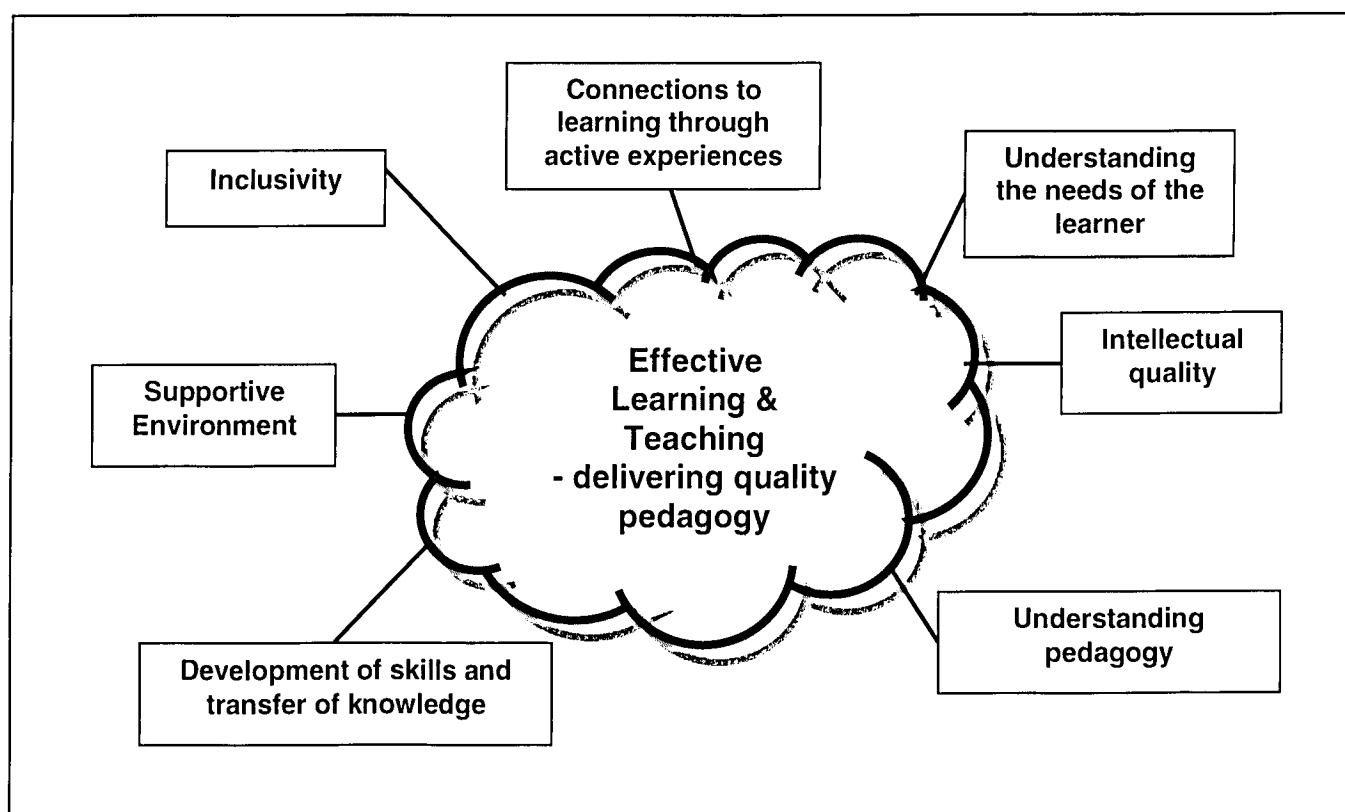


Figure 1: Effective Learning and Teaching

Effective learning and teaching requires a set of conditions to create a learning environment where students will obtain maximum benefit from the learning and teaching process. Figure 1 identifies those requirements that set learners and teachers up for success.

At the heart of it all however, is pedagogy, and as Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2003:300) argue, that it “needs to be the core of the professional culture of schools.” A teacher is the main agent within their classroom, and can make a difference in their students’ lives through valuing an ideology of a pedagogy that not only looks good in theory, but can be applied practically and productively, within the classroom setting. According to Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard (2006:37) “good social outcomes are more likely to be achieved by classroom practices that are intellectually demanding, connected to the students’ worlds beyond schools and socially supportive than by socially supportive classroom alone.” Over the years, factors about what should constitute pedagogy have been analysed and deconstructed. In recent times, long-term research about pedagogy has been conducted. The findings of Newman and Associates (1996) in the USA are one example, and the other the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) by Lingard et. al. (2001) in Australia, which ‘makes an assessment of what can be achieved by schools and teachers.” (Lingard, Hayes and Mills, 2003:407)

Our current society is a knowledge-based one. Thus, a constructivist pedagogy is essential in assisting students and teachers in becoming empowered through their exchanges in a classroom environment by articulating their thinking and transforming what they have learnt into new understanding of the world they live in.

In addition to using a constructivist pedagogical approach, a collaborative classroom environment is also particularly important, because it encourages students to be active members of their classroom community, and is able to take charge and construct their own meanings of the material given to them. A collaborative classroom environment will, according to Keddle (2006:104) “increase the authenticity of school work by

constructing a classroom environment that reflects more closely the outside world.” It could be argued that every student interprets given information in different ways depending on their experiences. An environment that fosters collaborative learning is one that will also assist students in their practical life, where they will have to communicate in a variety of ways, with a variety of individuals of different abilities and ideologies.

Brophy (1999:5-33), in his work on effective teaching, gives “supportive classroom environment” and the creation of the “opportunity to learn” as two essentials in his 12 principles of effective teaching. There is a consensus in the literature that in order to effectively engage students with learning, a classroom environment needs to provide for students socially and intellectually (Churchill, 2011).

Marzano. Gaddy, Foseid, Foseid and Marzano, (2005:64) states, that even without speaking, eye contact, moving around the room and looking and listening to your students conveys that all students are equal and all students are important. The teacher helps to establish a learning context that supports the personal, social and academic well-being of all members of the classroom community (Brophy, 1999:8).

Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005:112) state the popular image of a teacher standing at the front of the room lecturing from a book is simplistic. We now know that effective teachers engage their students in active learning and have a central role in improving student’s outcomes (Mills et. al. 2009:70). The link between theory and practice has been developed as educational research searches to identify the specific teaching practices that enhance student learning.

Additionally, these views are supported by the work of Andrews et. al. (2006), Campbell (2004), DEET (1995), Gurr (2004), Retallick (1999), Richardson (1997) and Simpson (2003), who indicate that a range of identified principles and practices are important in order to improve and revitalise learning and teaching. Thus, through fostering 'community', opportunities are created for students to learn, relate and grow in ways that recognise and respect their unique and special phase of development.

Students have particular characteristics as well as personal, social and learning needs. Among them is the need to become independent and competent in a fast changing world so that they have a sense of themselves as thinking, knowledgeable people who relate well to others. Educating young people is likely to be more effective when it is based on a shared understanding of values and beliefs. As Cumming (1998) also suggests, a strong sense of community has benefits for both students and teachers and provides the necessary basis for school effectiveness and improvement. These ideas have been incorporated into the CSO core document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*'.

Some theories have emerged which focus on how learning organisations use effective methods to enhance learning and teaching in schools. Lashway (1998) indicated that schools that dedicate themselves to systematic, collaborative planning can continually develop and implement new ideas, thereby not just improving, but transforming themselves. The outcomes of the research contributed to the development of the Wagga Wagga CSO's document, '*Today's Children Tomorrow's Adults*', and it will be explored further in this study.

Lashway (1998) also refers to the work of other researchers when defining the learning organisation as a group of people pursuing common purposes with a collective commitment to regularly and continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those purposes. These qualities are critical for effective and efficient schools because they represent the leading organisational and contextual indicators that have been shown to influence student learning. This will be a foundation part of this study through the use of a survey for teachers.

Much of the research on effective schools by the NSW Department of Education and Training (2005), Education Department of Western Australia (1998), NSW Board of Studies (2002), Education Queensland (2003), Eltis (2003), Gurr (2004) and Kosky (2003) have recognised that conventional approaches to curriculum pedagogy and organisation are not always in the best interests of all students and their school communities. Similarly, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study 2000 (QSRLS) believed that quality teaching alone cannot bring about educational change. This research identified elements of effective learning and teaching that has been referred to as productive pedagogy. Gore et. al. (2004) explores the elements of the productive pedagogy to include intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and working with, and valuing, differences.

Additionally, the Australian National Middle Schooling Project (1996) in Cumming (1998) developed a set of principles which guide best practice for effective learning and teaching. Hearfield (2001) further refined the principles as effective learning and teaching. The work of the research has strengthened our understanding of effective schools, has both deepened and broadened to include the following: learning and

teaching that is learner centred, collaboratively organised, outcomes based, flexibly constructed, ethically aware, community oriented, adequately resourced and strategically linked.

Campbell (2004), in identifying effective schools, made reference to the 1998 Federal Senate Report into school education in Australia, entitled *A Class Act*, and identified the following teacher characteristics as desirable in the emergence of effective schools: deep commitment, enthusiasm, innovative and co-operative teaching practices and passionate concern for young people. This research will attempt to establish if these characteristics are identified in the classroom of CSO Wagga Wagga system of schools. These characteristics have been further articulated in the recent work of De Courcy (2006, who has emphasised that teachers can make a difference through their passion, relationships, time on task and feedback to students, and that these characteristics are essential for student learning gains. It is further understood and stated by Hawkes (2007) that good schools are found on good relationships that release the creative energy of everyone in the school. Additionally, the above characteristics, as advanced by Campbell (2004) and De Courcy (2006), are designed to improve the learning and teaching environment, provide better curriculum articulation and enhanced pedagogy and organisation. They are based on current documented success of effective schools, as shown by Department of Education and Training (2005), Education Department of Western Australia (1998), Education Queensland (2003), Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2006) and the NSW Board of Studies (2002). The results of these studies offer hope and inspiration to those struggling to improve, and are focused on providing a teaching environment conducive to student participation in their own learning.

Garmston and Wellman (1998) have observed that as teachers reflect and engage in substantive dialogue with their peers, building common understandings and curriculum consistency across classrooms, they discover ways to reinvent instructions and strategies to support greater student engagement and learning. As a result, achievement soars. Substantive dialogue, reflection on practice and the development of common pedagogy understandings are essential to ongoing professional learning and classroom achievement. Teachers are each other's most powerful resource for professional learning (PLOTpd 2005).

Similarly, educational reviews undertaken by the NSW Board of Studies (2002), Tasmanian Department of Education (2001), Victorian Government (2003) and Education Queensland (2001) have identified key learning principles that influence quality learning and teaching. The common pedagogy understandings include:

1. Learning occurs at different rates and in different ways.
2. Learning and teaching needs to take place in a context of high expectations.
3. Students use their current level of learning to discover, construct and incorporate new knowledge, skills and understanding.
4. Teacher instruction and assessment together influence student learning.
5. Students can develop and use a range of strategies to actively monitor and evaluate their learning and their learning strategies.
6. Strategies for learning are taught, learned and refined in a range of contexts.
7. Students need learning experiences with appropriate time to explore, experiment with and engage with the ideas and concepts underpinning what they are to learn.
8. Frequent feedback from teachers is critical for learners to gain insight into their

learning and understanding, and to enable them to map their progress in relation to defined standards.

The investigation of the CSO Wagga Wagga's core statement on learning and teaching, 'Today's Children Tomorrow's Adults', will establish the extent to which the above elements are reflected in the identified classroom practices.

These factors (above) can be summarised by referring to the Tasmanian Department of Education (2001:5) report, "Essential Learnings", where it states that

'...there is an international move for curriculum to engage all learners, including adolescents, where students participate in deep understanding about important life-related issues.'

Hadfield and Jopling (2008) have a conviction that the nature of 21st century learning can be improved by adopting two overall strategies involving increasing engagement in learning and supporting the intention of learning. Likewise, according to Simpson (2003), there is a growing acknowledgment that for students to improve, advance and develop academically, socially and morally, a dramatic change needs to take place at the classroom level. It is believed that the school as a learning organisation will only change as classrooms become the focus for effective learning and teaching, and become student-centred. Simpson (2003) further suggests that when individual success for all students becomes the shared vision of the school, disengagement and disruptive behaviour in the classroom will decline and students will become positive and engaged in their own learning. These views will be explored through survey and interview discussions in this investigation.

Effective school improvement demands that teachers obtain targeted and supported professional development. Much of this professional learning and development will occur at the school in programs designed and adapted by members of the school community where trusting, positive relationship and shared values are the foundation for teachers to work together successfully. The importance of teachers working together collaboratively, and opportunities for professional dialogue and reflection will be investigated as part of this research.

2.3 Schools as Community

Another focus in the literature for this research is in the area of schools as learning communities. Support for the development of a learning community approach for schools has emerged with the Effective School debate. According to Lezotte and Cipriano-Pepperi (2001), the International Effective School Movement has agreed with the learning communities approach to education and strongly recommends reform in policy, practices and resources. There has been increasing recognition that conventional approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and organisation are not always in the best interests of all students and their communities (Lezotte & Cipriano-Pepperi 2001). Similar to the learning community philosophy, the School Effectiveness Movement's research (Lezotte 1996) indicates that the prime function of schooling is to arrange for students the conditions which enhance effective 'learning for all'.

The modern sense of schools as learning communities developed during the latter part of the last century. Austin (1985) in Schroder and Marble (1994:167) and Garmston and Wellman (1998:265) defined learning communities as

"small subgroups of students ... characterised by a common sense of purpose

... that can be used to build a sense of group identity, cohesiveness and uniqueness that encourage continuity and the integration of diverse curricular and co-curricula experiences”.

Traditionally the individual teacher was the centre of most attempts to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Since the 1990s there has been a growing recognition of the power of the learning community to support improved student learning.

Royal (1997) suggests that a good deal of evidence exists indicating that a strong sense of community in schools has a benefit for both staff and students and provides the necessary foundation for school improvement. For this to be beneficial, Lewis (2000) recognises that ownership of pedagogical change and accountability lies in the classroom with the teacher and the students. This view is also supported by Haeusler (2001) who indicated that for schools to improve continuously, they need to develop a culture of improving student achievement and performance through planned classroom processes and strategies.

Schools in the U.S.A. that participate in the Effective Schools Movement indicate that there exists a commitment to developing a learning community as a way to generate genuine reform, improve learning and enhance teacher professionalism (Effective Schools 2001). Additionally, a learning community approach to schooling improves the learning environment, provides better curriculum articulation and enhances pedagogy and school organisation. It facilitates schools to seek flexibility and appropriateness.

According to Alloway et. al. (2006), Arnold (2000), Beare (2001), hence (2003) and The Effective School Movement (2001), there are moves to involve students in building a stronger sense of personal identity and at the same time developing skills that would allow them to operate successfully in a world beyond their immediate classroom, family and community. Lorna (2000) suggests that school aged students learn best when activities engage them in the wider community, working with others, influencing decisions and being challenged to develop values, skills and knowledge acknowledged by others. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), according to Aspin and Chapman (1999), along with Loughran (1999), Project for Enhanced Effective Learning (PEEL) Project, and Canadian Learning Strategies Group, as reported in Erickson et al. (2005), and the Tasmanian Department of Education (2001), have argued that learning for the future should be based around the tasks of learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Subsequent research by Beare (2001) in *Creating the Future School* likewise identified a number of characteristics as essential in the development of effective schools. Among them is the need for schools to develop a shared vision with a focus on learning and regular monitoring and assessment. Within a successful climate for learning, purposeful teaching, high expectations, professional leadership and strong home/school partnerships can develop, supporting the school where students' rights and responsibilities are honoured.

Expectations of schools by the wider community are making 'old ways' of learning and teaching ineffective. Giorcelli (2002) explains that students today are more subject to adult turbulence, more attention seeking, less attentive to certain things, less compliant, more argumentative, globally connected, more rights oriented, anxious for identity,

technically competent and under more personal pressure. Giorcelli (2002) further suggests that because of rapid societal change, there is no longer an easy answer to educational issues. It is therefore necessary to discern the most appropriate ways of preparing today's students as tomorrow's adults through revitalising the learning and teaching process. This study and investigation will attempt to explore the changing pressures for teachers on the learning and teaching process.

Hargreaves (2001) suggests that our basic structures of schooling and teaching were established for other purposes and other times. To satisfy the needs of students today, and to prepare them for the adult world of tomorrow, schools need a different paradigm for their learning and teaching. There is a view in the literature that learning communities offer a healthy and robust alternative (Retallick 1999:110). As Simpson (2003) points out, for a school to be an effective and successful learning community, it must have a common sense of purpose of what it wants for its students. This purpose must reflect the aspirations of students, teachers, parents and administrators. Once this vision is in harmony with the community expectations and regularly reviewed, then educators, working collaboratively, prepare, plan and deliver a curriculum consistent with the vision of the school.

The CSO Wagga Wagga (2000) in its publication *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* reflects views expressed by Simpson (2003), Giorcelli (2001), Lewis (2000) and Haeusler (2001) where it is claimed that learning and teaching takes place in an environment of trust, support and challenge. In the learning community, each member feels safe to take risks and to work on their own learning style. To achieve an effective learning community takes time, perseverance and commitment from the whole school

community, with a focus on the needs of each student. This focus allows schools to provide students with opportunities to develop the characteristics required to live as ethical people in a rapidly changing world. Tomorrow's adults need to be inquirers, reflective thinkers, adaptable, knowledgeable, communicators, principled and caring people who are healthy and conscious of their global responsibilities ('Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults' Appendix 2). This investigation will attempt to establish the extent that the published learning and teaching principles and practices are evident in the classrooms of the CSO Wagga Wagga schools.

Bryk and Driscoll (1988) likewise found that a system of shared values and activities linked school members to each other and to the school traditions with an ethos of caring in interpersonal relationships, evidenced by collegial interactions and an extended role for teachers beyond classroom instruction. These have contributed to the development of healthy and vital school communities. Mark (1997:173) states that:

'In a school community communication is open, participation is widespread, teamwork is prevalent and diversity is incorporated. Staff members and students share a vision for the future of the school, a common sense of purpose and a common set of values. They care about, trust and respect each other, and they recognise each other's efforts and accomplishments.'

This view is further supported by Sergiovanni (1996:42) who acknowledges that

'There is a growing acceptance of the idea that general improvement in student academic performance and social and moral development will occur only when classrooms become learning communities and teaching becomes more student centred. Learning communities are intellectually demanding places where students learn to use their own minds well. In learning communities, acquiring basic skills and absorbing a core of essential information remains important, but it is not sufficient. Students are deeply involved in constructing knowledge that helps them become lifelong learners. And, students recognise the value of what they are learning beyond their school experience.'

Covey (1998) describes the development of interpersonal relationships built on trust as one of the foundation principles. This is a crucial step in forming a learning community through an effective team or classroom. Mutual support also develops through forming and performing group activities that powerfully bond the team members. In this way, group norms and values are the agreed way a team or group conducts itself. Dalton and Watson (1997), in *Amongst Friends*, provide numerous ways of building community and developing group norms. According to them, group norms include generic and specific values, and also behaviours, to which group members agree to adhere and, ipso facto, be held accountable for supporting. The Institute experience of the CSO Wagga Wagga has claimed to provide the opportunity for teachers to develop skills and understandings of these processes. This study will investigate the usefulness of the Institute in assisting teachers to understand the nature of what it means to be a learning community.

Sergiovanni (2004) has also stated that much of the debate about learning organisations has resulted in the transfer of business structures into an educational setting. He argues that businesses are motivated by self-interest to maximise gains and cut losses. However, when the organisation is seen as a community, the focus of the organisation moves to relationships, values and beliefs. Values and beliefs lead into the development of the concept of schools as communities which focus on effective learning involving a relationship factor that holds the school together as a community (Sergiovanni, 2004). According to Garmston & Wellman (1998), it is the relationships that bind members of the community to each other and to their important ideas and their work.

From the findings of the research associated with the National Middle School Project, Cumming (1998) emphasised that promoting a culture of learning was enhanced through the development of a learning community. These ideas are supported by the works of Hearfield (2001), The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (2000) and the NSW Board of Studies (2002). Additionally these findings are supported by the work of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1994:67), which describes a school as a learning community

'whose culture reduces isolation, increases staff capacity, provides a caring, productive environment and promotes increased quality. A Learning Community is a place where critical inquiry is practiced by collegial partners who share a common vision and engage in shared decision-making. This continuous critical inquiry provides a basis for seamless school improvement.'

The relationship between critical enquiry and school improvement provides an interesting link in the development of the classroom and school as a learning community.

This literature identifies a number of phases through which a learning community will pass in order to become a true community where effective, collaborative learning will occur. According to The Victorian Government (2003), Carlin (2002), Edwards (2001), Fullan (2000) and Retallick (1999), these phases see a community of learners engaged in supporting each other, undertaking challenges in learning and working while engaged in collaborative and positive relationships. Working effectively requires from teachers both commitment and common understandings of collaborative principles and skills.

The research summarised in Table 1 additionally confirms the view that approaching effective teaching is greatly enhanced when a learning organisation develops and adopts a learning community philosophy. Hayes et.al. (2006 :123) suggests that students need

‘... to be engaged in high-order thinking, where they have to hypothesise, generalise, synthesise, evaluate and so on; they need to learn important concepts and processes in depth, rather than be engaged in superficial learning, and be provided with opportunities to demonstrate a deep understanding of such concepts and processes; they need to be provided with opportunities to use discussion as a means of learning; they need to see knowledge is a social construction, that it is made by people and as such can be changed; and they need to be exposed to critical literacy perspectives which enable them to see how language is used to construct particular kinds of realities.’

Becoming a Learning Community is a process that enables students, teachers, family and community members to work together to support student learning. Central to the Learning Community process is collaborative learning, developing meaningful relationships among learners and teachers, establishing connections beyond the classroom and developing an engaging classroom environment.

Additionally, the Learning Community assists schools to build community relationship skills, knowledge, capabilities and values that equip students as independent, creative thinkers. The Learning Community philosophy will challenge and support students to be successful and will help establish new and meaningful conventions for learning. This approach will assist teachers in strengthening their own pedagogical practice.

Retallick (1999) recognises the healthy alternative that Learning Communities can provide for schools and educators intent on building community. There are countless forces and pressures pushing and pulling schools in various directions. The processes

and strategies consistent with Learning Communities offer a holistic alternative to the prevailing metaphors that are rooted in the past or in the organisational theory of business and industry. Learning Communities suggest a new paradigm in which Raywid (1993) identifies qualities such as respect, caring, inclusiveness, trust, empowerment and commitment.

Further, the Learning Community treats the classroom as the focus of the community building, by featuring constructivist and co-operative learning strategies, and group learning activities as a pedagogical approach. Additionally, the learning community classroom will feature high levels of dialogue and reflection, interaction and collaboration with a common focus on learning together.

A Learning Community also develops when teachers explicitly work to create a physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional environment that actively encourages and supports learning.

There is great interest in how a learning community approach can enhance educational reform and improved learning outcomes for students. In a learning community, Norman (2000) and Stoll and Louis (2007) state that all members are actively involved in the education process rather than the traditional passive transmission and reception of information from teacher to student.

Engaging students and teachers in working together and exchanging ideas enhances learning because it is inherently a social process of constructing shared understandings. Stoll and Louis (2007) explain that in a learning community all members of the

community are seen as learners. They work together towards a common end. All members of a learning community are respected and all contributions valued. A learning community is inclusive and reflective, and encourages members to take responsibility for their own learning. In these communities, education is about creating a shared way of thinking about ourselves, our values and our world. The CSO Wagga Wagga Institute experience attempts to provide participants with opportunities for dialogue, reflection and modelling these processes of learning. The extent to which this happens will be investigated in this research.

These views are also at the foundation of the Victorian Government (2003) Blueprint for Government Schools statement, the Tasmanian Department of Education (2001) Essential Learnings statement, Education Queensland (2001) New Basics and NSW DET (2000) Organisational Culture document.

These Australian educational reform plans supports the view that learning within the learning community is conceived as something a learner does, not something that is done to a learner (NSW DET 2000) the research focuses on teachers in classrooms who aim to develop a student's competencies, skills, knowledge and talents. Learning and teaching, therefore, is a personal transaction between students and teachers as they work together. These are the underlying beliefs upon which collaborative and co-operative learning is founded and will be a focus in this study. Within the learning community, people work together in groups and develop ways of dealing with each other that respect the individual's abilities and contributions, while at the same time accepting responsibility for the group's actions (Victorian Government 2003).

Strong, supportive anecdotal evidence, gathered from teachers, administrators, parents and students, according to Goonan (2001), ACSA (2001) and Arnold (2000), indicates that through the development of collaborative relationships, a number of characteristics can be identified that distinguishes successful and effective schools from their counterparts. The journey a school takes to become a learning community will allow it to restructure, reform, revitalise, enlighten and enliven its educational outcomes for the benefit of all. Within Australia, Kearns (1999) identifies a learning community as one that values learning for social and economic development, and responsible citizenship, while providing learning opportunities for all through partnerships. Longworth (1999) further states that a learning community endeavours to encourage sharing of knowledge, talents and resources for the benefit of all learning community members.

According to the Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2005), effective schools are learning communities developed around a culture of collaboration for the development of effective teaching practices to improve student achievement and their learning. Additionally, the learning community values diversity and maintains a focus on continuous enhancement of learning and teaching while developing new insights, practices and understandings that engage students and their learning.

The concept of learning community principles and practices as a measure of effective schools has expanded with the depth of understanding of organisational theories, concepts of decentralisation and empowerment, the importance of organisational culture and the principles of quality management. These have added important dimensions to the understanding of schools for the future and for this study.

One important consideration offered by Sergiovanni (2004) about classrooms becoming learning communities is a need for change to the mindset of teachers and organisations. Apart from classrooms becoming learning communities, the school, as an organisation, must embrace the learning community educational philosophy. Sergiovanni (1996) additionally maintains that there is a strong link between what happens to students and what happens to the organisation. He explains that for classrooms to become learning communities, schools also must be transformed into learning communities for teachers. Senge (2007) raises the same point with reference to the Korean Department of Education... *"the quality of the education system cannot rise above the quality of the teachers"*, while Hayes et al (2006, p.188), when identifying aspects of learning communities, referred to the works of Butt (1999), McCaleb (1994), Retallick (1999) and Johnson (1999). Throughout this literature on learning communities, there is a view expressed that the foundation of a learning community is based upon consensus by group members, of collaboration and co-operation rather than competition.

In the classroom, collaboration and co-operation are the building blocks for schools as learning communities. The Centre for Collaborative Education (2001) suggests that for schools to be successful in meeting the needs of their students, they will need to meet two conditions – to create an environment where the students are known to their teachers and to create time for teachers to collaborate with other teachers and students. These factors assist schools reach their vision for sustained student learning through the creation of a learning community within a collaborative culture. This study will attempt

to explore the extent and nature of collaboration as described in the CSO Wagga Wagga document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*'.

Burke (2001) explains that the issue of stimulating, and even more critically, sustaining the focus on improving learning and teaching is clearly important. This, according to Johnson (2004) provides a sustained and lasting impact on the effect of powerful learning and teaching. The Wagga Wagga learning community journey that began with the Institute was a process that, according to Hayes et al. (2006), recognised that this philosophy cannot simply be layered into schools or imposed on teachers. It is a process that builds understandings and strategies about what constitutes effective learning and teaching in the classroom. It is a process that requires teachers to immerse themselves into the philosophy, beliefs and practices of a learning community. It was a process that provided opportunities to model, practice and question the learning community approach. It was a lived and practical experience provided by the CSO Wagga Wagga for their teachers to be encouraged to change their thinking and classroom strategies about effective learning and teaching.

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) (2001) explores the role of co-operative learning as a strategy in building a learning community. ACSA explains that co-operative learning is a set of strategies that effectively enable learning communities to be established and operate. Co-operative learning honours the belief inherent in a learning community, that we can learn more from and with each other than we can by ourselves. Co-operative learning is a tool that helps create an effective learning community, and is one strategy that forms part of a wide range of more meaningful learning and teaching experiences. Further, ACSA (2001) indicates that this will

involve a re-definement of a vision for educationalists and a recommitment to the students who are, and must ever remain the focus of all our educational endeavors.

More specifically, as explained in a 1995 NSW Department of School Education Discussion Paper, *Schools as Learning Communities*, and by the Northwest Regional Laboratory (1998), as well as considerations offered by Johnson (1995), and more recently Aspin et. al. (2001) and Chapman et. al. (2005), the characteristics of a learning community include supportive and shared leadership where the Principal shares leadership, power, authority and decision-making. Additionally, shared values and vision that has a focus on the commitment to student learning is one where students are empowered, self-directed and engaged in a learning-focused environment that is creative and resourced. As well, there exists a learning focus where lifelong learning is modelled; where teachers are motivated and committed to a professional development plan; where habits of continual inquiry and ongoing reflection are well developed; where students have a commitment and opportunity to achieve quality learning through a wide range of learning and teaching experiences; where the learning of all members of the community (students, teachers, parents and administrators) is supported and assisted in order to understand the complexities of learning and teaching processes.

Johnson (1995), in his paper presented at the Australian Studies Association Biennial Conference in Melbourne, provided a comprehensive analysis of the then current thinking. More current research of Chapman, Gaff, Toomey and Aspin (2005), Department of Education and Training (2005), and Earl (2003), for example, supports the view that educational organisations are becoming learning communities. Johnson

(1995) advocated the elements shown below as important in the development of a learning community. In this, he is supported in the works of Senge (1998), Fullan (2000), Hargreaves (2001), Watkins and Marsick (1993), Bennett & Rolheiser-Bennett (1990), Fullan & Hargraves (1991) and Silins (1994) whose research provides further detail of the indicators that illustrate learning communities. Among these indicators, Johnson (1995) describes schools as learning communities with the following observations: where all members are committed to lifelong learning, learning is seen as the central activity of both individuals and the school as a whole, and collaboration is a major plank in the school's culture. Additionally continuous improvement (selected change) is built into the very fabric of the school, while leadership is distributed and shared.

The research of Senge (1998), Cumming (1998), Retallick (1996), Hearfield (2001) and Giorcelli (2002) builds on the preceding learning community elements, and further indicates that schools should consider themselves to be learning communities that can easily adapt to a variety of change initiatives which are now impacting on the education community.

Changing a school into a learning community, according to Garmston and Wellman (1998), will not be simply a matter of changing norms, skills and knowledge, but rather changing the whole school structure to support a positive view of education and therefore increase academic achievement, retention, motivation, intellectual development learning, involvement and a sense of community. Garmston and Wellman (1998) advocate that changing a school into a learning community will

revitalise the learning and teaching processes. It will be interesting to see if these qualities have been achieved by the CSO Wagga Wagga.

Johnson (1995) makes reference to a number of earlier studies to support his views on the characteristics of a learning community. Specifically he uses the work of Watkins and Marsick (1993:8-9) as his essential definition of a learning community

‘...is one that learns continuously and transforms itself. Learning takes place in individuals, teams, the organisation and even the communities with which the organisation interacts. Learning is a ... strategically used process integrated with and running parallel to work ... The learning organisation has embedded systems to capture and share learning. ‘

The findings of Thomas (2002) in the United Kingdom, looking at restructuring schools into learning communities, focused on teachers reflecting on classroom practices, and identified factors that assist schools to be more effective. These factors include positive relationships as central to good learning and teaching, individualised personal learning as the focus of the curriculum, democratic practices which enable school students to have a say in what and how they learn and in the running of the school, as well as environmentally sustainable values underpinning the work of the school. This study will provide opportunities for teachers to identify those factors that have assisted or hindered their progress to becoming a learning community.

Likewise, the transition of the learning community concept into the school setting requires the whole community to be involved in understanding and engaging with the learning process. Alloway et. al. (2006) explains that, where it was originally considered that teachers teach, students learn and administrators manage, learning communities

now require teachers, principals, students and their families to become active and responsible partners in the learning process. Additionally, Arnold (2000) concludes that interrelationship and interaction among community members are encompassed in the ideas, teaching strategies and learning experiences which develop an effective, collaborative and co-operative learning community. These ideals, according to Fullan (2001), need to go beyond the classroom and be modelled in the administration of the school, its community and the system of education. Further, academic performance as well as moral and social development will improve in schools as classrooms and school communities of learners are created, fostering both support and challenge. The CSO Wagga Wagga's core learning and teaching statement '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*', will be investigated and analysed in this study in reference to the above claims.

A learning community, according to Slavin (2004) and Dalton (1996), will be a community of learners who are engaged in supporting each other, undertaking learning challenges and working on positive relationships with each other. Similarly, this view reflects the educational philosophy of Dewey (1916:759), who wrote

"There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community and communication. [People] live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common. Things that they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – like-mindedness ... Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. Consensus requires communication ..."

Johnson (1995) is of the view that most schools are somewhere along the way to becoming learning communities. It is considered that in this sense the journey towards becoming a learning community has refocused educators on the task of bringing

effective classroom practices to learning and teaching strategies. As such, it is a common theme in the literature that for far too long, teachers in the classroom, and many administrators, have had their main focus on syllabus content and test results rather than on learning and teaching strategies. Lorna (2000) supports this view of the need for pedagogical change. In this view, the community is not just where students learn, "*it is the fabric of their learning and contains the values, beliefs, norms and behaviours of their culture and their ancestors*" Lorna (2000:7).

Additionally, Lorna's view (2000), concerning the importance of a school as an interactive model in the learning and teaching process, is further supported in the literature by such researchers as Edwards (2001), ACSA (2001), Hearfield (2001), Johnson (1995), Lezotte (1991), Australian Curriculum Studies Corporation and Eltis (2003). In their writings, these researchers all suggest that traditional teacher-focused classrooms are a major factor in the underachievement of students.

When schools journey to become learning communities, Aspin and Chapman (1999) suggests that each school builds and encourages higher student achievement, more effective and advanced thinking and problem solving skills. Further, these communities demonstrate an increased responsibility for learning by students and teachers, positive student and teacher relationships and a culture where there is a sense of self-worth in an accepting, welcoming and motivating environment. This view is supported by Townsend (2005) who reports that the key to the student's ability to learn is influenced by the way in which the teacher organises and manages the classroom as well as the relationships that develop between the teacher, student and parent. This influence will be examined.

Hayes et. al. (2006:38) recognises that effective learning and teaching goes beyond positive classroom relationships: “It is about creating classrooms where students are not scared to have a go and are prepared to take risks with their learning.” There also exists a sense of quality for learning and teaching experiences that are supportive, balanced and durable. The CSO Wagga Wagga has identified that one of the critical steps in forming a learning community is the development of interpersonal relationships when learning and teaching take place in an environment of trust and support (TCTA 1998:10) This is reflected upon by all the members of the learning community so that learning and teaching effectiveness is recognised. In fact, there is a true sense of partnership between students, teachers, administrators and parents in the whole education enterprise. Lorna (2000) believes that positive independence can be nurtured and developed over time by providing genuine opportunities for students to practice, to fail and to learn. This research will establish the extent to which the identified practices of effective learning and teaching as outlined in the CSO Wagga Wagga’s publication ‘*Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults*’, are strategies regularly engaged by the primary classroom teachers.

Research studies of Alloway et. al. (2006), Arnold (2000), Earl (2003) and Eltis (2003) on the effects of co-operative learning on student progress, indicate that the re-organisation of the social structure of the classroom into co-operative learning groups has many positive outcomes for students. These include increased opportunities for students to interact and communicate, and increased opportunities for them to be involved in tasks that require students to negotiate meaning through the integration of social skills and communication. This socialisation can best be realised through student involvement in caring and effective learning communities, where the spirit of

support and challenge work in harmony, where relationship is the 'glue' that holds the community together, and where values such as respect, acceptance and inclusion are the foundations upon which everything is built. Fullan (2001) explains that in order to change what people value, in any organisation, including schools, people must work together to accomplish it and that leads to deep and lasting change. Fullan (2001) goes further and states that this involvement will require individuals within the school community to redefine their personal model of a teacher, student, parent, principal and leader; and the supportive relationships that exist between them. When this is done and when individual choices align in productive patterns, the group achieves productive results (Fullan 2001). This investigation will attempt to explore how the classroom socialisation processes impact on improved learning and teaching.

Such authors as Garmston and Wellman (1998) argue that working with others can often be difficult and full of conflicts and tensions, yet may be absolutely necessary if any productive results are to occur for the organisation. Working as a community would seem to be a natural condition of human life and working with a variety of people with different views and capabilities will provide ongoing challenges for educational leaders in managing any educational change process. Educational leaders will encounter supporters and blockers. Understanding and representing the various perspectives of school community members will be vital if change is to be sustained. Opportunities for teachers to identify elements that support or hinder their Learning Community journey will be gathered and analysed through this research study.

The work of Eastcott (2007) indicated that a range of strategies, when used by teachers, can better interact to improve results for all students. This study, on Developing a

Framework for Professional Learning Programs in Schools, conducted on behalf of the Australian Government identified learning communities as having explicit expectations of learning, aligned values, culture and actions, focused leadership and teaching and networked linkages. The study further identified meaningful relationships as the one pervasive trait that united members of the learning community and provided an environment for educational change that is meaningful and relevant. Through the development of a learning community, there is a collective sense of responsibility for student learning, and the learning community has focused on effective learning and teaching principles that encompass community, connectedness, collaboration, capacity and curriculum. Eastcott (2007) further explains that this focus will allow a school and a system to articulate a set of beliefs and principles that drive effective learning and teaching within the school, and provide guidelines that can be integrated into the school's organisation. Additionally, these guidelines will have implications for teachers, principals, parents and students, and influence development of the school as a learning community. Further, such guidelines have implications for the application of practical learning and teaching strategies that take place with both students and adults, and for the curriculum, in terms of what, and how, it is taught as well as to whom it is taught.

Arising from educational reform movements, an examination of the literature from Arnold (2000), Carlin (2002) and Earl (2003) promotes several common basic learning and teaching settings which have proven successful in raising the performance level of all students. Significantly, clear guidelines are essential to prepare learners to thrive in the real world of today and tomorrow. Six such strategies have been identified in the CSO Wagga Wagga's *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* framework document, and include inquiry, collaboration, meaningful learning, communication, human

development and self-responsibility. The engagement with these strategies will be explored in detail through this investigation when examining the Wagga Wagga CSO primary schools.

2.4 Professional Learning for Sustained Change

Developing a clear understanding of what constitutes an effective school requires a link to the professional development and learning opportunities provided either by the educational system or the individual school community (Johnson 2004, Hayes et. al. 2006).

Professional learning and development that is effective and sustained aims to discover ways by which the learning and teaching process may be understood. By adopting a planned and systematic strategy, chances of an effective and lasting change are enhanced. Townsend (2005) claims that the single greatest weakness of school reform activities in the past has been that they stop at the classroom door. It is therefore necessary to view professional learning differently if sustained educational change is to occur.

Loughran (1999) gave insight into the effectiveness of professional development that can be gained, in relation to the understandings of “best practice”. The professional learning and development characteristics focused on four stages including, planning, facilitation, implementation and application. These identified characteristics of best practice were used for this study as a basis for the teacher survey section on professional development (Appendix 4:1). Additionally, the work of Senge (1998 and 1999), Baird

and Mitchell (1997) support this concept of essential stages necessary for effective and sustained professional learning.

The U.S. Department of Education (1999), in its research findings into professional learning, identified core professional development requirements. Its analysis shows that these features reflect a learning and teaching culture that embraces a high standard for all students, focuses on deepening teachers' knowledge, skills and understandings of student learning, curriculum and pedagogy, while providing extended ongoing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, plan and reflect on educational programs, standards and results. McNeil and Silcox (2006) argue that for successful educational change to occur, it requires teachers and leaders to work collaboratively. The challenge for schools is the translation of their vision into a working reality that meets the needs of students, and the aspirations of the whole school community. McNeil and Silcox (2006:12-13) agree and state that:

“Engaging in a process of school renewal with a focus of change residing in the school community offers one such pathway to achieving the desired change. It is through teacher empowerment and engagement that lead to profound change in schools.”

Similar characteristics were identified by Johnson (2004) and are demonstrated in Figure 2 following, where a series of strategies are identified that combine to provide opportunities for effective professional learning. Johnson's elements indicate that professional learning needs to be focused, supported and localised over a period of time in order to create an environment for sustained educational change. Further, the work of Century and Levy (2002) three phases of professional learning were identifies that leads to sustainability of educational change. These phases are establishment,

maturation and evolution. This concept of phased development links closely with the research of Loughran (1999), discussed earlier, where he identifies three phases of professional development; establishment, maturation and evolution.

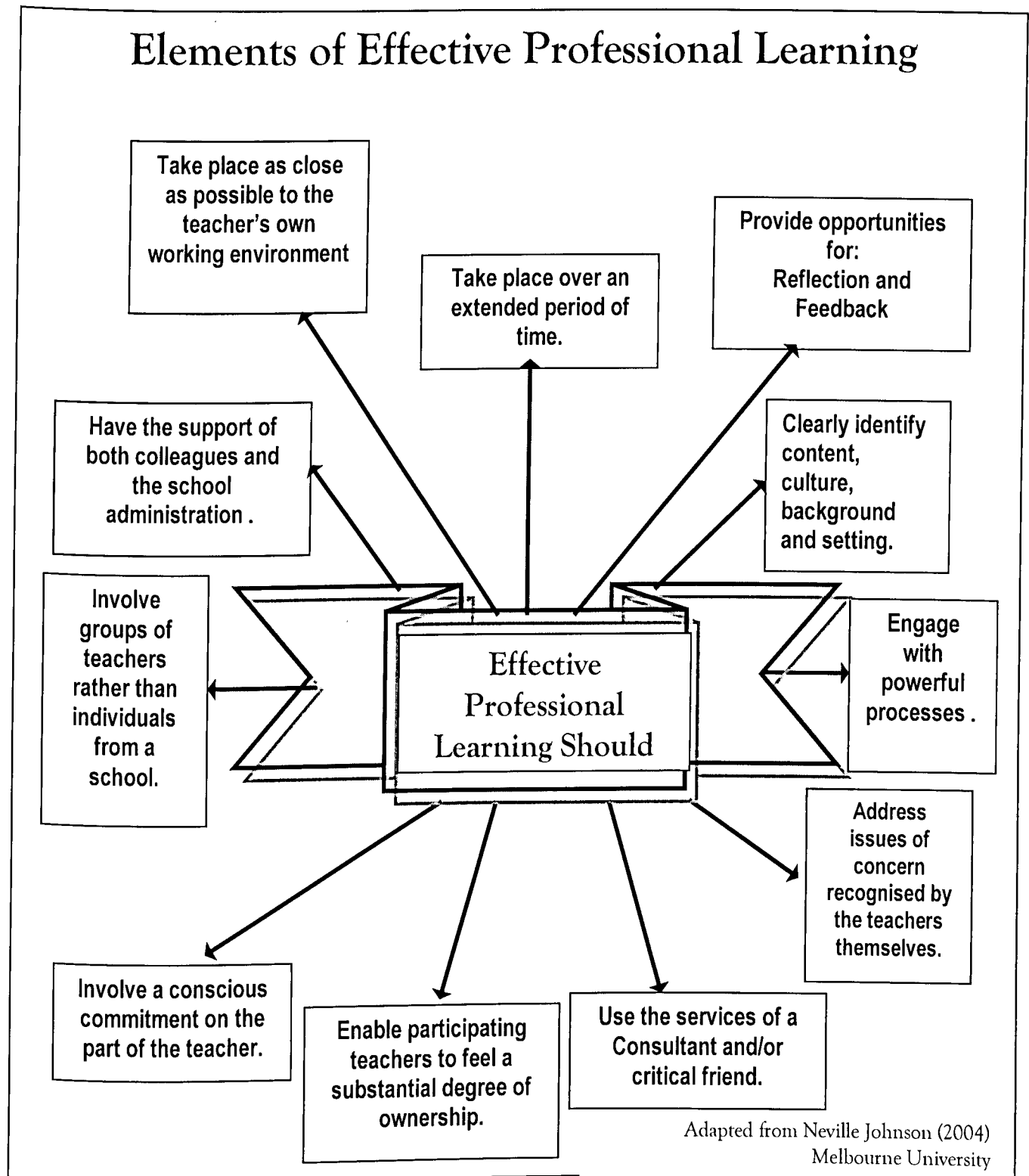


Figure 2: Elements of Effective Professional Learning

The information contained in Figure 2, Elements of Effective Professional Learning, is further supported through the professional engagement experiences reported in the Project for Enhancing Effective Learning (PEEL) Initiative in Australia (Goff and Nevard 2001), where teachers were encouraged to enhance their understanding of the nature and quality of learning in ways that make teaching more purposeful and effective.

These experiences required thoughtful reflection of current practices followed by selecting, sequencing and using a range of strategies and procedures that best suit the classroom context. These experiences required teachers to ask themselves, “what’s my purpose?” It will be of interest to explore in this study how the CSO Wagga Wagga’s Institute experience met these elements of effective professional learning for the group involved.

Hayes et. al. (2006) recognises that quality teaching alone cannot bring about educational change and is further claimed that the absence of quality pedagogy and the leadership of learning is detrimental to student learning growth. As a pathway leading to a culture of sustained and intensive professional development to revitalise learning and teaching, the U.S. Eisenhower Project, illustrated in Figure 3, below, utilises a range of active learning opportunities and identified a number of elements as effective opportunities for changing learning and teaching practices for improved student learning growth and development (U.S. Department of Education 1999). These elements include in-district institute or workshop, collaborative networks, study groups, a task force and mentoring. These elements will provide a basis for teachers involved in

this study to reflect on as they comment on their professional learning experience of the CSO Wagga Wagga Institute.

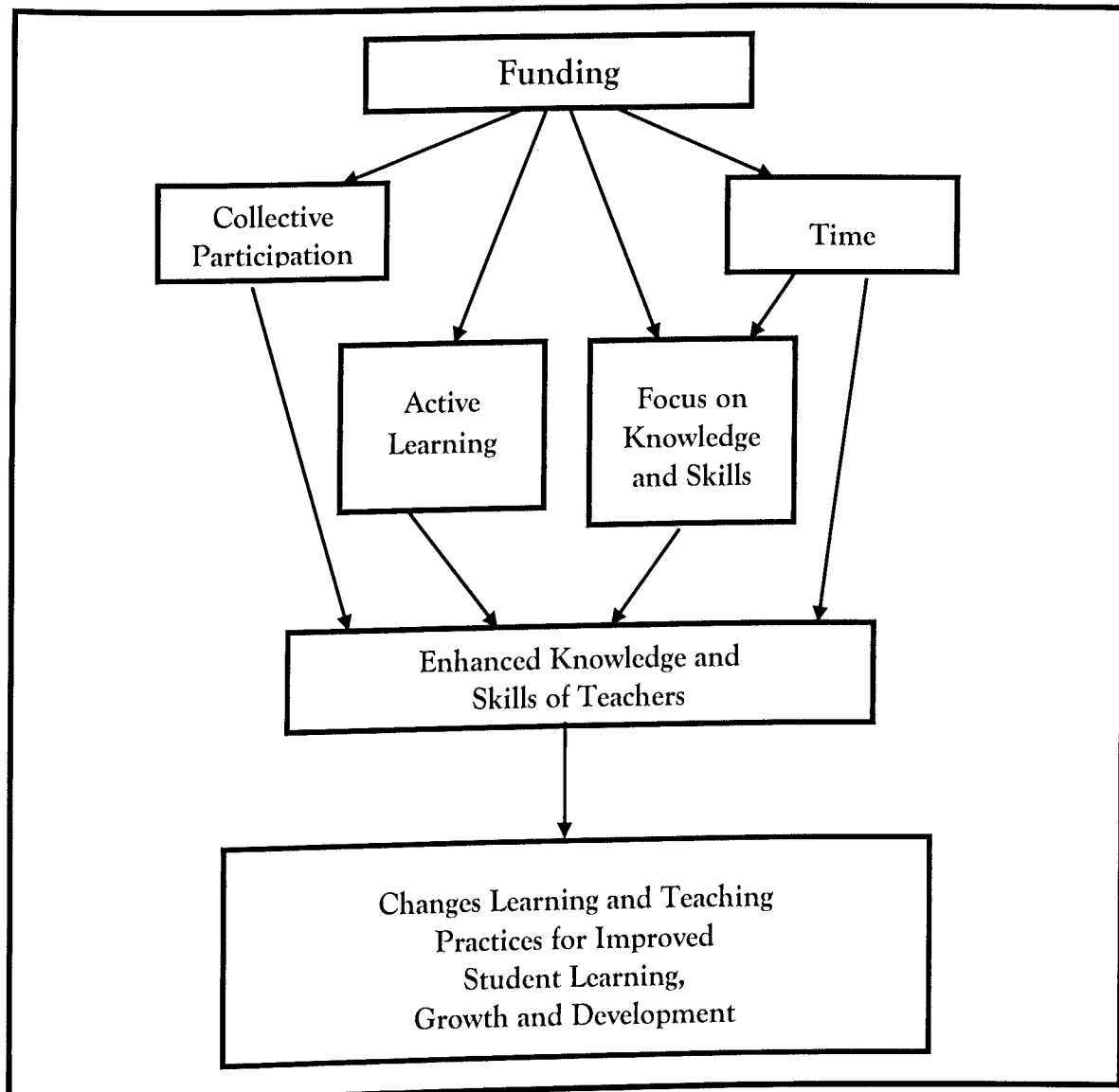


Figure 3: Sustained and Intensive Professional Development to Revitalise Learning and Teaching.

According to the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (2000), while organisational structures were provided, the above professional learning activities alone often fail to challenge or penetrate the core of classrooms. Findings from the U.S. Department of Education (1999) Eisenhower Project further suggests that effective professional learning and development will be sustained through identifying the following focus for professional learning: deepening teacher knowledge on how

students learn and on providing opportunities for professional learning, a greater duration and collective participation, targeting teachers rather than spreading across larger numbers and building capacity for continuous improvement by focusing on curriculum and pedagogy.

Figure 3, adapted from the U.S. Department of Education (1999) Eisenhower Project, illustrates that sustained, ongoing professional learning opportunities supported by funding, resources, professional networking opportunities, observations, planning and reflection, assist teachers to embed new insights, learning skills and understandings into the learning and teaching strategies employed in their classrooms and school organisational structures. In this, the support of the school leadership team is critical to the success of any professional learning program. Bambino (2002) supports this approach, indicating that by approaching professional learning that challenges educators to improve their teaching practice and bring about educational change, requires an approach that is neither negative nor threatening. The work involves school leaders and colleagues who share the same vision and mission, provide encouragement and support and help develop a community of learners. These findings will be tested in this study through the experience of educational leaders and teachers.

Best Practice professional learning and development as identified by Johnson (2004), Hayes et. al. (2006) and the US Department of Education (1999) have identified strategies that focus on strengthening learning and teaching through engaging in quality processes, using powerful classroom strategies and engaging in ongoing professional dialogue. In the U.S.A., the document, *No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children* (January 2003) by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, states

that it is essential for school systems to organise the work of qualified teachers so that they can engage and collaborate with colleagues to develop strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished at their craft of teaching.

Further, Louden (1994) and DEET (1995), identified the following professional learning and development characteristics as essential, be based on teachers' needs and wants, focus on classroom practice, provide support and follow-up for teachers, be run by high quality facilitators, take a variety of approaches, be collaborative, co-operative and collegial, involve active participation, take account of teachers in remote and rural areas, provide financial and other support or reward to teachers for attending, motivate teachers, give teachers confidence and balance theory and practice. Additionally, Research Brief (2006) further clarified essential professional learning characteristics to include quality learning and teaching, effective leadership, support for system wide improvement and clear and collaborative relationships. The impact of the Wagga Wagga CSO's Institute experience will be explored as part of this study and investigation in light of the above elements, for sustained professional learning and development.

These characteristics, therefore, are key elements to providing effective professional learning, where sustained educational change becomes embedded into school organisation and classroom learning and teaching practices. This is supported by the findings of Alloway et. al. (2006) who holds the belief that a professional learning program is successful only when its practices and principles are embedded into daily

classroom activities throughout schools. As such, this research has incorporated these factors into the design of the teaching staff survey (Appendix 4.1).

From the literature examined regarding effective schools and school reform, an essential factor identified for investigation was the need for teachers and educational leaders to engage in intensive and sustained professional learning. The literature in the past suggests that professional development has been done 'to' teachers rather than 'with' them. This is why the professional learning experiences and approaches used by the CSO Wagga Wagga may provide some interesting insights into changing and sustaining classroom learning and teaching.

Some school reform literature such as Hayes et. al. (2006), Newman and Associates (1996), Darling-Hammond (1997) and Sachs (2003) would support the underlying principles contained in the CSO Wagga Wagga learning community journey. There remains for the CSO, additional questions to be addressed regarding sustained pedagogical change being possible, when the mindset of teachers who want to change is challenged and supported by a viable and planned professional learning process. Young and Braund (2007) and Eacott (2007) indicate that long term, sustainable educational change requires a building of norms and trust in an environment of collaboration so that change becomes attitudinal rather than functional. This will be explored in the study.

2.5 Conclusion

Literature has indicated that a Learning Community philosophy will support improved student learning and classroom teaching opportunities. This will require planned and

targeted professional learning focusing on understanding and using effective learning and teaching strategies, while at the same time, developing the school and system leadership capacity to deliver quality pedagogy. For change to be sustained, this will need to be supported. Additionally, the literature emphasises that for educational change to be effective and successful, leadership must drive the learning agenda for individual schools and for the system of schools. Research has pointed to a range of successful strategies that have assisted teachers to make sustained educational change.

Chapter 3

The Learning Community Institute

3.1 Introduction

As part of a perceived need to encourage educational change in Diocesan primary schools, Hands On Consultancy was initially contracted by the Wagga Wagga CSO in 1996 to co-facilitate what is now known as the Learning Communities Institute. Hands On Consultancy planned a five-day trial Institute as part of the implementation process. This first Institute was titled 'Effective Learning and Teaching - Building Learning Communities', and involved twenty-five participants. In the following year, 1997, this initial Institute was followed by five more, conducted by Hands On Consultancy. Since that time, approximately ninety percent of CSO primary teachers have experienced a Learning Community Institute as part of their professional development.

3.2 The Institutes

An understanding of the Institutes, as experienced by Diocesan primary schools personnel, is assisted by an examination of Figure 4 below, from the *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* (2000) document. This diagram attempts to capture the essence of the CSO learning community philosophy. Figure 4, CSO Wagga Wagga Learning Community Institute Themes, that is described in the CSO document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* (2000). These elements include Meaningful Learning, Inquiry, Collaboration, Communication, Self-Responsibility and Human Development. When participants engage with an Institute, they are introduced to these elements as dimensions of effective learning and teaching which is supportive of a learning

community, philosophical approach to effective classroom pedagogy. This approach is based on the quality relationships that exist within the learning community. It indicates that engaging with effective learning and teaching strategies and building and sustaining relationships which are purposeful, then within classrooms and school communities, the conditions are created to support and challenge the learning growth of students. This core theme is found, and mentored across the whole institute experience for teachers.



Figure 4: CSO Wagga Wagga Learning Community Institute Themes

The Institute models, and immerses participants in, co-operative education strategies and practices, and there was a dual focus, with Institutes for teachers and Institutes for school leaders on leading a learning community. The constant refrain, "What's your purpose?" was heard throughout the five days of each Institute experience. This was such a significant part of each Institute that a symbolic bird, "The Parrot of Purpose", was used during the Institute experience to constantly remind participants of the importance of defining purpose in the design of co-operative learning strategies.

The approach attempts to deepen conversation and reflection and force participants to make explicit their assumptions about learning and teaching, and hence substantiate and defend individual teacher-based strategies within classrooms. Additionally, educational leaders are also challenged to defend their strategies regarding how they perform as administrators and educational leaders.

In each Learning Community Institute experience, approximately one and three quarter days were spent in developing relationships between the participants in pairs, small groups and clans. This is designed to encourage a secure environment where trust and intimacy can develop slowly, and enable candor and sharing about deep beliefs, concerns, failures and new ideas.

Dalton and Watson (1997) are of the opinion that it is only after building trust and confidence through structured, collaborative activities have been developed and supported do the challenges emerge, in the form of taking on the strategies which are listed under the intersecting circles in Figure 4. During the Learning Community Institute, each construct was illuminated in terms of what it looks, sounds, and feels like. The implications and practices for the classroom were ‘unpacked’ through sharing success stories and practical examples from other schools, both within and from outside the Wagga Wagga CSO schools. Past Learning Community Institute participants were present to share their story and journey with Learning Community experiences.

3.3 Key Institute Themes

Each Institute was built around a particular theme such as, ‘The Hero’s Journey’, ‘Building Productive Learning Communities’, ‘The Leader’s Role’, and ‘Teacher as

Learner'. Each of the Institutes contained a number of common themes that provided a framework for the Institute. These include honouring teaching, collaboration, team work and grouping, clarifying purpose, norming, problem solving and developing an understanding of effective learning and teaching practices. These themes therefore supported the participants in the Institute to direct their thinking, reflections and dialogue around the principles and practices identified in the CSO Wagga Wagga core statement document on learning and teaching, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

The powerful theme of honouring teachers and teaching is worthy of brief examination here. This was achieved in various ways by Institute organisers, but most notably through the use of research literature that demonstrated the positive effect teachers can have on the lives of young people and their learning. The retelling of the Teddy Stallard story from a speech given by Sir Winston Churchill to the House of Commons in 1940 is one good example of how Institute organisers used positive experiences to demonstrate teacher effectiveness and impact on the lives of young people. (Robbins & Alvy 1995).

"Teddy is an unsuccessful and disheveled child who passes through his classes not connecting with anyone. A small gift from Teddy to his teacher, Miss Thompson, causes her to reflect upon why she became a teacher. A relationship develops between them. From this moment Teddy comes to view his teacher as a quasi mother and mysteriously his reading and grades improve. Both Teddy's parents have died. On completing medical school Teddy invites Miss Thompson to his graduation and some years later his wedding."

An examination of the managerial expertise of teachers, which is contained in the agenda for all Institutes, recognises and celebrates the wide-ranging skill level of teachers. Comparisons with senior managers in business and industry serve to further highlight the significant overlap of skills and expertise in these sessions.

A major focus in the delivery of each Institute was to urge participants to make journal entries regarding changes in their approach to learning and reflection. Some of the reflective thinking by participants was seen by organisers as private, but there was also an emphasis placed on sharing within the safety of a partnership or clan. Personal action planning at the end of the Institute also examined the options available to participants to make changes to the way in which learning and teaching might be re-conceptualised in their particular school and classroom environments. Finally, the Institute experience invited teachers to begin a journey while gaining a collective understanding of the diverse learning and teaching styles that would assist them to gain a better understanding of student outcomes. It also attempts to honour the rhythm of the day-to-day work of teachers in the classroom.

Following the five day intensive workshop, the consultants engaged to manage the Institute, provided a continuation of support for teachers within their own classroom and school environment. The Institute followed a phased process identified by Senge(1998 and 1999), Baird and Mitchell (1997) and Century and Levy (2002). The identified phases of the CSO Wagga Wagga Institute were Incubation, Investigation and Immersion and illustrated in Figure 5 on the following page.

The Incubation phase recognises the personal, professional and communal formation experiences. It is a time for professional dialogue, developing and deepening understandings. This phase was experienced through participation at the CSO Institute. Teachers voluntarily entered this phase with a positive general attitude, but understandably with limited conception and strategies for fostering the objectives of Learning Communities as developed and understood by the Wagga Wagga CSO.

During this phase, teachers were immersed in national and international literature reviews and evidence about effective approaches to learning and teaching, as well as dialogue, modelling and reflection about practical co-operative learning and teaching strategies.

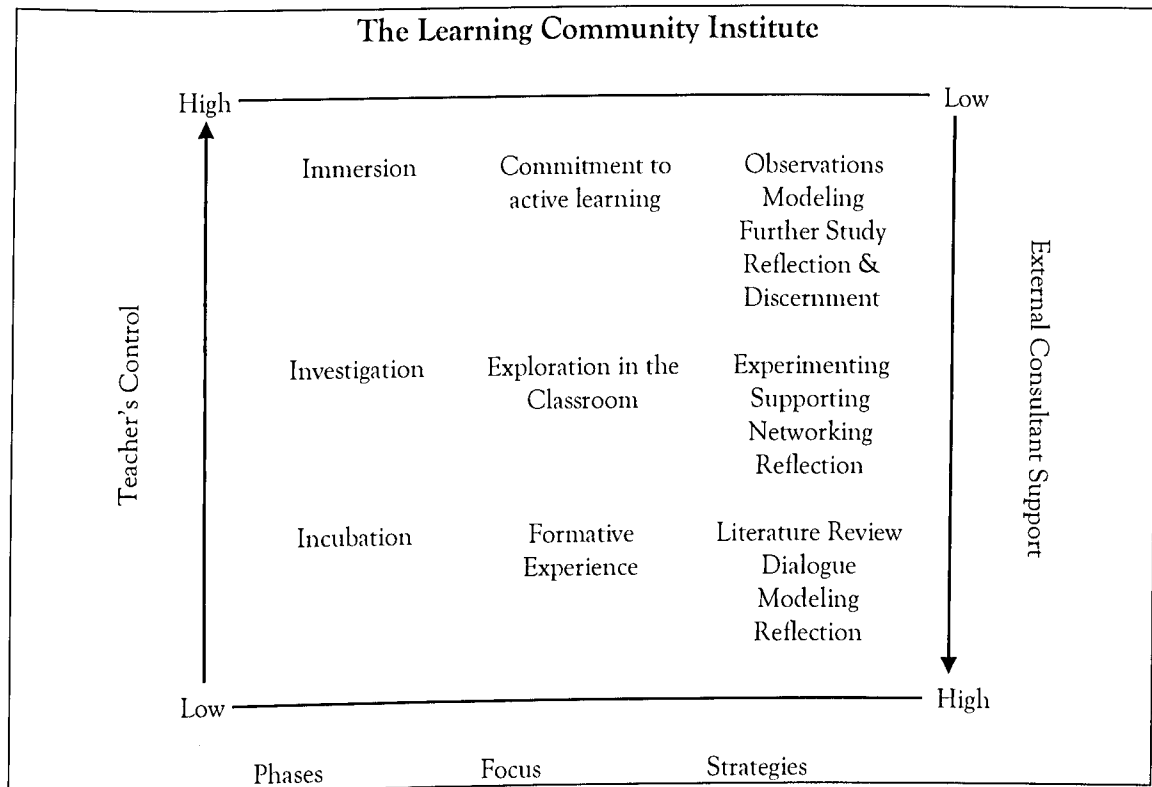


Figure 5: The Learning Community Institute

Following Phase 1, the Investigation phase provided opportunities for teachers to return to the classroom to develop, explore, risk, consolidate and trial a range of strategies and ideas in a safe, formal and structured way. Ongoing support and professional networking were experienced during this phase, with opportunities to further reflect and deepen understandings and skills. Professional dialogue and modelling opportunities were also significant features of this phase. Teachers assumed increased control of the direction of Learning Communities within their classroom and school as they started to adapt and initiate ideas and procedures. Central to Phase 2

was further development of understandings of the theories and principles that lay behind the practices, strategies and principles of Learning Communities, as documented in the CSO statement *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*, and explored during Phase 1. These practices were defined as the activities engaged in by teachers, while the principles were those theoretical parameters necessary for teachers to understand, in order to better articulate the learning community journey in CSO schools and classrooms.

Finally, the Immersion phase provided educators with further opportunities for deeper personal and professional experiences and prospects for study, modelling, reflection and discernment, leading to a sustained pedagogical choice and commitment to the learning and teaching principles outlined in the CSO publication *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*. During this third phase, teachers who had participated in the Phase 1 Institute experience were supported by the external consultants, working on a one-to-one basis in classrooms. Teachers were involved in observations, modelling and professional dialogue about understandings of a Learning Community and strategies relating to the CSO learning and teaching principles and practices.

This final phase demonstrated how the efforts of collaboration and support by teachers and students translate into changed classroom practices that are durable and resilient. During this phase, assistance, support and modelling for teachers helped to expand the circle of influence at the local school level and within the other CSO schools, encouraging and supporting others to embrace and embed the CSO Wagga Wagga's philosophy of learning communities. This duplicated and extended the range of Learning Communities across the CSO Wagga Wagga.

In the *Art and Practice of Learning Organisations*, Senge (1998) identifies five stages of development for learning organisations to embed change:

1. System Thinking
2. Personal Mastery (aligns with the incubation phase)
3. Mental Models
4. Building Shared Vision (aligns with the Investigation phase)
5. Team learning (aligns with the Immersion phase).

These observations about identifiable phases or stages are further supported by Senge (1999) who explores a three stage continuum for change. The “*New Cognitive Capabilities*” (Stage 1), allows for people to see new things, seeing more clearly their own, and others’, assumptions, actions and consequences. This is followed by “*New Action Rules*” (Stage 2) where people begin to experiment with actions based on new assumptions so they can see the results. The final stage is the “*New Values and Operating Assumptions*” phase (Stage 3) where people can enact new actions and assumptions and continue to aid their own, and others’ learning. As such, to create conditions for sustained professional learning to occur, leading to educational change, the three phases incorporating the elements of incubation, investigation and immersion as explored in Chapter 3 need to be planned for, present and supported.

3.4 Cadre

During 1997, a Cadre was established as a means of supporting and honouring those who were demonstrating a commitment to Learning Communities within their classrooms or school. It was a way of “keeping the flame alive” (Goonan 2001) within individual teachers and classrooms as well as sharing the story for those new to the

CSO system of schools. Initially, this group comprised twenty-five highly motivated practitioners who were supported by Hands On Consultancy and the Catholic Schools Office (CSO). Membership of the Cadre provided a forum for professional dialogue with a focus on sharing successes, challenges and resources while supporting one another in trialing ideas and practices. The South American term, Cadre, was selected for the group by the consultancy team. The term is associated with working undercover and with infiltration, the idea being that Cadre members would begin, in their own small ways within their circle of influence, to make their classrooms and schools Learning Communities. This would lead to a widening of their circle of influence to other classrooms, creating a ripple effect within the CSO Wagga Wagga. Importantly, one of the tasks of the Cadre was to assist Hands On Consultancy in writing the CSO publication, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*, to support teachers to create, understand and maintain effective learning and teaching communities.

3.5 Practices, Beliefs and Principles

The Wagga Wagga CSO continues to journey towards becoming a Learning Community. During this journey, there has been an attempt to shift from an invitational 'try some co-operative learning activities' to the present situation, in which the primary schools are expected to use principles and practices consistent with the CSO understanding of Learning Communities. The CSO document, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* (2000), sets out the reasons for, and discourse about, learning and teaching that has developed within the CSO primary schools in recent years. The expectation is that schools will work to align and enhance their daily practices with the beliefs and principles of the policy guidelines contained in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* (2000). The CSO policy position has been arrived at collaboratively over time,

using Learning Community Institutes as the major vehicle for transforming primary schools into learning communities within the Wagga Wagga CSO.

The system level changes that have been described above are noteworthy in that they appear to be consistent with and supportive of Learning Community philosophy. This research will explore the extent to which the primary teachers within the CSO system of schools have adopted a learning community philosophy and associated learning and teaching strategies that are identified by the CSO Wagga Wagga in its core document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* (2000).

3.6 Conclusion

In summary, the Institute experience provided groups of teachers from CSO schools the opportunity to come together for a significant period of time for the incubation phase of professional development. This enabled them to be immersed in the CSO learning community philosophy and to practice, understand and model the essence of the identified effective learning and teaching practices of meaningful learning, inquiry, collaboration, communication, self-responsibility and human development. This process was reinforced with the constant reminder for teachers and educational leaders to regularly reflect on the question "What's my purpose?" when reflecting, planning and engaging in pedagogical activities.

The next chapter will outline the research methodology that was undertaken to help establish if the teachers who participated in the learning community institute use the effective teaching strategies that are promoted by the CSO and will also explore if their

participation assisted or hindered them to implement the strategies as identified in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

Chapter 4

Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the research methodology chosen to explore the experiences of classroom teachers in their engagement with, and adoption of, effective learning and teaching strategies, modelled and promoted throughout the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) Wagga Wagga's Learning Community Institutes. The chapter also describes fully the methodology and research strategies used.

The chapter is divided into a number of sections. The first section justifies the use of a mixed-methods design. The data collection methods are explained in the next section, and a description of how the data was analysed follows. Finally, ethical considerations and the role of the researcher are addressed, and the chapter concludes with an overview of the how the data gathered will assist to establish if the learning community Institute assisted participants to use the CSO identified effective teaching practices.

4.2 The Research Question

For the CSO Wagga Wagga, there was an identified issue around the quality of pedagogy engaged in by primary classroom teachers. An intervention initiative known as the Learning Community Institute was developed, and from 1996 – 2000, over 90% of the primary classroom teachers engaged with this strategy.

Therefore, the research problem is how to determine the success or otherwise of the intervention known as the Institute across a rural Catholic school system, and to ensure that the learning community effective learning and teaching practices, promoted in the CSO document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*' are used. This problem will be answered by addressing the following questions:

1. Do teachers perceive that the Learning Community Institute influenced their teaching practices.
2. Do teachers perceive that their participation in the Learning Community Institute influenced them to engage with the teaching practices of meaningful learning, inquiry, collaboration, communication, self-responsibility and human development.

4.3 Research Procedure

A mixed-methods research design, according to Creswell (2008), is a procedure for collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods for a study to understand a research problem. Creswell (2008) further explains that by collecting both data types, this should lead to a more complete understanding of the research problem by comparing, relating or converging the data to assist in a more detailed interpretation of the research problem.

The mixed-methods research for this study is an analysis of three sources of qualitative and quantitative data. Collecting instruments included a survey, group interviews and semi-structured individual interviews. Included in this section are the explanations for the selection of the mixed-methods approach. These encompass:

- Selection of participants for personal and group interviews

- Consent and privacy protection of participants
- Design and use of survey
- Role of researcher
- Methods of data collection and analysis

The mixed-methods approach is based on the view that confidence in research findings is increased when corroborated independently from different sources. The data gathering processes for this research engaged educators and members of local school communities reflecting and commenting on their Learning Community Institute experience. The focus of the data collection was to determine if sustained professional learning and development experienced during the Institute impacted positively on the Wagga Wagga CSO's vision for more effective teaching practices, as contained in its publication, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

The mixed-methods approach, according to Mason (1996:4), aims to produce a rounded understanding on the basis of the rich, contextual and detailed data of the issues being investigated. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) additionally state that it is important that researchers deploy a wide range of interconnecting methods, hoping always to get a better focus on the subject matter. As well, the research methods used are structured to provide a focus on the actions, reactions, behaviours and lived experiences of individuals and groups who have contributed to the Wagga Wagga CSO Learning Community journey.

To maximise the validity of this study and investigation, a mix of qualitative and quantitative research instruments were selected to crosscheck data obtained from survey, group interviews and semi-structured individual interview feedback. By employing different data capturing techniques, there is the ability within the design of the methodology to corroborate data and yield a comprehensive analysis through a process of triangulation. This type of comparison is advocated by Denzin in Silverman (1993) and helps to present a more complete picture rather than the partial views that could result if the methodology had focused on one source for collection of the raw data.

Additionally, the use of a mixed-methods approach adds rigour, depth, complexity and richness to this study and investigation, as found in the work of Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Stake (1989) and Sarantakos (1998). This, according to Mason (1996:149) allows researchers to *“approach their research questions from different angles and to explore their intellectual puzzles in a rounded and multi-faceted way.”*

4.4 The Research Population and Sample

This study focused on primary school teachers employed by the Catholic Schools Office, Wagga Wagga. The year 1994 marked the beginning of a CSO initiated professional development process that involved more than 90% of the primary school teaching staff and culminated with the publication of the CSO document about the principles and practices of effective learning and teaching, known as *‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’*.

Specifically, the research was designed to collect survey data from a wide cross section of primary school educators who had commenced their professional learning experience with a Learning Community Institute, and had subsequently been supported within their local school community to implement a learning community philosophy and the changed pedagogical strategies of *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

Additionally, the interview samples were also from the teachers who had been part of the CSO Wagga Wagga Institute experience. Further, group interviews from current senior primary students and parents were chosen at random from schools which currently had a principal who had undertaken the Learning Community Institute experience.

4.5 Sample Size

The study included survey data collected from 49 primary school teachers. This was followed by five individual semi-structured interviews and two group interviews, consisting of ten senior primary students and ten parents.

It was anticipated that the response rate for the survey would have been higher. A total of 150 surveys were distributed across 28 primary school communities. With a 30% response to the survey, it was considered adequate by the researcher, to provide data for adequate depth and diversity. This was based on the knowledge that individual and group interviews would also supplement the survey data.

It could be argued that the number of surveys returned was not large, however, the information collected demonstrated a number of themes and trends about the Learning

Community Institute experience and the implementation of changed pedagogical practices. These themes and trends were explored further during the individual interviews.

4.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of data entailed the grouping and tabulating of themes and issues from the survey questionnaire, and then the semi-structured interviews. The survey was the primary source of data collected from teachers across the CSO primary schools. Data collected from the interviews was aligned to the emerging themes and issues highlighted through the surveys. These identified themes and issues provided a focus for the group interviews to allow for comment and reflection from the point of view of parent and student observations.

Secondary source material provided another source of information which enlightened the analysis of the existing data and provided insight into the survey and interview discussions. These secondary sources were anecdotal comments from CSO consultants, post interview discussions and verbal comments and clarification from teachers who had or had not completed a survey. These secondary sources tended to clarify and support the themes and issues identified from the survey interviews.

4.7 Survey

The first method of data collection was the use of a survey to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, and supplement the other field work experiences. This study involved circulating 150 survey documents across 27 CSO primary schools. Schools

identified as rural city schools were sent ten survey documents, rural town schools were sent seven copies each and isolated community schools were each sent one copy.

Prior to sending the survey out to schools, an opportunity was provided at the CSO principals' gathering, for the researcher to address the principals and outline the research purpose and data gathering methodology. This was followed up with a letter to principals (Appendix 4.4), which explained the data collection method for the survey.

As principals distributed the survey to teaching staff, they were to briefly explain its purpose and emphasise the total confidentiality of the data collected. A stamped return envelope was provided for the return of completed survey forms directly to the researcher. Of the survey forms distributed, 49 were completed and returned.

After distributing the survey documents to the primary schools, it was followed by phone contact to all of the primary school principals to encourage them to remind their teachers to complete and return their questionnaire. Two of the primary schools invited the researcher to address their weekly staff meeting regarding the nature of the research and encourage discussion among the teaching staff and a successful return rate of the questionnaire from their school principals.

The Learning and Teaching Practices Inventory Questionnaire (Appendix 4.1), devised for this research, was issued to 150 primary school principals and teachers. The survey was designed and planned by the researcher based on the key indicators published in the document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*. Prior to the survey's wide distribution, members of the Project Advisory Team were asked to pilot the survey and

to provide constructive feedback and suggestions regarding the design and use of the survey. As well, a copy of the survey was forwarded to the consultants of Hands On Consultancy for their reflections and feedback. Their suggestions regarding the addition and use of a comment section for each of the learning and teaching strategies and the institute experience was added to the survey form before distribution to teachers.

The survey design has a number of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include the ability to distribute the survey widely, the possibility of a high response rate from the respondents, the anonymity of the respondents, the reduction of bias and the consistency in the method of presenting the survey questions. Limitations include the possibility of a low response rate, the researcher being unable to explain or clarify aspects of the survey to the respondents, a lack of control under which the respondents completed the survey and the limitations to the type of questions that can be included in the survey. (Sarantakos 1998) The survey additionally provided an open ended response option to allow for a wide range of responses allowing for the various contexts and experiences of the respondents.

The survey design used both fixed-alternative and open-ended questions to gather data, and consisted of a Learning and Teaching Practices Inventory. This survey included 53 behavioural statements which were identified in the CSO *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* document. Classroom teachers were asked to scale items as to the frequency that they practiced the stated classroom strategies. Each statement was followed by five Likert-type possibilities ranging from "always" to "never". Each response was tabulated according to the learning and teaching practices identified by *'Today's Children,*

Tomorrow's Adults' document. Open-ended responses were also used to provide and encourage opportunities to gather additional data and the reflections of teaching staff around the Learning Community Institute experiences, or their engagement with the learning and teaching strategies documented in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

The reliability of the survey was estimated using Cronbach's Alpha method of estimating the internal consistency of the seven scales in the survey. The reliability coefficients were above 0.80 for all these scales (see Table 2 for the specific co-efficient of these scales). According to Laerd Statistics (2010), Cronbach's Alpha is the most common measure of reliability used when multiple Likert questions are asked in a survey. This indicates a high level of internal consistency of the survey results.

Survey Sections	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Meaningful learning	0.951	12
Inquiry	0.871	6
Communication	0.812	8
Collaboration	0.875	8
Self-responsibility	0.903	10
Human development	0.856	15
Institute experience	0.842	25

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Responses to the open-ended questions on the survey were transcribed and analysed for themes.

4.8 Individual Interviews

The interview method involved conducting five individual voluntary participation semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, there is no focus on structure and hierarchy, but rather questions are used as a springboard to facilitate mutual discovery and interest (Bailey 1996). This allowed the opportunity for both the interviewer and interviewee to explore and comment on a wide range of views, understandings and reflections about the focus topic. The role of the interviewer is neutral, establishing a “balanced rapport” (Fontana and Frey 2000:650) being careful not to evaluate or influence the responses.

As the interviewer, to stay neutral required the need to prepare written interview questions in advance to assist in guiding smoothly through the interviews. Additionally, no opinions or comments of agreement or disagreement could be given by the researcher. Further questions based on the interviewees responses could only be questions for clarification. This situation supports the opportunity for a greater depth and breadth of data to be collected. Further each interviewee will provide a different and varied response based on their experiences, circumstances and issues.

This data collection method involved semi-structured individual interviews where five participants, who all had experienced a Learning Community Institute, were selected. The researcher chose participants who had volunteered to be part of the study after principals were informed about the research project and had circulated survey forms to members of their staff. From the volunteers, the participants were selected from the following areas of teaching categories:

1. Principals/School Executive. The researcher selected one participant at random from this group of three volunteers.
2. Classroom Teachers. The researcher selected two participants at random from this group of four volunteers.
3. The CSO Consultants and Education Officers were all verbally invited by the researcher to volunteer to participate in this study as all members of this group had experienced a Learning Community Institute. The researcher selected two participants from this group of five volunteers.

The interviewees were invited to express opinions on the Learning Community Institute experience and their journey following this experience. A reflective dialogue approach was adopted. The interviews also assisted in identifying consensus and differences in viewpoints, and raised related issues not canvassed in the initial survey and group interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and the interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded for identification of common themes and key concepts.

In the interviews, particular focus was placed on perceptions held by participants relating to their Learning Community Institute experience and journey, and the extent to which the effective teaching practices identified in the document, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*, were both evident in schools and classrooms, and effective in changing teachers' and students' attitudes towards learning (see Appendix 4.2).

4.9 Group Interviews

The third data collection method was obtained from the group interview activity. The group interviews involved the selection of ten members from participating parents and ten senior primary students, in an attempt to facilitate group discussion on evaluative aspects of the Learning Community Institutes. Sarantakos (1998) refers to various definitions of group interview studies that identify features like organised discussions, collective activity, social events and interaction that contribute to social research. Randall (1997) further states that the members of a group are drawn from a larger audience, as specific information is required from within the group, a series of questions (Appendix 4.6) leading participants through conversation and discussion. They are able to build on the ideas and comments of other participants to give researchers further information, through free-flowing open-ended discussion. (Gall et. al. 2006)

In the present study, group interviews were organised to provide a way of gaining information in a short period of time about the breadth or variety of opinions not necessarily achieved through a survey approach.

Due to the diversity of size and location of the CSO Wagga Wagga primary schools, the groups identified for interviews were selected using a sampling method described earlier in this chapter, where twenty seven CSO primary schools were divided into sub-groups based on schools where the principal had or had not participated in a learning community Institute. This process allowed for the convenient use of existing school communities.

Group interviews were directed by the researcher, who asked questions designed to stimulate conversation within the group (Appendix 4.6). There were no restrictions placed on respondents about their observations of learning and teaching within the classroom. Field notes were also taken by the researcher who also acted in a moderately non-directed role as the facilitator and interviewer.

Comments from the group interviews were audio taped in order to facilitate accurate recall of participants' responses. At the same time, the researcher can observe, analyse and assess important non-literate sources of information about those participating in the group interview. At the conclusion of each group interview, transcripts were produced, then analysed by the researcher for themes and the emergence of key issues, which were compared with the data emerging from the teacher survey and the interview phase of the Learning Community Institute study and investigation. Interview transcripts and researcher's field notes were used to create categories to determine the list of identified themes which will be discussed in the next chapter. The task of the researcher was to review the transcripts, categorise and organise the data into related themes.

According to the work of Sarantakos (1998:182) the group interviews can "*explain trends and variances, reasons and causes through the views of the respondents.*" As such, these groups involve organised discussion with a selected group of individuals, to gain information about views and experiences which reflected on the Learning Community Institutes' main goals of improving the learning and teaching paradigm within the primary schools of the CSO Wagga Wagga.

As mentioned, the group interview strategy required conducting an interview group for parents and another for senior primary students. These groups each consisted of 10 participants who were asked a series of open-ended questions (Bailey 1996) based around the feedback obtained through the survey instrument. The purpose of the group discussion was outlined to the participants, by the researcher, to facilitate interaction between group members, promoted debate and to respond to open-ended questions. In operation, the group interview function was used to provide an in-depth portrait of reflections and evaluative comments on the effectiveness of Learning Community strategies on selected schools.

School principals were informed about this research project at a prior CSO Principals' Meeting (Appendix 4.2) and once sample schools were selected for the group interviews by the researcher, the Principal was contacted by telephone and followed up with contact via a letter. To select participants for the group interview, purposive sampling was used. This method allows the researcher to select participants based on their specific knowledge of the research topic. In order to obtain feedback and reflection from parents and students, the researcher chose participants from schools whose Principal had participated in a Learning Community Institute.

To select sample schools, names of principals who had participated in a Learning Community Institute were added to a list in a column in an Excel spreadsheet. Using the spreadsheet function, random numbers were allocated to the list of names. The list was then sorted by random numbers, lowest to highest. The two names at the top of the list were selected as the schools to be approached for the parent and the student group interviews.

The selected school principal was asked to consider the inclusion of a pre-worded invitation in their School Newsletter (Appendix 4.3), seeking participants who would like to volunteer for the group interview activity, to provide comment on their school's learning initiatives as expressed in the document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*. Group members were guided by open-ended questions from the researcher and notes were taken. Additionally, the group interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, and they were informed that any published data would not be in a form that identified the individual participant or school. After having read an information letter (Appendix 4.7), the participants signed an agreement about how the research data collected may be used without identifying the participant (Appendix 4.8). In the case of senior primary students being nominated by their principal, parents/guardians were contacted by phone and information (Appendix 4.7) was sent home for them to provide written consent (Appendix 4.9), to allow their child to participate in the focus group activity. The content of the group interview recording, plus the direct field notes of the researcher, were used as a primary source of evidence.

The value of the group interviews as a data gathering instrument, according to RIVA Market Research (2003) is that it allows respondents to talk in their own words, without filters or outside interpretations, allows the researcher to hear, firsthand, the attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and opinions of each member of the group, and gain insights into people's shared understandings.

Interviewing in a group can also provide disadvantages. According to Oatey (1999) one person can undermine others and dominate the conversation. Further some researchers claim that group interviews are not a good research methodology because "of potential

influence of one or two respondents on the remaining members of the group ... the dominant respondents can negatively affect the outcome of the group and that group pressure may influence the comments made by individuals.”(Frey and Oishi 1995:2) It was therefore important to engage in a mixed-method approach for research data gathering.

4.10 Data Analysis

For this research there were three sources of data collected and analysed. The data originated from individual interviews, group interviews and a survey.

The data analysis process for the interview involved identifying areas of agreement and disagreement and applying this to interview comments based on key words relating to the learning community Institute experience. The next step required the researcher to group data according to categories and themes identified from the interviews. These categories formed the basis for the analysis of data and represented a pattern of interconnected thoughts and comments from the participants.

The group interview activity was also recorded. Using the data codes developed from the interviews, the researcher listened to the group interview recordings and collated the data into categories. A summary of the focus group themes was prepared by the researcher.

The survey provided statistical data based on responses using a 5 point Likert Scale. The survey required responses to a number of statements with “always, mostly, sometimes, rarely or never”. Additional opportunities were provided on the survey

documents for written comments to be added where respondents were able to identify factors that either assisted or hindered the engagement with identified learning and teaching practices. The written comments were then categorized according to the previously identified codes. A summary of the survey comments was created.

The next phase of the data analysis required the researcher to identify themes that were common across the three data sources. This alignment of emerging themes provided the essential data for the research and was used to draw conclusions and recommendations.

From this investigation, recommendations have been developed for consideration by the CSO to provide reflection and direction for future structural, administrative and classroom strategy changes. The findings of this investigation will be presented to the Leadership Team of the CSO for consideration to further involve teachers in refining and refocusing their vision and mission as educationalists, and recommitting to effective pedagogy and learning process and to the learning growth and development of their students. These recommendations have resulted from the analysis of data gathered about the impact of the Learning Community Institute on the engagement with the learning and teaching practices identified by the CSO in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Procedures for group and individual interviews and survey include voluntary participation, use of an informed consent process (Appendices 5.5.1, 5.5.2, 5.5.3) and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

A Project Advisory Team was established to act as a sounding board for the research, and also act in the role of ombudsman for any respondent who may have expressed concerns with aspects of the research. The Project Advisory Team, consisting of 4 members of the Wagga Wagga CSO school community, was invited by the researcher to review the research methodology, to provide a forum for school and community members to express concerns and to reflect on and critique the research data and findings, assist with random sampling selection and provide the researcher with feedback, support and planning via professional dialogue.

The formation of a Project Advisory Team was seen as a critical aspect of ensuring that the Learning Community research maintains relevance. The Project Advisory Team members provide a source of advice and comment on information gathering processes and sources, key issues and reactions to findings, conclusions and recommendations. The Project Advisory Team also provides a forum for the school community members to express concerns or make enquiries about the research project.

The Project Advisory Team was formed prior to commencement of the data collection phase and comprised; a School Consultant from the Catholic Schools Office, a Learning and Teaching Officer from the Catholic Schools Office, a Primary School Principal and a Primary School Teacher.

The Project Advisory Team met prior to, and after the data collection phase of the research, to provide comment and reaction to the report progress. Members were also invited to provide informal reaction at any stage of this investigation via e-mail, direct conversation or phone.

Terms of Reference for the Project Advisory Team were clarified in line with the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics committee requirements (Appendix 5.1) and the requirements set by the Wagga Wagga CSO (Appendix 5.2).

4.12 Role of the Researcher

As a School Consultant employed by the Catholic Schools Office, Wagga Wagga, the researcher is currently responsible for supporting secondary school teachers with improving pedagogy and curriculum delivery. Being aware of this role while conducting the qualitative research across the system of CSO primary schools, it is possible that there might have been some influence of the research findings as the researcher did have knowledge of the Learning Community Institute process and had previously been involved in discussion groups regarding the document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

To compensate, the researcher used members of the Project Advisory Team regularly for comments on the data collected, and any analysis developed. Additionally, a simple random sampling method was used when selecting participants for interview and focus group activities in order to reduce any bias. Also, the researcher did act as the facilitator for both the group interviews and the individual interviews.

As a facilitator there are important considerations to take into account when gathering data for research. Once an interview has been arranged, the role of facilitator becomes critical, especially in terms of providing clear explanations of the purpose of the interview, helping people feel at ease, and/or facilitating interaction.

During the interview the facilitator will need to promote debate, perhaps by asking open questions. The facilitator may also need to challenge participants, especially to draw out people's differences and tease out a diverse range of meanings on the topic under discussion. Sometimes the facilitator will need to probe for details, or move things forward when the conversation is drifting or has reached a minor conclusion. The facilitator also has to keep the session focused and so sometimes may deliberately have to steer the conversation back on course. The facilitator also has to ensure everyone in the interview group participates and gets a chance to speak. At the same time the facilitator is not to show too much approval (Kreuger 1988), so as to avoid favouring particular participants' viewpoints. The facilitator must avoid giving personal opinions so as not to influence participants towards any particular position or opinion.

The role of the facilitator is a demanding and challenging one and the facilitator will need to possess interpersonal skills and qualities, including, being a good listener, non-judgemental and adaptable. These qualities will promote the participants' trust in the facilitator and increase the likelihood of open, interactive dialogue.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter described the research design implemented by the researcher for this study, including overall research design and data collection instruments. The methodology used in this study engages both a mixed-methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data. The use of a mixed-methods approach provided triangulation which ensures cross referencing different perspectives from the multiple data sources. Additionally, the validity of the research was enhanced due to the various strategies and sources of data collection.

The mixed-methods approach employed during this study and investigation provided the range of relevant data that was received, analysed, discussed and interpreted about the impact of the Learning Community Institute on the nature of learning and teaching in the Wagga Wagga CSO primary school classrooms.

In the quantitative approach, the survey was used to gather data from classroom teachers. In the qualitative approach, in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used to explore the extent of the influence on learning and teaching that the Learning Community Institute and *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* publication had been observed by teachers, parents and students. The next chapter will provide an analysis of data and the findings from the survey, group and in-depth interviews.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the data collected through the survey, group and personal semi-structured interviews to establish the extent to which the effective teaching strategies of the CSO's *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* document has been operational within the CSO's primary school classrooms. This chapter will be followed by a discussion of the significance and meaning of the research data reported in Chapter 4. The survey provided a widespread overview of the perceptions of the CSO Wagga Wagga primary school teachers about the range of effective teaching strategies that were used within their classrooms and the impact of the intervention strategy known as the Institute. The survey responses also provided the basis for the focus of questions developed for the personal semi-structured interviews and group interviews. This chapter first presents the responses gathered through the survey, followed by the key themes and concepts obtained from interview participants. Finally, an overview of the group interview comments will be presented.

5.2 The Survey

The Effective Learning and Teaching Practices Survey (Appendix 4.1) will hereafter be referred to as the survey and was circulated to 150 school teachers within the 27 CSO Wagga Wagga primary schools. The response rate for this survey was 36% of the distributed surveys returned. The focus of the survey was to establish if the effective teaching practices as documented in the Wagga Wagga CSO document *'Today's*

Children, Tomorrow's Adults' statement were being practiced in the classroom of the CSO primary schools.

The survey explored the level of engagement with the identified teaching practices within primary school classrooms and also investigated the extent to which the teachers' participation in the professional learning project known as the Learning Community Institute was the catalyst for adopting and explicitly implementing the CSO Wagga Wagga's effective teaching practices.

The elements of effective teaching, as outlined in the document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*, include meaningful learning, inquiry, communication, collaboration, self-responsibility and human development. Characteristics of each of these elements were included in the survey and the respondents results were collated as a percentage of the total responses.

The survey not only collected data on the extent to which effective teaching practices were used, but provided opportunities for teachers to reflect on the factors within their classrooms and school community that may have assisted or hindered the development and implementation of the CSO recognised effective teaching practices. Additionally there were both positive and negative comments from teachers identifying factors that supported or hindered them in the implementation of these identified teaching practices. The responses were collated and grouped from the survey and summarised in Table 3 following.

Effective Learning and Teaching Practices Expressed as a percentage of the survey results	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Meaningful Learning	30	58	11	1	0
Inquiry	17	47	26	8	2
Communication	15	45	32	8	0
Collaboration	33	44	19	3	1
Self-Responsibility	28	49	21	2	0
Human Development	46	42	10	2	0

Table 3: Teaching Practices Survey Results

Where respondents indicated “always” and “mostly” on the survey, it was interpreted by the researcher to indicate that there was some consistency in the use of these identified practices within classrooms.

Table 3 above illustrates how teachers perceived the extent to which the teaching practices defined by the Wagga Wagga CSO were being implemented in a consistent manner within their own classroom. These overall survey results indicated that the dimensions of communication and inquiry as identified by the elements listed in the survey, were perceived by teachers to be the least used strategies to engage students with learning while the identified characteristics of meaningful learning and human development were identified as the teachers most regular practices set of strategies. The survey additionally provided opportunities for teachers to reflect and comment on their perceptions of the impact of the Learning Community Institute intervention strategy and its influence on teaching practices. These issues will be discussed later in this chapter.

The survey additionally identified a number of issues that teachers believed enhanced effective classroom practice. They included: collaborative and meaningful learning and teaching strategies and experiences that are planned, shared and inclusive, developing a supportive, active and secure classroom environment built on positive relationships, student consultation and engagement in reflection experiences and explicit teaching of co-operative learning skills and values.

The survey comments have further indicated that apart from focused, purposeful well planned learning and teaching, there is also a requirement for capacity building leadership to develop, establish, nurture and support collaborative relationships and partnerships across the whole school community. When these elements are present and focused there are opportunities for the core purpose of schooling of supporting student learning and their achievement, to become a reality. These elements can be seen to form the basis of what constitutes an effective learning community of the Wagga Wagga CSO schools.

Recent discussions in Australia over the implementation of a national curriculum and about student learning have moved away from the 'What' students learn to the types of learners educators are trying to create through structured learning experiences (Yates & Collins 2010). Yet lesson content quality, the 'What' has a greater impact on our student learning outcomes (Alton-Lee 2006). Additionally, it is important for teachers to provide relevance in order to motivate and engage students (Marsh 2010). Much of the current developments within Australia about the establishment of a national curriculum has a strong focus on the mandatory content that is to be delivered by teachers to students at particular stages in their schooling. Little has been mandated or

suggested around the pedagogy that will effectively engage the learners of today. This is one of our greatest challenges as contemporary educators. This is the 'how' of education.

Likewise, teachers responded clearly about those factors that have hindered effective teaching within the classroom, and across the school, and these include time management in a crowded curriculum, variety of stages of learning within the same classroom and a range of student ability within a class group as well as disruptions to normal class routine caused by student behaviour and other school activities. Additionally, teachers mentioned low level of positive modelling, knowledge, interest, skills, confidence and willingness to engage consistently in effective practices on the part of some teachers and competitive culture amongst some parents and students who display a lack of congruence of values between school and home. These comments from teachers further support the findings of Ellsworth (2000) regarding obstacles to educational change initiatives. The issues listed above were identified from the survey. These identified factors supporting or hindering effective classroom teaching, were used to structure the questions for the interviews and focus groups as a way of clarifying and explaining the findings of the survey. Survey responses concerning individual elements of effective learning and teaching practices from *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* were examined and are summarised below in more detail.

The purpose of this investigation is to describe and analyse how the participation of primary school teachers in the CSO Wagga Wagga learning community Institute, has resulted in the adoption and implementation of the learning and teaching practices identified in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

5.3 Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question was to establish the perceptions that teachers had regarding the learning community Institute influence on their teaching practice. The survey, individual and group interviews provided the data to consider the response to this question.

The Learning Community Institute philosophy is grounded in the view that teachers' professional learning and growth is a fundamental pre-requisite for school development and improvement. The Learning Community journey for schools of the CSO Wagga Wagga commenced at the 'Institute' where teachers were given opportunities to build their capacity and understanding for articulating their purpose to meet the challenges of education in the 21st century.

The following Tables in this Chapter (Tables 4-10) mean scores have been calculated by assigning the value 5 to Always, 4 to Mostly, 3 to Sometimes, 2 to Rarely and 1 to Never. The data from the Institute section of the survey is presented based on the groupings used in the survey when gathering data about the Institute as a professional learning strategy. The results are presented in Table 4, following.

The survey provided an additional opportunity to collect data on the processes of the Institute. When asked how the institute provided a springboard for participants to engage with the CSO's learning community approach, Table 4 indicates that 74% of the respondents to the survey indicated a positive response about their experience and to the role of the Institute.

Institute Professional Learning Strategies		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	Standard Deviation
		Survey Frequency Scores						
Is founded on teacher needs.	Planning	16	23	5	5	0	4.02	0.95
Is relevant to teachers' interests and experience.		17	24	8	0	0	4.18	
Provides enough flexibility to accommodate the needs of individual teachers.		24	15	4	6	0	4.16	
Clearly defines goals, process and outcomes.		12	23	14	0	0	3.96	
Involves committed participants.		17	10	22	0	0	3.90	
Offers equal access to all teachers regardless of their geographical location or type of school.		28	13	0	8	0	4.24	
Brings together teams of classroom teachers.		19	13	13	4	0	3.96	
Requires preparation by participants.		14	16	12	7	0	3.76	
Addresses various levels of need (e.g. teacher, school, system).		13	17	12	7	0	3.73	
Involves leaders with expert knowledge and practical know-how.	Facilitation	25	19	5	0	0	4.41	0.80
Locates activities in pleasant and comfortable surroundings.		18	14	17	0	0	4.02	
Involves teachers drawn from both similar and diverse professional settings.		24	11	14	0	0	4.20	
Provides high-quality 'user friendly' materials and resources.		25	14	10	0	0	4.31	
Has the support of the school executive.		16	21	12	0	0	4.08	
Demonstrates a clear relationship between theory, research and practice.	Implication	20	19	10	0	0	4.20	0.76
Provides opportunities for active engagement.		24	19	6	0	0	4.37	
Contains both structured and unstructured times, with participants able to reflect upon implications for their professional practice.		26	23	0	0	0	4.53	
Makes optimal use of time available.		18	25	6	0	0	4.24	
Involves modelling of exemplary practice.		12	29	8	0	0	4.08	
Sequences and spaces activities over time.		24	15	10	0	0	4.29	
Builds Knowledge and knowledge through action research.		20	20	9	0	0	4.22	
Balances of curriculum and pedagogical issues.		12	17	20	0	0	3.84	
Uses a variety of presentation styles.		24	13	8	4	0	4.16	
Involves planned follow-up.	Application	8	17	16	8	0	3.51	0.77
Creates a feeling of excitement, empowerment and ownership.		5	30	14	0	0	3.82	
Translates into practice knowledge and skills gained in professional development.		4	30	15	0	0	3.78	
Demonstrates accountability for student outcomes.		12	18	19	0	0	3.86	
Supports teachers' accountability for student outcomes.		0	28	21	0	0	3.57	
Rewards participation and achievements through academic credit, employer recognition, career advancement opportunities, or remuneration for time spent.		11	14	15	9	0	3.55	
Encourages transferability of learning across school sectors and subjects.		4	25	17	3	0	3.61	
Total Percentage Scores			36	38	21	5	0	

Table 4: Institute Survey Frequency, Mean Scores and Standard Deviation.

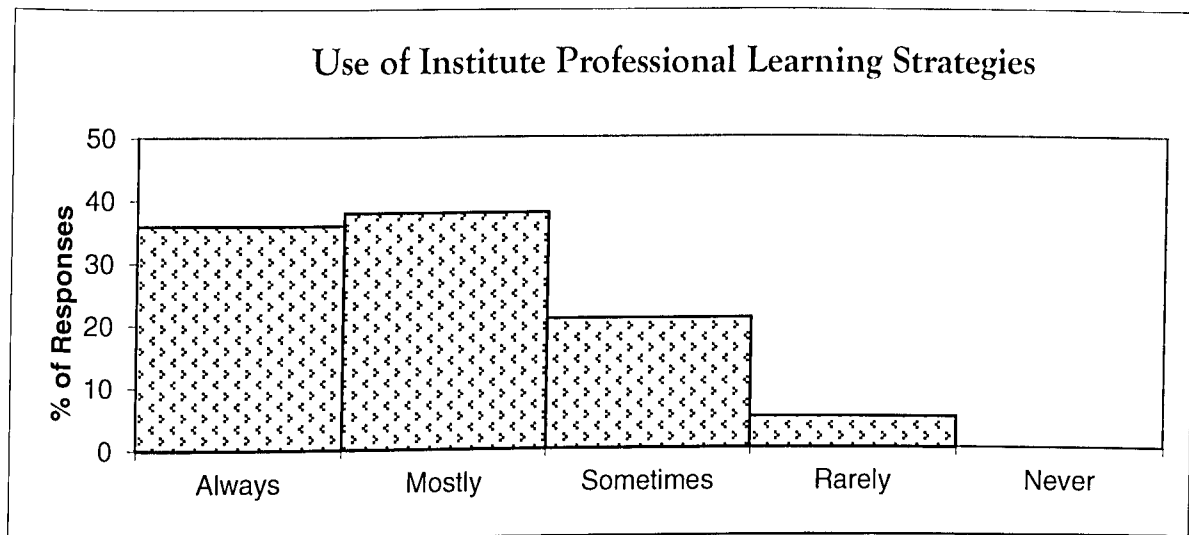


Figure 6: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Institute Learning Strategies

This distribution of mean scores is also very interesting. Of note, the mean scores are all above 3.5, indicating that there was strong agreement among those who responded to the survey that the Institute professional learning strategies were engaging to meet the wide range of individual teachers to perceive that their professional learning needs were being addressed through the Institute experience. The frequency model groups in Figure 6 around Always and Mostly demonstrate this. However, not all teachers found the planned follow-up strategy in the Application phase, useful. This gained the lowest mean score of 3.51 in the survey.

It is interesting to note that the Implementation phase of the Institute, as described in the survey, has the lowest standard deviation, indicating a high positive response rate from participants. Of note is the highest mean score (4.53) for the acknowledgement of the engagement of “both structured and unstructured times, with participants able to reflect upon implication for their professional practice” (Appendix 4.1) This is followed closely with a mean score of 4.37, noting the provision of “opportunities for active engagement” (Appendix 4.1) as a key feature of the Institute. Overall, the

Implementation and Facilitation phases of the Institute were identified in the survey as providing a range of strategies which teachers found engaging and supportive.

Teachers identified in their survey comments that learning about, and the practice of, co-operative learning strategies as being of great benefit to their teaching and their students' learning. They enjoyed the hands-on experiences of the Institute and their increased understanding of making explicit to students and parents the purpose of learning and related activities.

Additionally, respondents stated that the Institute experience has modelled a range of strategies that empowered them with confidence and ideas that could be successfully applied to a number of classroom situations. Teachers expressed ideas and discussed plans for implementing many of the co-operative learning and teaching strategies demonstrated and practiced during the Institute experience.

The involvement of teachers in Institute experiences was also seen by respondents as boosting and encouraging confidence and motivation that was transferred easily into the classrooms. Respondents also appreciated the opportunity each Institute provided for collegial networking and reflection.

Responses from teachers regarding the effectiveness of the Institute experience were not necessarily positive. Some respondents highlighted the fact that the Institute experience actually had the effect of limiting their own learning journey. Others identified learning strategies emphasised during the Institute which, on application in

the classroom, were found to have the potential to create disorganisation, disruption and noise. Some respondents felt challenged about changing their approach to teaching, while other respondents felt that the day to day variables of the school environment hindered enthusiasm and provided constraints for trying new strategies such as those advocated during the Learning Community Institute experience. Such views tended to emphasise the importance of follow up activities and greater support by the CSO and school leadership over a period of time for teachers while these new strategies were being implemented in the classrooms.

Some respondents indicated that the survey provided them with the opportunity to engage in further professional dialogue that has helped them maintain their momentum, deepen their own understandings and renew their commitment to the *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* document. These respondents pointed to the opportunities for professional reflection, discussion and learning provided by the survey materials as a way of critiquing Institute learning strategies and the impact on their own classrooms and schools.

In summary, the survey provided an insight into the extent to which the strategies identified in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* were incorporated into everyday classroom practice after participation in the Learning Community Institute. It appears that further on-going support from school leadership and the CSO Wagga Wagga would assist those teachers who remain unsure, inexperienced or unwilling to embrace the range of pedagogical strategies that have been identified as effective and purposeful for the delivery of the school curriculum to support student engagement for learning.

5.4 Research Question 2 Findings.

This study considered the following question; *Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in meaningful learning?*

Meaningful learning relates to how students construct understanding and make meaning from their learning. This was considered to be a high priority amongst the respondents, with 86% as indicated in Figure 7, that this effective teaching practice as described in the survey, and outlined in Table 5, by the 12 descriptors is regularly practiced in their classrooms.

Of note, in the meaningful learning section is the lowest mean score of 3.8 indicating that not all respondents practice connecting new learning to students' lives as a strategy of building meaningful learning strategies and pre-testing for learning were the most identified strategies used to build meaningful learning. Issues also emerged from the survey's written comments, regarding factors that have supported teachers implementing meaningful learning strategies within their classrooms. These themes include the engagement with collaborative learning and teaching strategies and experiences, student consultation and reflections about their own learning and establishment of an active and positive classroom environment through the development of co-constructed norms.

Teachers additionally commented on using constructivist learning, being explicit about their purpose either, of the lesson or the assessment task, or by identifying specific teaching skills and values as a way to enhance the learning and teaching process.

Meaningful Learning Strategies

Meaningful Learning Strategies	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
gather as much student information as possible.	16	29	4	0	0	4.24
find out what students already know and can do.	21	26	2	0	0	4.39
help students actively construct understanding.	15	30	4	0	0	4.22
provide varied learning experiences, strategies and resources to meet diverse needs.	15	26	6	2	0	4.10
provide focused small group and 1:1 teaching with students.	11	29	7	2	0	4.00
connect new learning to students' lives.	9	27	9	4	0	3.84
focus learning on important questions, concepts and processes.	15	29	5	0	0	4.20
foster explicit connection-making between ideas and processes – across the curriculum and subject boundaries.	9	29	9	2	0	3.92
make purposes and goals explicit.	19	24	6	0	0	4.27
help students apply/transfer learnings to new situations.	7	31	9	2	0	3.88
engage students in authentic learning.	11	35	3	0	0	4.16
focus on assessment as an integral part of learning, using a wide variety of formats.	20	24	5	0	0	4.31
Total Percentage Scores	28%	58%	12%	2%	0%	

Table 5: Meaningful Learning Survey Frequency and Mean Scores

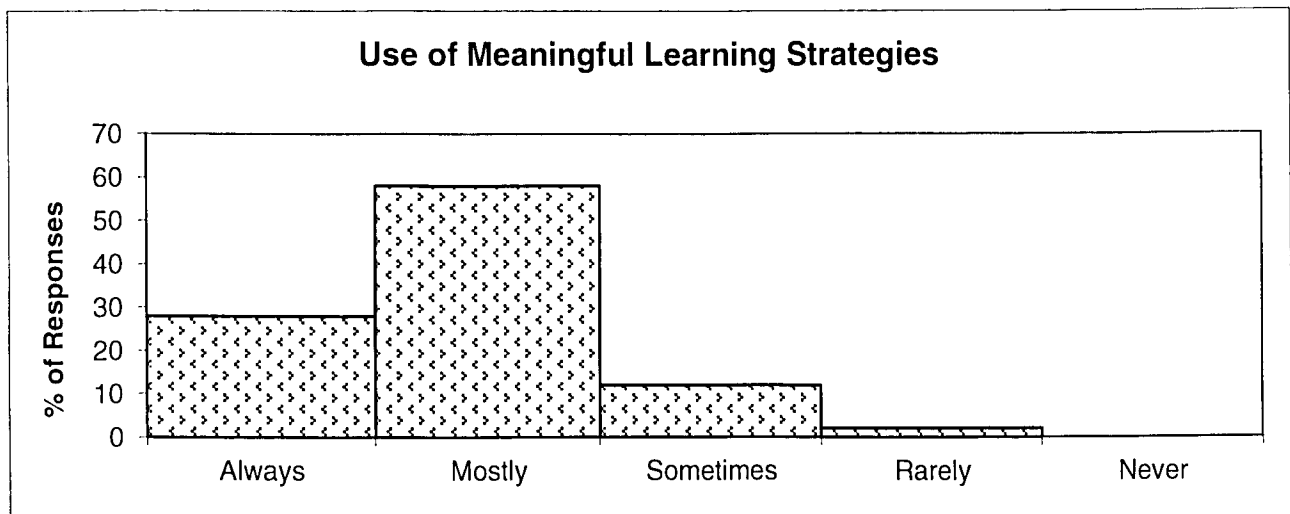


Figure 7: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Meaningful Learning Strategies

Some teachers stated that getting students to think about and reflect on what they are learning is an important objective for meaningful learning and the need for this to be consistently practiced in the classroom.

Some of the survey respondents identified factors that have hindered meaningful learning within their classrooms and these include their own poor time management for planning and organisation, variety of stages of learning within the classroom and a range of student ability within a class group. Additionally, disruptions to the normal class routine because of other school activities and behaviour of unco-operative students were also cited.

These factors combine to discourage some of the teacher respondents in planning and implementing the identified strategies that support meaningful learning within the classroom. This study also considered the following question; *Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in inquiry?*

Inquiry, as identified in the CSO Wagga Wagga document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*', assisted young people to make sense of their world. This was consistently practiced as part of the teaching strategies used in the classroom by 64% of survey respondents (Figure 8). Inquiry was seen as less important than Human Development, self-responsibility, collaboration and meaningful learning, yet more important than communication.

Inquiry Learning Strategies

Inquiry	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
engage students in meaningful inquiry and research.	3	30	14	2	0	3.69
use an inquiry framework for program planning purposes.	3	21	16	8	1	3.35
understand the links between inquiry and constructivist learning.	6	26	11	4	2	3.61
explicitly teach investigative and research processes and skills.	9	21	14	4	1	3.67
have students pose and explore questions - their own as well as those of others; philosophical as well as practical questions.	7	23	16	3	0	3.69
use mistake-making and error as an important part of the learning process.	23	17	6	1	2	4.18
Total Percentage Scores	17	47	26	8	2	

Table 6: Inquiry Survey Frequency and Mean Scores

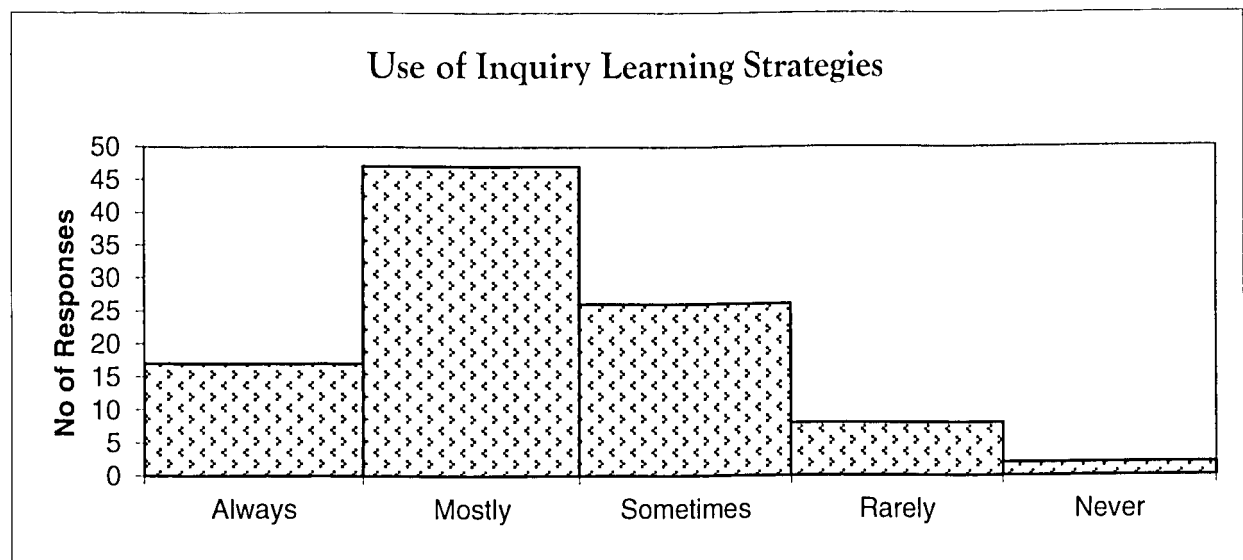


Figure 8: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Inquiry Learning Strategies

In Table 6, the mean score of 3.35 indicates that there is no consistent understanding or process around the inquiry pedagogical methods. While the highest mean score focused on how students learn from mistake-making and errors. This strategy, as illustrated in Figure 8, is perceived to be not fully embraced by classroom teachers.

Many respondents referred to student access to technology and especially the use of the internet, while others focused on the use of a range of appropriate and co-operative learning and teaching practices as a method of addressing the elements of inquiry learning. There was a view expressed by respondents that a secure classroom environment allowed students to freely explore, make errors and take risks without the feelings of failure or ridicule.

On the negative side, teachers identified the need to spend time explicitly teaching appropriate skill development within a 'crowded curriculum'. This was coupled with what teachers described as a low level of teacher knowledge, skill, confidence and willingness to focus on teaching and supporting inquiry learning strategies. Some respondents commented on the limited resources, time and space as obstacles to progressing classroom inquiry opportunities.

Of interest are the survey's lower numerical responses to inquiry practices. There were no clear factors accounting for this from the survey. Co-operative learning strategies were the main focus of the Institute activities, along with the building of trust and relationships. Perhaps the focus for teachers who responded to the survey has been more around relationship and community building, based on their Institute experience.

As the inquiry method is a constructivist learning pedagogical strategy, no evidence could be found that this had been explicitly modelled, either at the Institute, or at follow-up support visits, or as a focused CSO professional learning experience. In the comments provided it was stated that some teachers still lacked confidence and skills and their attitudes provided resistance to pedagogical changes in classrooms. Possibly this lack of confidence could explain the hesitation of some teachers to engage more fully with inquiry, as described in the CSO document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

This study further considered *Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in communication?*

Communication is considered to be central to learning and essential for successful participation in society. This was recognised as the least consistent of the surveyed effective learning and teaching practices, with only 60% of the respondents indicating that the identified communication strategies were used regularly within the classroom as shown in Figure 9.

Various class sharing practices and reflections, including written responses, listening, discussions, class meetings and conversations were the most common ways of communication identified by teachers. Some teachers indicated that they took opportunities to practice and explicitly teach these skills.

Table 7 identifies that the lowest mean score was around student involvement with multi-media. The dialogue classroom strategy was perceived to be the most engaged in

strategy to enhance communication. On the other hand, some respondents provided an insight into why communication strategies were not always effective within classrooms. It was stated in the written comments that inconsistent classroom practices, along with lack of interest and positive modelling from teachers, students and parents were the main factors identified which contributed to a lack of engagement with the communication practice of effective teaching as described in the survey. Disruptive and unco-operative students were cited by some teachers as the reason for lack of success with effective communication strategies.

Likewise communication, as described in the CSO document, is about meaningful peer dialogue, skilled use of multi-media and multiple thinking skills.

When this survey was conducted, in 2002, learning technologies were beginning to impact on teachers and students. This phenomena was not a factor when the Institutes began, in the mid 1990s, nor when the *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* document was developing in the late 1990s. Learning technologies and their application in the classrooms and wider community has caused some resistance and insecurity among educators as they endeavor to engage (or for some, disengage) with this new form of communication strategy. Hence, a lower response in the survey.

Additionally, this study also provided the opportunity to ask; *Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in collaboration?*

Communication Learning Strategies

Communication	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
regularly engage learners in meaningful dialogue with peers	16	27	5	1	0	4.18
model invitational language	11	27	9	2	0	3.96
teach non-verbal forms of communication	4	21	21	3	0	3.53
develop student skills with multimedia	3	14	22	10	0	3.20
teach students effective questioning skills	7	22	19	1	0	3.71
encourage written conversation	1	23	16	9	0	3.33
provide for multiple ways to represent thinking, ideas and information	2	28	16	3	0	3.59
help students use styles appropriate for different audiences, purposes and contexts	11	24	12	2	0	3.90
Total Percentage Scores	15	45	32	8	0	

Table 7: Communication Survey Frequency and Mean Scores

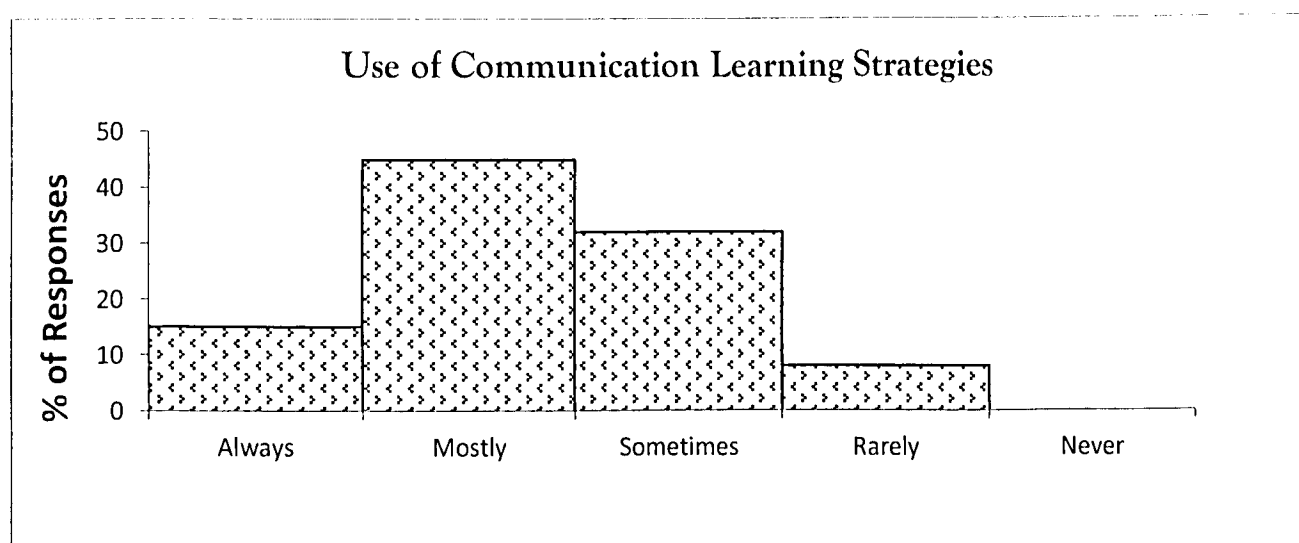


Figure 9: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Communication Learning Strategies

The survey indicated that 77% of respondents believed that collaboration, is essential for effective participation in society where working collaboratively prepares students for life success (Figure 10). This was considered to be an essential part of classroom and school life. Table 8 has the involvement of the wider community with a mean score of 3.18. Collaboration beyond the classroom as a strategy is not widely used by teachers.

Teachers commented that when they worked together, collaboration across the whole school community was successful. This occurred because of shared planning opportunities for learning and teaching as well as the development and review of school policies and procedures. From these experiences, it was reported that staff displayed positive attitudes, leadership, interdependence, organisational skills and supportive relationships. Further, it was commented in the survey that this modelling helps students to become more collaborative and efficient when working in teams and partnerships.

When some teachers reflected on teacher-student collaboration, survey comments focused on involving students in curriculum programming through identifying what students want to learn so as to make the experience relevant and hence, build enthusiasm. One teacher indicated that ... “our school has an emphasis on social justice and outreach, and this has been highly effective in connecting students with the wider community ... This has helped collaboration across the school”.

Additionally, the survey identified a range of strategies that assisted classroom collaboration. These strategies included, small group work for a variety of purposes, share/pair activities, peer tutoring, role play, partner work, projects focusing on team

work and inclusion, group discussion exercises and in-class parent assistance. One teacher commented ...”I have a regular parent who took up the invitation to work with us during Maths. The children wish she would come every day. She enjoys *learning with* the children – this is a rare type of parent. She is seen, not as a helper, but as part of our team”. This involvement with volunteers assists classroom teachers to model and value aspects of collaboration to their students.

Several respondents to this part of the survey indicated that students required explicit teaching of group and co-operative learning skills. This involved students becoming committed to co-operative skills and being aware of their significance daily.

Additionally, setting up clearly understood classroom norms and rules, which were proposed and agreed upon and checked regularly, were seen as beneficial, as student supported, monitored and motivated each other during planned and unplanned classroom tasks and activities. A number of respondents indicated that their involvement, understanding and modelling of collaborative practices at the Learning Community Institute inspired them to successfully and confidently adopt and regularly use similar strategies within their own classrooms.

Respondents also commented on a range of factors that have hindered the student and staff experiences of collaboration. These include limited classroom time, resources and space for some activities – especially group work and unco-operative and inexperienced teachers who lack knowledge, skills and confidence; negative attitudes; clash of strong personalities; and a staff who react rather than respond.

Collaboration Learning Strategies

Collaboration	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
understand the power of student partnerships	20	27	2	0	0	4.37
make explicit the benefits of working together	22	20	6	1	0	4.29
match collaborative groupings (team size, membership and duration) to needs and purposes	25	17	7	0	0	4.37
use collaborative structures in a purposeful way	23	21	5	0	0	4.37
embed teamwork principles in collaborative work	19	27	3	0	0	4.33
explicitly develop a wide range of collaborative skills	13	21	15	0	0	3.96
actively foster perspective taking	7	23	14	3	2	3.61
involve the broader community beyond the classroom	1	15	25	8	0	3.18
Total Percentage Scores	33	44	19	3	1	

Table 8: Collaboration Survey Frequency and Mean Scores.

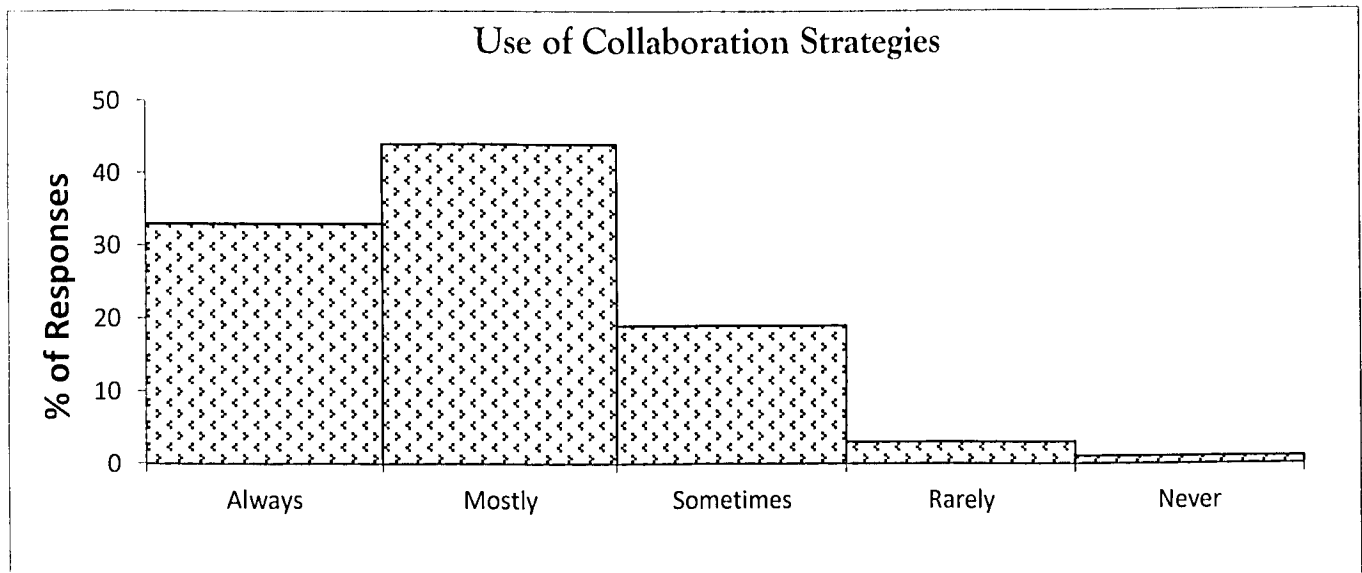


Figure 10: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Collaborative Learning Strategies

It was also identified that there were some narrow minded views held by a minority of vocal parents who are continually competitive as well as students who are unable to cope emotionally or socially at peer level, and those who prefer to work in isolation, or display competitive and non-inclusive behaviours.

These obstacles were offered as reasons for not engaging purposefully in the process of collaboration when planning learning and teaching strategies for the delivery of the curriculum. As an observation, some of the survey respondents indicated that there are teachers who identify collaboration simply as group work, which appears unorganised and noisy. Further, it was explained that when students are focused on individual tasks, worksheets and text based activities, noise is reduced so that students and the classroom are under the full control of the teacher. This has been for some the justification for not to embrace fully the range of collaboration strategies.

A further consideration in the survey was; *Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in self-responsibility?*

The survey produced a comprehensive response when teachers considered self-responsibility where it was recognised that young people should become self-responsible and self-directed learners. Here 78% of respondents focused on the students and the range of strategies used to reinforce self-responsibility (Figure 11). Table 9 lists mean scores of 4.35 for the use of reflection as a strategy which builds self-responsibility. This is also supported by helping students accept responsibility for their own actions (mean score of 4.24).

Many of the responses from teachers identified, as a priority, the following self-responsibility needs for students and teachers. Firstly, establish a range of strategies to help students to feel the need to challenge themselves, focus on positive actions that support honesty and responsibility, set goals and norms for behaviour through discussion and evaluation, in order to establish expectations and boundaries for the classroom at the beginning of the year, and follow through by constantly reflecting on them. Additionally, students should take pride in their own, and others' work and activities.

Secondly, teachers indicated that students are to be encouraged to use journals for reflection, future planning, self-assessment, homework and home study as a method to assist in taking more responsibility for their own learning.

Thirdly, teachers are to develop whole class/school social skills programs, which involve the explicit teaching of values and the development of school behaviour management policy and procedures aligned with the school's mission and vision and articulated through staff professional learning and development activities. Finally, allocate the sharing of student class jobs, roles and responsibilities by empowering and supporting others, thereby assisting individual students not only to develop a sense of self responsibility, but to assist them in building team work and a shared understanding of co-operation.

Self-Responsibility Learning Strategies

Self-Responsibility	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
honour the intrinsic motivation of students	14	29	6	0	0	4.16
use language that actively encourages self-responsibility	17	29	2	1	0	4.22
promote student self-understanding and meta-cognitive awareness	7	28	14	0	0	3.86
foster on-going reflection on learning	17	26	8	0	0	4.35
model and make explicit creative, critical and problem-solving skills and processes	3	23	23	0	0	3.59
help students select and use a wide range of learning – how – to learn and thinking tools, techniques and processes	4	26	16	3	0	3.51
invite student negotiation and choice in learning	7	21	20	1	0	3.65
teach students the task and organisational skills to learn to manage their own learning	8	29	9	3	0	3.73
actively involve students in self-assessment	14	21	12	2	0	3.88
help students learn to take responsibility for their behaviour by – * Using gospel , social-ethical values as the base to work from * Focusing on student construction of understanding * Teaching appropriate problem-solving strategies and skills, and constructive ways of resolving conflict	18	25	6	0	0	4.24
Total Percentage Scores	28	49	21	2	0	

Table 9: Self-Responsibility Survey Frequency and Mean Scores.

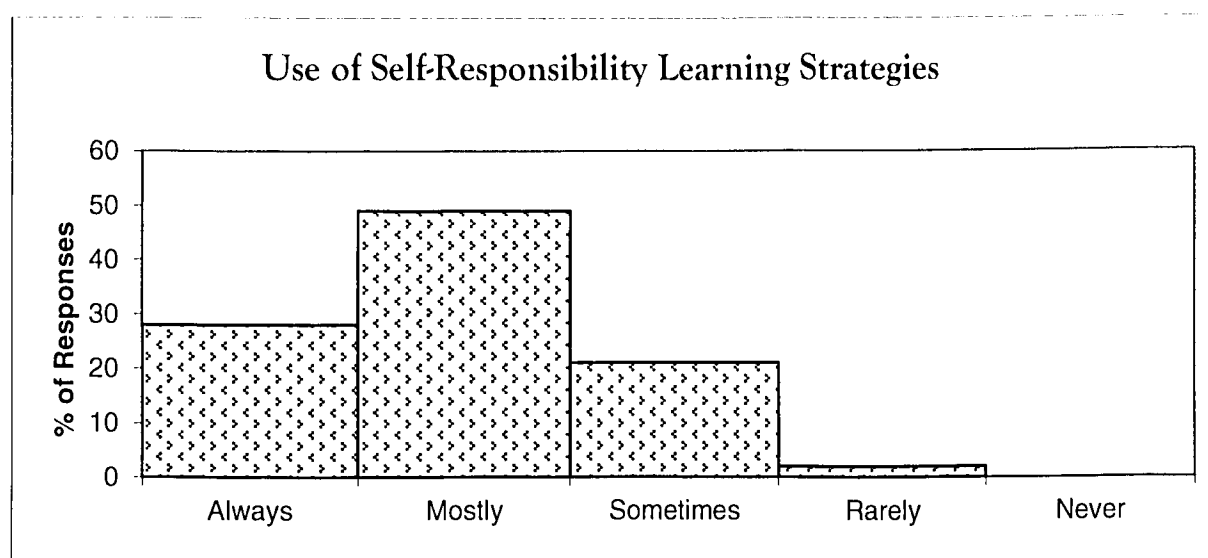


Figure 11: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Self-Responsibility Learning Strategies

Teaching staff also identified factors that hindered the development of self-responsibility within their classrooms. These included, lack of parental support, reduced understanding regarding the home environment of some students and a lack of confidence of some teachers when exploring and promoting self-responsibility for themselves and in their students. Additionally it was stated that some staff were still using the crime/punishment method and not embracing opportunities for growth and natural/negotiated responses. Further, some respondents believed that staff peer pressure encouraged an authoritarian approach by teachers rather than self-responsibility. As a result, the operation of such factors often produced students who were not yet able to respond to opportunities within the classroom for increased self-expression, and were more oriented to external rewards rather than discovering the value of intrinsically worthwhile activities.

A further question to this study was; *Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in human development?*

Human development refers to helping young people become the kind of adults who will thrive in, and make a positive difference to the world they will inherit. This was noted by 88% of respondents as being a consistent focus for them. (Figure 12) The highest mean score of 4.71 shown in Table 10, was about developing a sense of belonging – one of the core beliefs of the learning community philosophy that is emphasized during the Institute experience. The lowest mean score of 3.67 was about helping students develop a sense of hope for the future. This was not something that is regularly addressed in the classroom.

Human Development Learning Strategies

Human Development	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean
build unity and a sense of belonging in the classroom.	36	12	1	0	0	4.71
help students to appreciate and value diversity.	34	12	3	0	0	4.63
help students develop as principled, ethical human beings, displaying values such as respect, fairness, courtesy, responsibility and kindness.	33	16	0	0	0	4.67
co-create with students class norms based on these values.	33	14	1	1	0	4.61
develop in students effective habits of mind and qualities such as initiative, resilience, adaptability, imagination, persistence, confidence, courage and enterprise.	18	27	4	0	0	4.29
integrate the spiritual with other aspects of learning.	26	20	2	1	0	4.45
place a focus on creating the new (products, models, information) rather than simply reproducing what is known.	11	32	6	0	0	4.10
help students to pro-actively vision and create preferred futures, in ways that have personal, school, community and global relevance.	4	28	14	3	0	3.67
offer opportunities for students to work in the service of others – to show care and make a contribution within and beyond the school.	9	25	13	2	0	3.84
Total Percentage Scores	46	42	10	2	0	

Table 10: Human Development Survey Frequency and Mean Scores

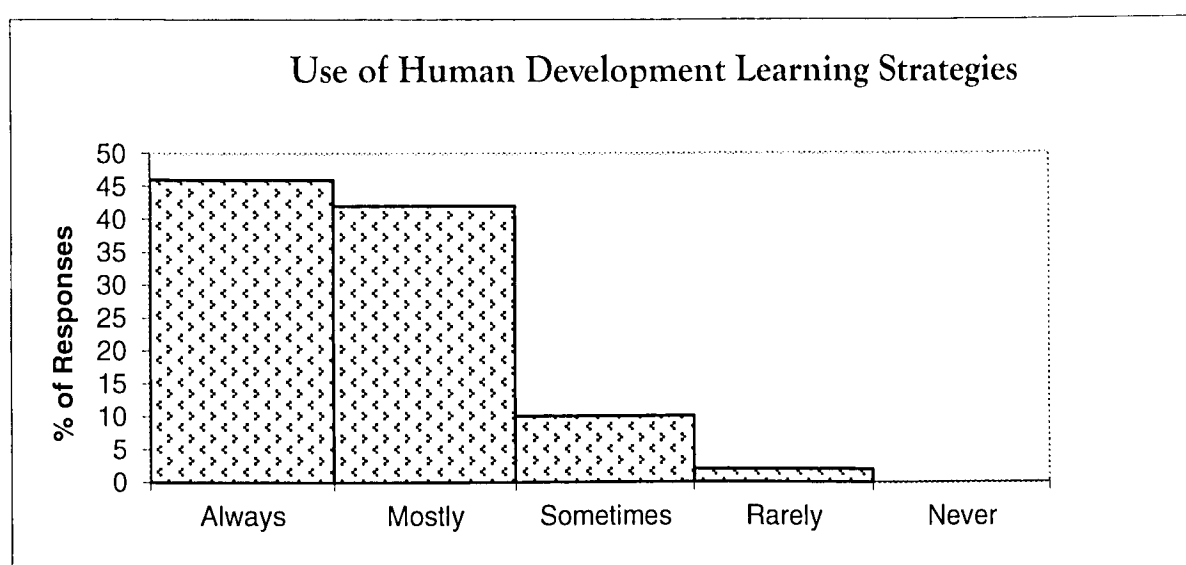


Figure 12: % of Responses for Identifying the Use of Human Development Learning Strategies

Schools and classroom teachers had, as a priority, the explicit teaching of social skills programs designed to assist students better understand their social and civic rights and responsibilities. Supporting these initiatives, activities enhancing the building of self-esteem were considered by teachers as important and complementary.

It was noted by a respondent that within the school curriculum as supplied by the NSW Board of Studies, a range of values were embedded and emphasised, not only within the learning and teaching activities, but reflected within the whole life of the school through its activities, policies and procedures. Additionally, CSO Wagga Wagga schools are expected to provide a Catholic perspective across the whole curriculum. The teaching and modeling of understood and agreed values within the classroom and school community assists student growth and development.

Some teachers also described in their survey responses, barriers to the enhancement of human development. A number of responses focused on the external influences of the home, media and peers. It was stated that there exists a lack of congruence of values between school and home. Other teachers commented that the curriculum is already overcrowded with requirements and compliance issues, thus not allowing enough time to fully focus on aspects of human development.

5.5 Emerging Themes

The survey provided opportunities for respondents to comment on factors that they considered both supported and hindered their implementation of the effective teaching practices of meaningful learning, inquiry, communication, collaboration, self-responsibility and human development.

Survey Written Comments collated as themes.	Frequency of comments on themes from the survey that respondents indicated HINDERED the implementation of the CSO identified effective teaching practices							Frequency of comments on themes from the survey that respondents indicated SUPPORTED the implementation of the CSO identified effective teaching practices						
Key Themes	Meaningful Learning	Inquiry	Communication	Collaboration	Self-Responsibility	Human Development	Total %	Meaningful Learning	Inquiry	Communication	Collaboration	Self-Responsibility	Human Development	Total %
Relationship & Community Building	13	9	6	4	3	4	38	15	7	14	13	10	11	20
Student Learning	10	10	11	10	10	10	58	41	33	28	12	20	10	42
Professional Development	8	10	10	9	18	9	14	1	1	2	4	4	5	5
Teacher Pedagogical Skills & Strategies	8	4	3	3	2	3	21	18	10	18	21	19	28	33

Table 11: Survey Written Comments Themes Frequency

Additionally, the survey gathered data about the Institute and what participants experienced that supported or hindered their adoption of effective teaching practices. Further, there were opportunities to reflect and provide 'any other comment', which will be referred to later in this chapter.

In the analysis of the written comments, four themes emerged and they are:

1. Relationship and Community Building
2. Student Learning
3. Professional Development
4. Teacher Pedagogical Skills and Strategies.

Each of these themes will be discussed. Table 11 above illustrates these themes and summarises the frequency which survey respondents made reference to these themes.

The frequency provides some indication of the significance of these issues by the respondents. This is shown in Table 11 in the % Total column.

Table 12 below is a summary of the analysis of responses from the interviewees. The analysis was conducted at three levels. Firstly, the researcher re-read the interview scripts and listened to the recorded interviews, looking for common trends. Secondly, key themes were identified and the interview scripts were again reviewed to assist in identifying the concepts that supported the key themes originating from the survey. This information was used to create Table 12. Finally, the interviews were explored again to calculate frequency records of the identified key themes and concepts. The frequency results were used to distinguish the interview participants' ideas and their importance.

Interviewees (N=5), were asked to reflect on their learning community institute experience and those factors within their school community that supported or hindered the progress of the implementation of the CSO identified teaching practices. The interviews highlighted some common issues that supported and supplemented the data gathered during the survey process and from the research literature. These issues included relationships, community and professional learning with the resultant impact on student learning. Staff resistance to change and confidence of school leaders to assist teachers with accepting changed classroom practice and belief about learning and teaching were also noted.

<i>Key themes and concepts that emerged from the interview data</i>	<i>Total number of times key words were used across all interviews</i>	<i>% of interviewees who used the key words</i>
Relationship and Community Building	63	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork/partnership • Safe/Belonging Identity • Shared Vision/Passion • Self-Responsibility/Norms • Respect/Trust 	15 10 31 17 16	100 80 100 100 60
Student Learning	43	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching • Purpose/Explicit • Student Centred • Parents 	50 13 42 14	100 80 100 60
Professional Development	25	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute • Influence • Reflection • Leadership 	39 19 23 20	100 80 60 100
Teacher Pedagogical Skills and Strategies	33	100
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence/Confronting • Challenge • Blocking 	5 11 37	60 80 100

Table 12: Interview Data Analysis

5.5.1 Relationship and Community Building

Responses targeting relationship and community building accounted for 20% of the written comments on the survey. It was found that through using the various effective teaching practices, strategies were identified in the survey that supported the building of valued relationships within classrooms and across the school community.

It is recognised by participants that the Institute provided them with practical opportunities to observe, practice and model numerous co-operative and collaborative

activities, designed to build relationships. This was verified during the individual interview phase of this research, as discussed later in this chapter. The direct quotes following in this chapter are from the individual and group interviews.

Written comments obtained from the survey also identified networking, the establishment of classroom norms, teamwork, peer support, group work and school-based leadership as further factors that have contributed to building capacity for improved relationships and building the classroom and school learning community.

It was stated by 38% of the respondents that they were hindered in developing stronger relationships and community. One factor identified was the mismatch of the home and school values and expectations. Additionally, it was stated that *“pushy or unsupportive parents created tensions for the classroom teacher to fully develop trusting and purposeful relationships with their students”*. Teachers who completed the survey further recognised the value of developing positive relationships with students, however, for some, *“the realities, disruptions and practicalities of daily classroom life has not made the building of relationships and the building of a supportive classroom a priority”*.

In general, interviewees agreed with the Institute view that relationships were the key to engaging teachers in embracing change that translated into more effective practices in the classroom. One of the interviewees remarked that this was evidenced when staff displayed a *“passion for things to improve for children”*, another indicated that *“people feel valued and trusted”*, while another stated that *“building positive relationships gets down to the*

dignity of each person” and that “once you have a relationship going, people trust what you are doing”.

When effective relationships were developed with and among staff, opportunities arose for support to be given and challenge to be undertaken within an atmosphere of safe risk-taking. Positive relationships, it was noted, *“led to executive members and classroom teachers working together and feeling empowered to confidently undertake and lead the learning community journey”*. This supports the views expressed by Slavin (2004) and Dalton (1996).

The importance and significance of building relationships has been a fundamental strategy adopted by the CSO Wagga Wagga and is enshrined in their core statement on effective learning and teaching principles and practices.

The ‘building norms’ within classrooms and school communities was a recurring theme during the interviews. This was a key feature of each Institute. It was noted that explicitly trying to build respect, trust, belonging and community worked towards building and articulating a strong, shared vision for the whole school as a learning community.

One interviewee commented *“that setting norms has been a great opening for staff and classrooms in building community ... it is actually empowering others”*. A community further develops and is enhanced when parents form a strong partnership with the school. It was further stated that *“the way our parents talk about our school, the way they see it, their*

involvement, the way they talk to other parents about our school being a learning school, a caring school, that's really important!"

Teachers play a significant role in building their school and classroom as a community. When providing the right kind of support and encouragement, *"staff develop, empowering them, seeing those talents develop and seeing them as a person become much more confident, better teachers, better citizens and more loving people"*.

Comments obtained during the interview phase supported survey findings, discussed earlier, about teamwork and networking with colleagues as a fundamental strategy that supports and assists in developing deep understandings of learning and teaching. This is what it means to be *"part of a team making personal connections"* was a comment made during the interviews. Likewise the literature as summarized in Table 1, Chapter 2 of this report also provides support for the need to develop collaborative partnerships.

Teamwork also became a significant outcome of building community. An interviewee indicated that *"I firmly believe now in teamwork, working together and getting a colleague"*. It was further stated that this is *"an important process in developing and sustaining a sense of community within the classroom and across the staff"*.

A further comment during the interviews about being a member of the school community is summarised as *"the key is to really listen to what you say and how you say it and reflecting on what you do and how you do it, so that if you leave this school with nothing else, leave feeling good about who you are"*.

The interviews indicated how significant the concept of community was and further refined understandings of being or becoming a learning community. *“Being introduced to the learning community changed my whole focus. It was through working with others that I really learnt what learning and teaching was all about. Being able to let go and share with people and invite people to be part of the whole process and to solve the problems so that things really move”.*

One of the interviewees, when reflecting on the learning community journey, commented that the greatest reward has been *“watching kids grow, learn and develop, ... watching staff become empowered ... and involving parents with dignity, care ... and commitment with the school”.*

Another interviewee summed up their understanding of their experiences with a learning community. *“It’s a reflection of where everybody’s at, it’s a sense of purpose, it’s a feeling, you see it in the interactions of people, you see it in their responses, you see it in the total picture of the school. It’s not something that you do, it’s something that is”.*

5.5.2 Student Learning

The student learning theme provided a response rate of 42% and was commented on most frequently in the survey. Teachers who responded to the survey made reference to the importance of explicit teaching, and holding high expectations. Further, it was noted that engagement of students and providing them with on-going support assisted students positively in the classroom. This factor can, to some degree, be attributed to activities at the Institute where participants were constantly encouraged to reflect on the Institute’s focus question, “What’s my purpose?” This message has stayed with

many of the Institute participants and has helped classroom teachers to respond to the learning needs of their students more explicitly.

In 58% of the survey's written comments, teachers indicated that the impact of disruptive students, interruptions to learning through absenteeism and lack of student maturity to work collaboratively with others were factors that were identified as hindering student learning progress. For some teachers, unplanned disruptions can impact on their learning plans for the rest of the class.

Elements for effective learning and teaching as identified by researchers in Table 1 Chapter 2, impact on the quality of learning. Some teachers commented that when students disrupt the learning process through misbehavior or absenteeism there is a reduction in the focus on learning, time on tasks, the regular monitoring and teachers assessment and the use of purposeful, shared learning. Without these elements obstacles are created for teachers to establish a supportive and collaborative environment for improved student learning.

During the interviews, several statements were made about the importance of student learning resulting from engaging with the learning community processes. One interviewee commented that *"the greatest reward is seeing students grow and learn and develop to become independent learners"*. While another added *"children in the school now believe in themselves and believe that they can achieve"*.

As teachers became explicit about their teaching strategies it was stated that *“I began articulating everything I did and why I did it and what the purpose was”*. This assisted students in understanding what the focus of their learning activities were and what they would achieve.

Additionally, it was stated that the learning community Institute experience helped *“teachers engage the students and help them develop their own learning journey ... it is about working together and growing the whole person”*. It was further stated that the institute *“helped teachers understand the importance of providing a secure and safe environment for students to learn and take risks while introducing the fun and creativity back into learning”*.

The ‘Circle of Influence’ concept was addressed by a number of the interviewees. As elicited in the survey data, interviewees found that mentoring, modelling and shared planning opportunities supported and assisted staff to engage in professional dialogue, experiment with strategies and develop confidence about embracing different learning and teaching methods within the classroom and across the whole school community.

5.5.3 Professional Development

Of the written responses, only 5% were supportive of the role of professional development in assisting with the implementation of the CSO identified effective teaching practices.

These comments identified the value of on-site, sustained, on-going follow-up as a strategy that supported teachers in implementing effective teaching strategies. As well,

team planning and the reflection on the Institute question “What’s my purpose?” were considered supportive.

The 14% of comments about professional development hindering the implementation of effective teaching practices focused on the lack of support after the Institute, when teachers had returned to their classrooms and faced the daily challenges of school life. It was emphasised that there needed to be follow-up for some teachers to be encouraged to take ‘safe risks’ in trying new strategies and ideas, modelled and practiced at the Institute. Teachers also lacked confidence to trial a different way of doing things and reverted to their more traditional approaches to student learning and classroom organisation.

The Institute experience was identified as a catalyst by school leaders and staff to return to their school community and “give it a go”. One interviewee stated that the Institute experience “*really affected me and challenged me and asked me lots of questions about purpose, the big picture, being explicit with kids, self-responsibility, making more connections and being reflective. I hadn’t deepened my understanding in so many areas of learning and teaching before*”.

When you compare these views of the contemporary learner to current practices in some classrooms across the CSO system of schools, a different learning culture can be observed. Interviews conducted as part of this research have indicated that “*some teachers have found it difficult to adjust their thinking, they find the learning community approach being encouraged by the school executive too difficult and just can’t cope with a focus on relationships rather than the curriculum content and would prefer their own traditional ways of*

teaching". Even after several years of schools working towards becoming learning communities, it was noted that *"I still have classrooms that are not dynamic and have not yet taken on completely with learning communities"*.

The Institute experience was described in the interviews as an empowering model of professional learning, it gave *"confidence and strategies and honoured the things you know you do well"*. The Institute *"helped me to see what is our purpose"*. After attending an institute there was *"a commitment in the school and a passion for things to improve for children"*.

The Institute was also seen by respondents as providing opportunities to engage in reflection and planning, and gain confidence and practical strategies. As interviewees reflected on their experience at the Institute, there was a consensus of opinion that the Institute experience assisted individual teachers to develop a focus on: *"building relationships, developing dynamic classrooms, exploring ways of engaging parents in working together and creating opportunities to model good practice at all levels of the school community"*.

It was identified during an interview that the Institute *"gave me a wonderful repertoire of activities, I planned with a purpose, linked in with teamwork, used co-operative learning to enhance teaching and build confidence and relevance"*.

After participating at the Institute many participants felt they had the responsibility to go back to their school community to try to live out and enact some of the ideas and strategies that were experienced during the Institute. It was stated that the Institute

“helped me reflect and think about how I could turn the gifts and talents I have into something good and look forward”.

Again, the Institute was described during an interview as an intensive program in that *“teachers came to understand, came to realise how children learn, the importance of the way you teach them, not what you teach them, the importance of relationships, the importance of setting norms and how we treat each other”.*

The impact of the Institute on participants who were interviewed can be summarised by the following statement, *“I really do see a purpose for what I am doing. I do believe I can make a difference and that we can make a difference as a collective group, with our staff and our children”.*

5.5.4 Teacher Pedagogical Skills and Strategies

The second highest factor commented on in the survey concerned teacher pedagogical skills and strategies. 33% of comments focused on how a variety of skills and strategies that teachers use were important. Co-operative learning strategies, modelling and the use of the inquiry method of teaching were identified as significant pedagogical activities that gave teachers confidence in engaging students effectively in learning. Further, mention was made of the *“value of teacher time management and planning individually and with others”.*

On the other hand, 21% of the comments about factors that hindered the implementation of effective teaching practices focused on teacher pedagogical skills and strategies. Lack of confidence and skill was given as the reason, along with an attitude

of resistance to change. Further, “*school organisational structures*”, “*timetable and teachers organisational skills*” were identified by some respondents to be a hindrance to them trying to adopt their new teaching practices. For some, it was seen as the CSO or school executive imposing both a way of working in the classroom and thinking about learning.

When asked to reflect on those areas within the school community that hindered the progress of educational change, interviewees made clear that there were some individual staff members who “*resisted change and felt uncomfortable about embracing different directions and alternate or new learning and teaching strategies*”. It was stated that in some schools, “*the engagement with co-operative learning strategies within the classroom was resisted by some teachers*”. This created tensions within the staff communities when it was seen that there were obvious ‘blockers’ to the learning community strategies contained in the document ‘*Today’s Children Tomorrow’s Adults*’.

Additionally, it was found that some school leaders did not feel confident once they began to implement their school’s learning community philosophy. The challenge of moving the whole school towards a learning community journey often highlighted a “*lack of the necessary skills, strategies and focus to commence or complete the journey*”. Another interviewee stated “*the biggest challenge is changing from a one person to a team mentality*”.

Similarly, dealing with professional issues with individual staff members was noted as a challenge to school leaders, “*confronting people on a professional basis is tough*”. It was felt that there were, at times, difficulties in trying to balance professional confrontation over performance while at the same time engaging with individuals to

accept the learning and teaching direction that the majority of the staff were articulating in their shared vision for their school. *“Some did not see this as a whole-school change of philosophy, some teachers went back to their classrooms on a Thursday afternoon at 2.30pm to do a learning community. They just did not get it”*. In some instances, it was observed that where outside support was provided for school leaders who had doubts about their abilities to respond to the learning community challenge, better results were obtained. The observation was that *“the principal and leaders need to model and hold high expectations”*.

Some principals and school executives recognised, too, that teachers in their schools were at different points on the journey and it was important to recognise and acknowledge this fact and to *“walk in their shoes”* to seek an understanding of their point of view.

5.6 Other Factors

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to make ‘other comments’. Many took the opportunity to provide further statements about the Institute and the adoption of the CSO teaching practices. Three main themes emerged. Firstly, comments were made about the value of teachers being able to reflect, discuss and share ideas which were provided by the Institute experience. Secondly, the question *“What’s my purpose?”* from the Institute experience was identified as a constant reminder to help teachers reflect on their practices, actions and reactions. Lastly, comments were provided encouraging the CSO to re-introduce professional learning similar to the Institute with sustained, on-site follow-up and support provided, in order

to keep the focus on the teacher's core purpose of providing effective learning experiences for all students.

Of significance, the publication of the CSO core document on learning and teaching, *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* received some attention at one of the interviews. It was commented that the publication of this document *"has had an impact by helping us to teach and think about how we want our students to be, spiritual, critical thinkers, self-responsible and caring citizens, and so on. These became the key outcomes for our students in our schools"*.

This document, for some, provided clarity of purpose for learning and teaching. It articulated for the first time for the Wagga Wagga CSO schools, *"clear guidelines about what teachers individually and collectively are to strive for through their purposeful classroom strategies and activities and through the relationships that they build and develop as part of the learning and teaching process"*.

5.7 Group Interviews

The Group interview process involved two distinct groups, one being representative of the body of 10 parents associated with the schools who have had the majority of their staff participate in a CSO learning community institute and the other involving 10 senior primary students discussing their own classroom learning and teaching experiences.

The Group interview discussion questions (Appendix 4.6) were designed by the researcher to further explore the initial data collected through the survey and individual interviews and help participants reflect on their current primary school learning

experiences. Participants were given opportunities to talk about strategies that classroom teachers used that both assisted and detracted from learning.

Comments were recorded by the researcher in the form of notes, then evaluated in order to find connections between student and parent viewpoints with the CSO Wagga Wagga stated principles and practices of effective learning and teaching as published in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

Examining the parent group interviews for substantive themes, it was found that the parents focused on: norm setting, relationships, co-operative teamwork, developing self-responsibility, communication and learning and teaching strategies.

Parents in the group interview recognised, from the comments of their sons and daughters, that opportunities were developed in the classroom *"to establish and to reinforce agreed ways of acting towards each other"*. These norms were co-created by teacher and students at the beginning of each school year and were discussed, published and displayed, and were referred to and applied regularly during school activities.

Parents additionally recognised that these norms also incorporated Christian gospel-based values to help students grow and develop responsibly, and to provide opportunities in the classroom for students to actively develop and demonstrate a range of personal skills, values and talents.

For the norms to be understood and enacted daily, it was recognised by parents that positive relationships between the students and themselves, and between the students

and teachers, were fundamental to the development of a rewarding and engaging learning community in both the classroom and the school. Parents described such relationships as “*positive, respectful and valued*”. These experiences are likewise reported in the work of Alloway et. al. (2006), Arnold (2000) and Earl (2003) for example.

Parents further agreed that the use of co-operative classroom teaching strategies were regularly discussed by students at home and that students enjoyed “*working in groups on challenging and interesting activities that involved practical and outside the classroom experiences*”, where students could make connections in their learning between the classroom and the outside world. Parents also stated that students appreciated the opportunities to work with technology and on occasions to work individually on tasks.

Further, students were encouraged to be self-responsible for learning activities. This was achieved in some classes through the use of open-ended questions and inquiry research activities which gave students a range of options regarding what to explore and how to present their findings. Sometimes teachers and students negotiated ways where students could demonstrate what they know and can do. On other occasions, some of the parents indicated that they were involved in discussions with their children regarding aspects of some of the research tasks. Some teachers, in their survey responses also reported that there were various responses from students to the different strategies used with the classroom as a way to more effectively engage their students in the learning process.

Parents additionally recognised occasions when students were disengaged with learning. Such occasions occurred when they watched movies or used worksheets with no connection to classwork, where it was considered that the *“teacher was unprepared or inconsistent”*, and when students experienced multiple teachers through teacher absences or job share positions.

Further reflection by parents indicated that many of the take home tasks/homework actively involved other members of the family in talking about, and helping with, the learning activity. In these cases, parents felt *“connected with the classroom and school”* and expressed confidence in what was happening with their child’s learning.

Furthermore, parents identified home-school communication as essential. When this occurred, they expressed a sense that their school *“was welcoming and encouraging with a feeling of openness about school activities and their child’s academic progress and well-being”*. Events such as ‘socials’ and carnivals, fundraising, working bees and volunteers for canteen, reading programs, and also class tutoring, were considered by parents to enhance the home-school communication.

Parents commented on the occasions when they felt that the school was not living up to what it proclaimed. Comments were focused at *“teachers who were inconsistent, showed favouritism, were being cranky or yelled at students”*. Parents recognised in their children a strong sense of justice and fair play displayed when things ‘went wrong’ in the playground or classroom. Students additionally identified these events and evaluated them against their agreed ‘norms’ established collaboratively by the class.

The student group interviews discussion centred on two main themes: classroom strategies and norm setting. To assist learning in the classroom, students interviewed agreed that *“a positive, friendly and relaxed classroom atmosphere was best”*. They exposed an understanding that *“teachers were always trying to do their best to help students learn”*. Mention was also made of the extra time that teachers used to work with students who, at times, struggled in the classroom with new and challenging learning strategies, or who were experiencing some learning difficulties.

When asked about what strategies teachers used in the classroom to help them learn effectively, students cited *“practical activities”*, *“use of visuals”*, *“models and games”*, *“teacher demonstrations”* and *being able to access and “use technology”*. All students agreed that they most enjoyed class work when challenging activities were approached via teamwork and where they could be creative. Additionally, students stated that they particularly enjoyed *“experiences that involved learning outside the classroom”*. Further, students felt empowered when there was clarity about how, when and why their assessment was being arranged and they understood how it ‘fitted in’ with their classroom learning activities. They felt confident about their learning when the teacher *“clearly explained the purpose of the learning activities and strategies”*.

The setting of co-created classroom norms by students and teacher at the start of each year was a feature all students found useful. Of particular note, one student mentioned that for them, having the teacher ask the students what they expected from their teacher created a feeling of partnership between teacher and student.

Students reflected on those elements of classroom life that they believed detracted from learning and teaching. The single factor that was discussed by the student group related to a feeling of inadequacy and intimidation that some students experienced if they gave a wrong answer. When probed further, students indicated that this was not an issue in their present classroom setting, as these issues had now disappeared because of the co-created norms set at the start of that year. Additionally, comment was made by a number of the participants regarding their positive classroom environment that the teachers work consistently to create. Students recognised that *“teachers do care about their students and their learning and try to be creative and interesting with a variety of classroom activities and to ensure that students are clear about the purpose of learning”*.

In summary, the comments of students and parents who participated in the group interviews, showed strong connections and some understandings of the principles and practices outlined in the CSO’s publication *‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’* where the elements of effective teaching were identified, explained and discussed by participants of both groups.

5.8 Conclusion

The data gathering strategies provided an overview of the achievements and challenges that primary school communities of the Wagga Wagga CSO have identified on their learning community journey. Evidence gathered indicated that across CSO primary schools, various levels of engagement with the CSO effective teaching practices were identified. The evidence suggests that the impact of the Institute experience on teachers has been profound on some, but not all, teachers and school communities.

Focused and practical leadership skills, combined with passion and commitment from teachers, were two of the interesting issues observed during the interviews and survey, where respondents identified confidence in their own school's learning community experiences. In addition, the Institute experience was acknowledged by some as providing a sound professional learning event that assisted teachers to deepen their understanding, skills and beliefs about pedagogy. Respondents also stated that the Institute gave them the confidence to approach, trial and embed changed teaching practices within their classrooms.

The data gathered through survey, individual and group interviews provided clear evidence that the research questions about the Institute and the implementation of the CSO teaching practices were answered.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This study has been predicated on the view that there has been no formal investigation of the effectiveness and impact of the Learning Community Institute and the journey undertaken by the primary schools and teachers of CSO Wagga Wagga to implement effective teaching practices as conveyed in the publication *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*. The importance of such an investigation is timely as the Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office now seeks engaging ways to expand the philosophy, principles and practices contained in the *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* document across both primary and secondary schools.

This chapter will discuss the findings generated from this study and will explore factors about the Institutes that teachers have perceived to have assisted or hindered their adoption and implementation of CSO identified teaching practices. This research examines this topic from the perspective of teachers in CSO Wagga Wagga primary schools. The data collected used survey responses, individual semi-structured interviews and group interviews.

It was clear from the data gathered that those teachers who participated in the Institute and were supported afterwards with on-site sustained follow-up by external advisors, were most able to articulate about the adoption and use of the CSO explicit teaching practices in their own classroom and school community.

As schools embraced the learning community philosophy, this allowed them to make appropriate adjustments to classroom practices. Additionally, it was found that the most frequently used pedagogical practices were human development and meaningful learning.

Although teachers provided a positive attitude towards the use of a range of CSO teaching practices, there was still room for improvement and further change. Interview and written survey comments made reference to those teachers who did not take up the option of the ongoing, site based follow-up support by the external advisors. It was significant that their engagement with the listed teaching practices was low, infrequent or non-existent.

6.2 The Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation was to describe and analyse how participation of primary school teachers in the Wagga Wagga CSO's learning community Institute has resulted in the adaption and implementation of the teaching practices identified in *Today's Children Tomorrow's Adults*.

In order to determine the success or otherwise of the Wagga Wagga CSO's intervention strategy known as an Institute, on influencing teachers to adopt a set of identified teaching practices, two questions were proposed.

Question 1: Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices?

Question 2: Do teachers perceive that the learning community Institute influenced their teaching practices in meaningful learning, inquiry, collaboration, communication, self-responsibility and human development?

The data gathered from the survey clearly indicates that over 75% of those who responded indicated that the involvement on the learning community Institute assisted them to explicitly engage with the various effective teaching strategies of meaningful learning, inquiry, collaboration, communication, self-responsibility and human development. Interview comments further supported this identified trend found in the survey data.

Trends identified in this survey were used as the basis for the development of questions for the semi-structured interview candidates. The interview process provided opportunities to explore the survey trends more fully with a focus on the CSO Wagga Wagga Learning Community Institute process, and the perceived impact within the classrooms and schools of the learning and teaching principles and practice framework document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*'. Interview questions (Appendix 4.5) were developed after the survey as a guide to assist interviewees to comment on their learning community Institute experiences.

Teachers who participated in the survey or interviews acknowledged that engaging in a range of purposeful pedagogical practices could both improve student learning outcomes and encourage teacher reflection, discussion and collaboration about pedagogy and classroom practices. The majority of teachers surveyed were aware of the need to use effective teaching practices to create a productive and engaging learning

environment, however the interviews went further to identify teacher effectiveness as one part of an effective school. As the literature also demonstrated and supported through the interviews and survey that the leadership of learning is also a significant factor in establishing the supportive learning community environment required by students and teachers.

There are practical implications for students, teachers, parents and administrators emanating from this study as the CSO schools continue to deepen their involvement, understanding and development as learning communities. Firstly, the operations of the learning community Institute and the resulting professional journey by teachers, has provided opportunities and scope for deeper ongoing professional dialogue, learning, growth and development of many members of the school community. This in itself has been of significant value. Secondly, for the learning community Institute to be effective and successful, teachers expect any professional development activity to demonstrate that there is a real opportunity within a learning community to effect educational and life choices for students in a way that adds richness through a meaningful engagement in the learning process. Lastly there would need to be a strong belief amongst teachers in the CSO Wagga Wagga schools that the Learning Community experiences are providing students with opportunities to learn the requirements and challenges to live as ethical people in a rapidly changing world, with the view that tomorrow's adults will need to be inquirers and thinkers, with the capacity to be reflective, adaptable and knowledgeable communicators who are principled, caring, healthy, global citizens (*'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*).

The literature discussed in Chapter 2 provides many examples of studies that support the benefits of a learning community philosophy. Likewise, the present study noted that 74% of participants felt empowered after engaging with the various aspects of the learning community Institute. Major benefits of the Institutes noted in this study include the development of teacher collaborative skills, norm setting, understanding the need for explicit teaching and the use of co-operative learning strategies. Only 5% of the participants reported that the Institute was too challenging, too daunting and they still lacked confidence to try a different approach to teaching in the classrooms.

All teachers have beliefs about learning and teaching. Until teachers are able to clearly articulate their beliefs and align their practices with those beliefs using a common language, and engaging in meaningful professional dialogue, there will not be sustained change for effective teaching. The learning community Institute, and the document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* had provided this opportunity, in the past, for more than 90% of CSO primary teachers to be engaged in a process that could lead to sustained, changed pedagogical practices.

Educational change within the CSO primary schools has been attempted by deliberate and planned interventions using the Institute model as the catalyst for engaging educators with the learning community journey, while challenging their beliefs and practices about purposeful learning and teaching.

The discussion and conclusions from this research will be informed from data gathered through the literature review, survey responses, individual and group interviews. The following reflections will consider the role of the Institute, the leadership of the

Catholic Schools Office and the significance of a published document providing a Framework for Learning.

6.3 The Institute

The Wagga Wagga CSO's Learning Community Institute has influenced primary school teachers to explicitly engage with the teaching practices identified in 'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'.

Effective professional development is recognized as essential for building teacher capacity and affecting educational change. The CSO Wagga Wagga has promoted a strategic initiative for educational change through their Learning Community Institute experience. While this program has been recognised by teachers as supporting educational change, it did identify that successful change occurs where CSO and school leadership, and on-site sustained support from mentors and peers combine. This combination of leadership and support assisted teachers to take the challenge of changing pedagogy. This improved learning outcomes for students through the increased teacher understandings and engagement in the range of CSO teaching practices.

This study showed that the Institute experience was positively embraced by most of the teachers who appreciated the opportunity to focus on their core business by reflecting on their purpose as they planned and delivered learning opportunities for students.

The Institute experience was followed by a period of time that allowed teachers to consolidate, reflect and plan, rather than forcing change on to teachers and classrooms. All people, according to the research of Baird and Mitchell (1997), need time to

develop, grow and change, and this applies to both teachers and students. In modifying teaching strategies and reshaping teachers' routines, a three-phase continuum was observed, experienced and commented on in the survey and interview data collection. This view also supports the findings presented by Century and Levy (2002). The three phases described in Chapter 3 (Figure 5) of this report, has been interpreted by this researcher as:

Phase 1	Incubation
Phase 2	Investigation
Phase 3	Immersion

Interview and survey comments have made reference to these various stages that were experienced after participating in the Institute and following in the classroom and in some cases across the whole school community. The Institute was a unique experience for a small dispersed rural diocese where the Wagga Wagga CSO system embraced, supported, encouraged and then enabled every primary school community and their teachers to participate in this event. This was achieved through planning and generous financial support from the CSO over a number of years.

The CSO Primary School Consultant, has since indicated that the positive response by primary teachers to the Learning Community Institutes emerged because there was an initial attraction for teachers to co-operative learning strategies which challenged the inflexible content-driven curriculum at the time. It was also further reflected that the Institutes, in particular, were a planned effort to counteract the focus on content with insufficient regard for how teachers teach. This view is supported in the literature, for instance, where Hayes et.al. (2006) indicates that the focus on pedagogy has

disappeared from importance in the recent educational landscape. Currently, at national level, the focus of learning is about content, literacy and numeracy and assessment results. Further, the building of a learning community, with its accepted values and norms, supports and compliments the direction and the vision of the CSO Wagga Wagga, and the work of Catholic educators. (Goonan, 2001)

The professional development processes adopted by Wagga Wagga CSO represent an attempt by a significant number of committed teachers and educational administrators to develop a process and framework for understanding and discussing what education is and ought to be. Latham (2006) stated that if we wish to be successful and commit to the needs of our students then, awareness of the role as teachers is critical so that supportive and appropriate pedagogical strategies can be constructed around new ways of learning and teaching. The adoption of the learning community philosophy and the principles and practices documented in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* publication require administrators, teachers and students to adopt new, and for some challenging, visions on what constitutes effective learning and teaching. Some teachers who responded to the survey or were interviewed had indicated that they had established classroom environments where they perceived relationships and behaviours were valued and reinforced, and they practiced procedures which permitted students to collaborate and enhance their skills, knowledge, awareness and control of learning. McNerney et. al. (2006) supports this perception and states that a supportive classroom environment is the key to the future, as students learn best within a caring, cohesive learning community through the building of supportive, personal relationships. Because these educational changes were seen by participating teachers as significant and were

mentioned in the survey and interviews, there was also a view expressed that to be effective, such changes would need to be implemented and sustained over time.

These changes were substantial for the CSO primary schools and were expected to occur gradually over a five-to-seven year transition. Throughout the Institute activities and on-site follow-up, it was emphasised by the external consultants who facilitated the Institute experience, that change was a process, not an event. Teachers would need time, sustained support and classroom experience and opportunities to allow for attitudinal change and development. Through greater empowerment comes increased confidence, teacher self-efficiency, greater overall school morale and a stronger commitment to teaching being student-focused.

Teachers undertaking the CSO Learning Community Institute experience noted similar processes as did participants of the PEEL Project (1992:96), which states that teachers should consider the processes that students travel through in order to make connections and learning meaningful. This phenomena is of interest in that the PEEL project (1992) had a different focus and approach than did the learning community Institute, yet, the two strategies followed a similar 3 phases of professional learning, identified in this study as incubation, investigation and immersion. The outcomes for both projects leads to teacher changed perceptions about pedagogical strategies and beliefs about effective student learning and the importance of building relationships.

The research of Arnold (2000), ACSA (2001) and Longworth (1999), for example, discussed in Chapter 2, make explicit reference to the significance of the development of collaborative relationships as an important step in providing an environment for

learning where the student's educational outcomes are enhanced. Hawkes (2007) indicates that good schools are focused on good relationships that release the creative energy of everyone in the schools. A supportive classroom environment was identified, for instance, by ASCD (2007), Department of Education and Training, Victoria (2006), Gore (2004), Department of Education, Western Australia (1998) and Lezotte and Cupriano-Pepperi (2001) as an essential requirement for establishing an effective learning environment for students.

The relationship theme emerged as one focus from the survey written comments, as shown in Table 11 from Chapter 5, and again from the interviews, as documented in Table 12. Relationships and community building were the most frequently commented topics during the interviews, identifying teamwork and partnership, belonging, respect and trust as some of the notable characteristics of a supportive relationship culture within a school community. Senge (2000) also states that moving a school towards a learning community requires patience, perseverance and a strong belief in what you do. This will be supported in part by nurturing among teachers substantial professional dialogue that assists understanding in how we learn, and fosters the momentum and conceptual development of what it means to be a learning community. This development has been supported, for example, by the research of Hayes (2006), The Learning Federation (2006), The Victorian Government (2003), Education Queensland (2003) and Carlin (2002). This, if sustained over a long time frame assists, supports and encourages teachers to be able to clarify and articulate their purpose.

Leadership and CSO restructuring created less bureaucratic, smaller school regions, helping to imbue learning communities across its system of schools. The recent

examination and introduction of covenant, rather than contracts, between the employer and school principals, built on the principle of reciprocity rather than a fixed term contract, would seem to strengthen the notion of community, particularly mutual commitment that is a significant tenet of learning communities.

Developing a learning community was a planned and strategic intervention method that allowed the CSO, Wagga Wagga primary schools to attempt reform, and to improve and enhance professionalism and focus on purposeful teaching. The CSO has suggested that this process has been mutually beneficial and advantageous to teachers and schools, because teachers have been honoured in their craft and honoured in the process of finding an alternate and potentially a more effective and engaging way of educating students in this post-modern age.

This study has identified a number of issues that could help inform the Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office future approaches to effective professional learning and sustained development that supports improved student learning and achievement including the future role of the institute process, the leadership within the CSO, and a statement which provides a workable strategic framework for learning that has been collaboratively developed and proclaimed by the CSO and school communities.

The survey and interviews conducted during this study indicated that the Institute played a significant role in assisting educators to think differently about learning and teaching. For too long classroom teachers were focused on 'getting through the curriculum' rather than focus on the learning needs of students.

The Institute process, with its intensive modelling and targeted professional dialogue, followed by localised, on-site and sustained support and, in many cases follow-up, led to a deeper understanding of the teachers' purpose and impact on learning and teaching. Where the Institute experience was followed up on-site, spaced, and with professional support, change was initiated and embedded into the classroom and into teachers' understandings with their repertoire of practices expanded. It was mentioned in the interviews and survey that where on-site professional support did not occur with teachers after the Institute, then sustained changes to classroom practice did not generally occur and the support for the learning community approach to student learning and achievement diminished. Likewise, collaborative strategies modelled during the institutes were generally ignored after returning to the classroom when ongoing site-based follow-up and support was not offered or requested when teachers did not work and plan in a collaborative manner.

Research by Fullan (1993), Joyce and Showers (1995) supports the understanding that isolated training sessions are not likely to result in significant educational developments or changed classroom practice. Optimal professional learning experiences for teachers require a high quality course delivered over time with ongoing support in order to translate into changed classroom practice. Sustained practice and reflection are required to incorporate any new strategies, into the teacher's regular practice. For professional learning to have any impact on changing practices there is the requirement for course attendance, time to apply any new learning, opportunities to exchange ideas and strategies with peers, time for reflecting on teacher practice as well as collaborating within and across school communities. On-going support can take on various activities including study groups, further training workshops courses or conferences, modelling -

watching others work, peer coaching and collaborative planning activities. Added to this is the importance of leadership. The principal's visibility, participation and presence during any professional learning activities provide a powerful message about the importance of the initiative for teachers, students and the school community.

To provide for the on-going, sustained support after the Institute experience, a Cadre was established by the CSO. The Cadre consisted of a group of selected classroom practitioners who had experienced the learning community Institute, and had demonstrated a deep understanding of the skills and processes involved, as well as the ability to support, model, encourage, influence and engage with other classroom teachers in the art of pedagogy.

As 'peer tutors' for the CSO, Cadre members were given further training, skilling and support to walk with others within classrooms and schools, along their learning community journey. Understanding the principles and practices of *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* provided a common and consistent language and approach that was to be adopted and embedded by other classroom teachers. Cadre membership and ongoing training, networking and support ensured that classroom practitioners were delivering a consistent and reliable message to school communities regarding the CSO agreed principles and practices of effective learning and teaching. Their work ensured that professional dialogue and reflection continued among classroom teachers to focus on pedagogy and to keep asking 'What's my purpose?' when teachers reflect on the learning and teaching occurring within their classrooms. The Cadre availability to schools ensured that on-going, focused, localised professional support would continue

for individual and groups of teachers as well as whole school communities as they engaged with their learning community journey.

Research feedback from the survey and interviews for this study indicated that sustained change in the classroom was effective when professional learning passed through the phases of incubation, investigation and immersion, as outlined earlier. Cadre members were skilled and supported to strategically move in and out of these phases to meet the individual and identified needs of teachers and school communities.

This research showed that the use of the Institute and the on-site, sustained follow-up process were a successful strategy for sustained change, to support teachers with pedagogy and processes for student learning. These processes ensure that the beliefs for learning for the CSO Wagga Wagga schools have been supported consistently over time. The Institute provided a focus on pedagogy as the core-purpose of schooling and assisted teachers to reflect, discuss, support and plan for effective learning and teaching after frequently considering and asking themselves 'What's my purpose?'

It is recommended that the Catholic Schools Office conduct regular 'Institutes' followed by ongoing phased site-based professional support for new school leaders and newly appointed teachers to their schools. The Institute will provide for an intensive introduction, participation, modelling, networking and support opportunities to engage in reflection, dialogue and immersion in what the Catholic Schools Office believes about effective teaching. Additionally, continue to provide support and opportunities for past institute participants to collaborate, share, network and professionally reflect

celebrate and re-engage with the Catholic Schools Office principles and practices of effective teaching.

6.4 The Catholic Schools Office

The Wagga Wagga CSO's leadership and support for the use of effective teaching practices within a learning community philosophy has assisted sustained classroom change.

The Catholic Schools Office was instrumental in introducing, supporting and leading the learning community philosophy into its system of schools. There have been attempts by CSO personnel to align the policies, procedures and structures of the CSO to reflect the principles and practices of 'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'. Explicit initiatives, financial support and efforts to bring into line the various sectors of the CSO with the learning community understandings have assisted some school principals and their communities to engage actively and confidently in their own quest to revitalise learning and teaching.

In response to the publication 'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults' an important finding of this study was the importance of planning and developing a process of engaging all teachers and school communities into reflecting on, and further developing a common language on agreed principles and practices of teaching in the 21st century. The CSO expect that schools and classrooms demonstrate effective teaching practices, and where classroom structures meet the needs of all students, offering appropriate levels of support and challenge to engage students and to enable them to fulfil their educational potential. Schools will need to continue to reflect, review and adapt to build a strong, challenging and relevant curriculum and academically responsive classrooms that

provide students with the necessary skills and understandings for engaging with learning and success, now and in the future. Additionally the school community will be collaboratively organised, reflective, flexibly constructed and strategically linked to the wider community.

Hadfield and Jopling (2008) indicated that 21st century learning can be improved by adopting strategies that increase engagement in learning and support the intention of learning. The support of the Principal and a whole school approach to the school's learning community philosophy, aided success and consistency, and were appreciated by teachers who responded to the survey. Recent research has identified, and supports the above survey findings that teachers can establish opportunities for meaningful learning when they, clearly state learning goals (Noonan & Duncan 2005), model learning (Lingard, Hayes & Mills 2003), help students reflect on their own progress (MCETYA 2008), intensify peer support (Alton-Lee 2006), scaffold learning experiences (Eggen & Kauchak 2010), value student contribution (March 2010), allow students to think and share responsibility for learning (Grundy 1998, Alton-Lee 2006) and provide a safe and stimulating environment that meets the needs of all students (Edwards & Watts 2004). Likewise, Hayes et. al. (2006) has shown that effective learning and teaching strategies alone will not support sustained educational change. It is when purposeful pedagogy is influenced and supported by capacity building leaders that inspire, inform and involve students in their learning and achievements, that sustained change becomes possible. It is only when teachers keep asking "What's my purpose?" that there will be powerful learning where students are engaged, inspired and informed and where teachers are working collaboratively and are professionally supported and challenged.

Many teachers who participated in the survey and interviews commented that the removal of the Cadre group in 1999 was a significant factor for teachers not engaging with the CSO identified effective teaching practices. The removal of this ongoing professional support, it was indicated, led to a decline in professional engagement with the effective pedagogical practices. It was seen by some that CSO support for a learning community approach and the implementation of effective teaching practices was no longer a priority.

Processes used by the CSO to evaluate teaching have indicated that schools have been successful and compliant in meeting State Government registration requirements with the 'what' of teaching. All schools have successfully documented that they are teaching the NSW Board of Studies syllabi. Additionally, the CSO Curriculum Review Process supported by feedback through the survey for this research indicates that there are issues with the "how" of teaching. Pedagogy support, as a need, was identified in the survey and interviews and is now needed for further curriculum engagement. This need may be supported within the school by providing Learning and Teaching Co-ordinators and skilling the CSO Education Officers to further support classroom teachers with opportunities to reflect and develop their learning and teaching strategies.

This will fill the gap left when the Cadre was disbanded and will move CSO officers from an administrative support to a pedagogical support role. This will provide teachers with the on-site professional support which was identified in the survey and interviews as a significant factor that assisted teachers engage with the CSO effective teaching strategies. This could align the whole school community approach to working towards synchronicity for student learning, teaching, assessment and reporting based on an

agreed and collaboratively developed and practiced learning framework supported by the school and CSO leadership.

This study identified that the Catholic Schools Office provided focused support for schools around the core purpose of schooling, namely learning and teaching. There is now an opportunity for the CSO to re-examine the roles of School Consultants and Education Officers who directly support schools.

It is recommended that the work of the above support personnel, be aligned around the agreed principles and practices of effective learning and teaching. Regularly reviewing and reflecting on the CSO Mission and Vision, (Appendix 3) policies and procedures and role statements will assist in aligning and providing consistency for the professional support that the CSO provides to schools. According to Ellsworth (2000), it is when school communities link a range of tactics into a systematic strategy, schools can improve their chances for lasting and effective educational change and create better opportunities for student learning.

Build into the role of the Education Officer the work focus of the Cadre, discussed earlier, that once operated by providing planned, ongoing and sustained support for teachers to assist them with improved pedagogical practices. It is recommended that the CSO support learning and teaching by establishing in larger schools, a school-based position of 'Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator' to encourage, enhance and revitalise the craft of pedagogy in line with the CSO stated principles and practices of effective learning and teaching. Smaller schools can access similar support for pedagogy development through designated Education Officers from the CSO.

The challenge remains for the CSO to continually improve the 'how' of teaching, i.e. the engaging and efficient delivery of the curriculum through the use of agreed effective learning and teaching principles and practices that engages students. In establishing a Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator position, the CSO accepts responsibility for providing on going targeted professional support and capacity building, to the school-based Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator. This position will be free of administrative duties, provide time for in-class teacher support, planning and evaluation of classroom learning and teaching strategies, teacher professional learning plans and on-going professional learning and development. There will be an explicit understanding that the core purpose of schools and their teachers is that student learning growth remain the focus of teachers and classroom activities.

It is recommended that the CSO explore creative opportunities to provide and fund local site-based Learning and Teaching Co-ordinators within the larger schools. This support will raise the profile of pedagogy within the local school environment. Education Officers will be able to focus on supporting these Co-ordinators with the art and practice of effective learning, teaching and curriculum delivery as well as directly supporting the smaller schools.

It is further recommended that a review the operations of the Catholic Schools Office be undertaken to ensure that the learning community philosophy and the agreed principles and practices of effective learning and teaching are explicitly reflected, promoted and embedded into all CSO and local school activities, policies and procedures.

Accountabilities for keeping alive the passion and professional dialogue for purposeful pedagogy and the learning community framework, skills and understanding are to be built into the role of School Consultants and Education Officers. This can be achieved by capacity building opportunities and experiences and by providing flexible support strategies built around the three identified phases of professional learning: incubation, investigation and immersion, discussed earlier, to assist individual teachers and schools to keep answering the question ‘What’s my purpose?’

6.5 A Framework for Learning

A Framework for Learning publication builds on earlier commitments outlined in Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults (2000) and provides a point of engagement for reflection, dialogue and professional learning and planning and supports a range of pedagogical practices within a learning community to support and challenge student learning growth.

It is time to review ‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’ in light of the learning community journey over the past 10 years and in response to more recent research findings on how students learn effectively. Additionally, the CSO system of schools has significantly changed since the primary schools began their engagement with a learning community approach and the development and publication of the core document ‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’.

Since the turn of this century the CSO has doubled in size, with the number of schools, students and staff it now manages. Over the past six years, five secondary schools have joined the system as the Religious Congregations withdrew from the governance of secondary schools. There are numerous opportunities to re-engage all teachers, primary

and secondary, in a re-development of the statement *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* as well as a deepening understanding and philosophical support of the learning community approach to schooling.

The CSO core statement on learning and teaching had its origins in the early to mid-1990's when Institutes were planned and delivered to the majority of Wagga Wagga CSO primary school teachers. The identified effective teaching practices listed and described in the document *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*, likewise had its origin from the early 1990's or before. Since this time there has been extensive research conducted about student learning, effective pedagogical practices and the role of school leadership and its impact on student learning. Further insights, understandings and perspectives have emerged and are having an influence across the education landscape. As the CSO system of schools is now a K-12 structure, there is an opportunity to re-engage all educators in a focus on contemporary pedagogy. *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* contains many of the dimensions of effective teaching still recognised by researchers as significant.

Since 1994 there has been a CSO initiated program creating structures for a school system and school communities who value the principles and practices of learning communities. Data from the participants of the survey and interviews supports strongly held beliefs that becoming a learning community is a process that enables students, staff, families and community members to work together to support student learning and wellbeing. Central to this process is collaborative learning, developing meaningful

relationships among learners and teachers, establishing connections beyond the classroom and developing an inclusive learning environment.

The learning community, as identified in the interviews, assists schools to build purposeful relationships, knowledge, capabilities and values that equip students as independent creative thinkers and learners. The learning community philosophy will challenge and support students to be successful and will help establish new and meaningful connections for their learning. This philosophy will assist teachers in strengthening their pedagogical practice.

The survey responses and interviews also stated that the learning community treats the classroom as a locus of community building by featuring constructivist and co-operative learning techniques and group learning activities as a pedagogical approach. The learning community classroom will feature high levels of dialogue, interaction and collaboration with a common focus on an incentive to learn together.

Additionally, a learning community develops when teachers explicitly work to create a physical, social, intellectual, spiritual and emotional environment that actively supports student learning and their wellbeing. By actively developing a learning community opportunities increase for students to collaborate, think, inquire, create, reflect and make responsible learning decisions.

Significant comments during the interviews focused on relationships where it was stated that the relationships developed and sustained with students – both collectively and individually – are respectful and are at the heart of the learning and teaching.

When students have a positive self-concept, trust and communicate well with their peers and teachers, and have fun together, they are more likely to be receptive to learning and student-centred pedagogy. One of the critical steps in forming a learning community is the development of interpersonal relationships where learning and teaching takes place in an environment of trust, support and challenge. A learning community approach to inspiring, informing and engaging students in learning requires all members of the community to work towards this common end.

The strategic intent of the learning community, according to the literature and supported by the survey and interview comments is to “support student learning growth and wellbeing”. Teachers in classrooms aim to develop student competencies, skills, knowledge and talents. Students and teachers work together to develop ways of dealing with and respecting each other so that the foundation of the learning community is based upon strong, trusting relationships.

The literature further supports the view that effective and collaborative teaching strategies are the building block for developing, monitoring and sustaining a learning community. In order to make the curriculum meaningful, effective learning is grounded within a range of pedagogies that have their focus on the academic development and wellbeing of the student.

The survey identified the range of effective pedagogies within the learning community, which consisted of strategies that inspire, inform and engage the learner. This is achieved, according to the interview data and supported by the literature, by providing relevance for the learner through linking explicit teaching and new learning to the

learner's context, so that students deepen their understanding and make connections with real world learning experience. The opportunities and processes that engage the learner through inquiry, learning by doing, problem solving with others or independently, in groups or 'on-line', provide the pedagogical approaches that builds student capacity and engagement while supporting purposeful learning and teaching.

Table 1 in Chapter 2 has summarised a range of recent research findings about the characteristics of effective schools. It is clear that there is, within the literature, a collection of common learning dimensions that would assist the CSO to re-engage their teachers in developing a common language and shared understanding and provide a plan for self-assessment and reflection on their teaching practices as well as to continue to engage in professional conversations. Figure 13 following, provides a suggested Framework for Learning that could be used as a starting point for the CSO to re-familiarise all teachers with their core purpose, that is, teaching is about inspiring, informing and involving students, focusing on their learning needs, their academic development and their wellbeing.

Recent research has indicated that when students are encouraged to manipulate and use information to construct new meanings and understandings while using higher order thinking, they feel connected with their learning and are able to apply this to real-life issues and problems beyond the classroom. Additionally, as an effective teaching strategy, it is found that engaging with students in substantive conversation, and asking relevant questions, assists in building relationships and helps students develop deeper understanding (Hayes. D., Mills, M., Christie, P. & Lingard, B. 2006).

The literature review in Chapter 2 supports the view that contemporary learning is about;

1. the building of *community* that is learner-centred and futures-oriented, with inspired, professional, enthusiastic and passionate teachers and leaders.
2. improved teaching practices which are innovative, engaging, flexible, resource and technology based, and deliver a *curriculum* in a purposeful, relevant and manageable manner.
3. opportunities for *collaboration* to create supportive learning relationships and demonstrate cognitive and co-operative pedagogical strategies.
4. a sense of hope and *connection*, both within and beyond the classroom.
5. an evidence based approach upon which to reflect, evaluate, plan and to expand *capacity* to improve and sustain learning and teaching.
- 6.

A new framework for learning statement should provide an opportunity and focus for the CSO to evolve, develop and capture a collective view of education across all Wagga Wagga Catholic schools, so that students will become faith-filled, ethical and compassionate individuals, active and informed citizens as well as confident, creative and successful learners (MCEETA 2008).

Students from CSO primary schools are now beginning to influence and shape the learning and teaching agenda as they continue their enrolment into the CSO high schools, which have traditionally focused on an administrative hierarchical structure, and separated curriculum areas that are delivered via a tightly structured timetable.

A Framework for Learning

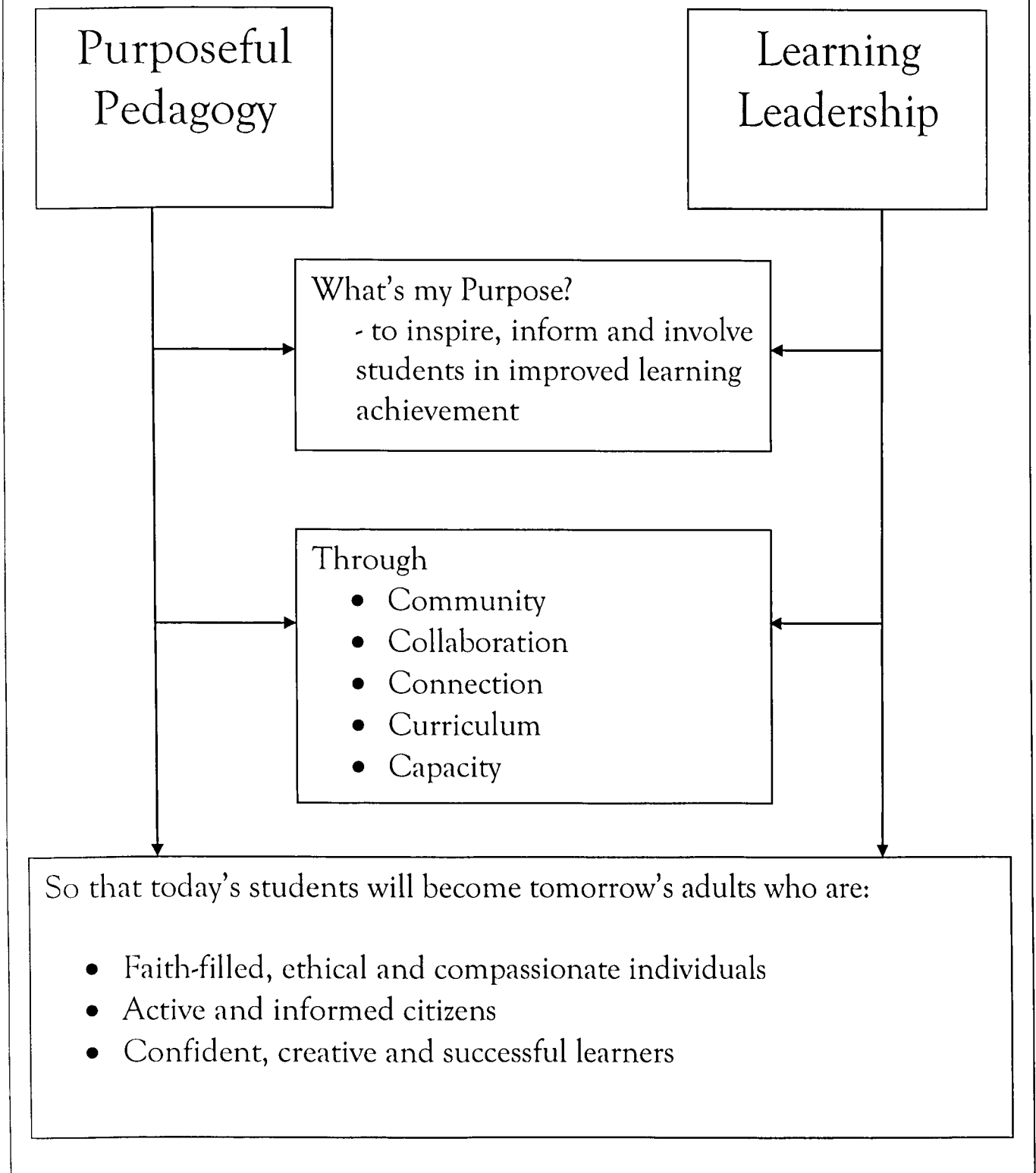


Figure 13: A Framework for Learning

Many of the students now entering CSO high schools, have participated in primary classrooms where they have been provided with various opportunities to take increasing control of their thinking and learning, while taking more responsibility for their own behaviour as a consequence of the classroom teacher engaging with an approach to learning that incorporates the principles and teaching practices published in *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'*.

The enthusiasm and confidence developed by some of the CSO Wagga Wagga primary teachers throughout the learning community Institute experience have helped some of the primary schools refocus their learning and teaching agenda. This study has reviewed and evaluated the assumption that the experiences, reflections, challenges and changes that are associated with each learning community Institute and its follow-up professional learning activities have been the impetus for a changing learning environment within some of the CSO primary classroom, providing a stronger focus on pedagogy. The concept of learning communities provides the agreed common language for teachers to discuss and reflect on their pedagogy and purpose. As Latham et. al. (2006) questions, without the language of pedagogy, how can educators share and build a profession in a collaborative way?

At grassroots level, within primary classrooms and from casual observations and conversations with primary teachers, principals, CSO Consultants and Education Officers, this refocus on pedagogy has led to a belief that there have been some observable changes in the school and classroom regarding ways that students learn and teachers educate. The strategies and emphasis that is enhanced through a collaborative learning community have provided educators with a practical approach that allows the

education process and teachers to focus on the learner. This process has reclaimed the educational agenda for some by helping educators ask the question “What’s my purpose?” in order to enhance the process of effective learning and teaching and meaningfully empowering teachers to engage students in their own learning.

The learning communities model, as adopted by the Wagga Wagga CSO is believed to be well grounded in theory as an appropriate framework for schools and, indeed, other educational institutions wishing to transform themselves and revitalise learning and teaching. Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 support this view.

The early learning community movement by the Wagga Wagga CSO began in a simple way and emphasised the individual classroom as the unit of change. Eventually it became clear that educational improvement could only be sustained with whole school and strong CSO system support. Well facilitated, resourced and systematic professional development known as the Learning Community Institute provided a number of teachers with the opportunity to reflect, discuss and ask themselves the question “What’s my purpose?” Additionally, they were able to engage with a range of appropriate and effective pedagogical strategies that would assist them to inspire, inform and involve students in meaningful learning. This has resulted in changes to CSO policy and practice that attempts to move individual teachers, schools, and an entire school system, towards transformation to a learning community. The Wagga Wagga CSO believed that their approach to effective teaching provides opportunities for learners to achieve their full potential. This can lead to a real focus on pedagogy and a need for educational leaders and classroom teachers to keep asking themselves,

for the sake of their students, their school community and the CSO system of schools

“What’s my purpose?”

This study highlighted that the Catholic Schools Office needs to engage in a process of review of current beliefs and practices on effective learning and teaching that will assist the students today to be well-adjusted adults tomorrow. Additionally, it is recommended that the CSO provide further opportunities for the teachers and school leaders to reflect, refine, engage in professional dialogue with colleagues and articulate beliefs, values and principles about learning and teaching in Catholic schools in light of recent understandings and research as well as relevant Catholic Church documents.

It is significant that the Catholic Schools Office Wagga Wagga has developed a learning framework document called *‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’* based around identified educational principles and practices. It is also significant that the literature indicates that quality learning and teaching alone does not guarantee change. The literature and the comments from the interviews and survey support the understanding that leadership at school and system level can build the capacity of classroom teachers and support them in their use of effective learning and teaching strategies to create an engaged learning community. In reflecting and planning for whole-of- system engagement for a new and updated version of a learning framework, consideration needs to be given to alignment and developing a strategic approach to identifying from the research, elements of both leadership and learning that will support student engagement and achievement. This researcher classified five elements of purposeful pedagogy (adapted from Table 1 in Chapter 2 of this report) to include; communication, collaboration, connection, curriculum and capacity. It is further

suggested that 'Leadership of Learning' can also be understood and explored as a complementary and in synchronicity by reflecting on contemporary research and consider using the same five elements listed as an organising strategy as a way of deepening understandings of the leadership of learning.

This study highlighted that the Catholic Schools Office could involve all their school communities (primary and secondary schools) in a renewal process of review and alignment of contemporary effective principles and practices of learning and teaching, and collaboratively develop for publication the next version of '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*'. This document should be embedded with the latest research on effective schools, 21st century learning styles and relevant Catholic Church documents. It is essential that wide exposure to a learning and teaching philosophical framework document provides the common baseline language and essential understandings for all teachers and educational leaders of learning and teaching expectations within the classrooms of the Wagga Wagga CSO Schools.

6.7 Concluding Statements

This study was to investigate if the CSO Wagga Wagga's professional development strategy known as The Learning Community Institute had an impact on teachers pedagogical practices. Further, this study explored the extent to which the CSO's identified teaching practices of meaningful learning, inquiry, communication, collaboration, self-responsibility and human development were being engaged by the teachers in the primary schools.

These findings will assist the CSO Wagga Wagga plan for the future. Quality, focused professional learning that is financially supported, site-based and spaced appears to be the key to engaging educators to focus on the knowledge, skills and understandings required to engage more with learning and teaching strategies, and make a difference to the learning, growth and development of young people.

There is a strong belief held by teachers employed by the Catholic Schools Office, Wagga Wagga of the need to assist students to learn, grow and develop in our changing world today, and that skillful teaching is required, supported by a deep understanding of students, pedagogy and leadership. This demands that all school communities develop a consistent approach, language and understanding of learning and teaching in order to prepare young people for the real world of today and tomorrow.

The literature search did indicate the elements that assisted in creating an effective school, along with the characteristics of the learning community philosophy. It was found that the learning outcomes for students are enhanced when a learning community approach is endorsed and adopted by the school community. Significantly, it was also clarified that leadership from both system and school levels were strategic in helping school communities engage with pedagogical change.

The literature review further explored the importance of professional learning for educational change. There was strong evidence which supported the view of the need for phases of professional development for sustained change. This research has identified these phases as incubation, investigation and immersion as illustrated in Figure 5 and discussed in Chapter 3. The CSO intervention strategy known as the

Institute followed these phases and was mentioned by the participants in the survey and interviews to be a significant catalyst for engaging teachers in changing their teaching practices.

The learning community Institute as a process for professional learning for pedagogical change was designed and implemented by the Wagga Wagga CSO to support teachers to collaboratively plan learning and to encourage teachers to embrace a range of effective teaching practices. This research has explored aspects of the CSO Wagga Wagga's planned professional learning experiences to demonstrate how the interaction of a variety of explicit initiatives and strategic events assisted some schools to begin to reconsider the purpose of learning and teaching. The Catholic Schools Office initiatives and strategic events have interacted and attempted to influence and develop Wagga Wagga CSO primary schools as learning communities.

Data for this research was gathered and analysed from three sources. Firstly, 150 survey documents were distributed to primary school teachers. This was followed up by a series of 5 individual interviews and then 2 group interviews. The data gathered provided information about the impact of the CSO's intervention strategy, the Institute, as well as the extent to which the identified teaching practices found in *Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*, were used by the primary teachers in the Wagga Wagga CSO's schools.

Four themes emerged from the data sources and were focused around relationship and community building, student learning, professional development and teacher pedagogical skills and strategies. The analysis of the survey and interview data illustrated

the importance that the participants assigned to these areas. Building relationships and community was considered to be foundational in improving student learning opportunities. Likewise, increasing teacher capacity and understandings about pedagogy, working collaboratively with colleagues for professional conversations and planning, reflection, and engaging as a school community with the learning community philosophy, were identified, along with leadership, as strategies that changed teaching practices.

Professional development was seen by the majority of the survey and interview participants as being the catalyst for the identified teacher changed practice. The Institute, in the view of the majority of teachers from the Wagga Wagga CSO schools, who participated with this study, was the strategy which encouraged and assisted them to change teaching practice. As noted in the findings, teachers who opted for the Institute without the onsite follow-up by the external consultants, indicated an inconsistent use of the CSO identified teaching practices.

In reflecting on the range of strategies undertaken by the Wagga Wagga CSO, a number of elements have been identified as being significant in the development of the educational change process attempted. The engagement of external consultants to lead the change process was embraced by the primary school teachers and staff of the Catholic Schools Office. This was supported professionally, financially and administratively by the Catholic Schools Office. The Institute experience provided a safe and supportive environment for teachers to reflect, risk and clarify their deeply held beliefs about learning and teaching. Collaborative and developmental learning community strategies were explored and modelled during the Institute and some were

supported afterwards by the external consultants, within classrooms. Additionally the 'Cadre' was established to provide ongoing support and encouragement for classroom teachers and school leaders by encouraging, supporting and assisting with focused, on-site, on-going spaced professional learning and development. The publication of *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* document was seen by the local education community as a unifying process that helped develop a shared understanding and language about learning and teaching for the Wagga Wagga CSO system of schools.

Educational leaders' and schools' learning and teaching processes may have been significantly influenced by Wagga Wagga CSO's professional learning activity known as the Institute. This has allowed schools to begin to understand themselves as learning communities and teachers to regularly reflect on the important question 'What's my purpose?'

This research has demonstrated that the Institute was designed to support teachers to reflect on their knowledge, skills, practices, values and beliefs about learning and teaching. The Institute provided a structured approach that was designed to have a positive impact on student learning. The Institute also provided teachers with an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and reflection about their current pedagogical practices and compare them to the practices promoted by the CSO document *'Today's Children Tomorrow's Adults'*. The Institute experience assisted teachers to regularly reflect and ask themselves and colleagues 'What's my purpose?' when planning student learning activities.

There remain implications for the Catholic Schools Office of Wagga Wagga to develop strategies and provide resources to continue working and supporting improved pedagogy and understandings. This can occur by continuing to implement and support a learning community framework through explicitly embedding into all classrooms, the identified and agreed effective learning and teaching principles and practices supported by capacity building leadership. This will assist educational leaders, classroom teachers and school communities to remain focused and be able to articulate the answer to the question ‘What’s my purpose?’

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Appendix 1

Consultants

Appendix 1

Consultants

Joan Dalton and David Anderson are respected Australian teachers and educators who work nationally and internationally as consultants, staff developers and project development specialists. Together they have formed “Hands On Consultancy” and since 1994 provided a series of professional learning services for the teachers of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga, focusing on the developments within the classrooms, and assisting schools to journey towards becoming effective learning communities.

Through a process of ‘Institutes’, teachers are engaged in a five-day, live in series of workshops where they experience, in a very practical way, through discussion, involvement and reflection, opportunities for a personal transformation of their own teaching philosophy, and explore a range of co-operative learning and teaching strategies. Dalton and Anderson, through modelling various strategies, allow for individuals to acquire skills, understandings and confidence in being able to effectively change their classroom into a learning community.

Teachers involved in these ‘Institutes’ are also provided with two or three follow-up visits by Dalton and Anderson back in their own schools and classrooms. This allows for practical feedback and constructive support for each teacher as they journey the learning community path. As part of their work with the Diocese *‘Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults’* was collaboratively developed and written, and lays out the long-term goals teachers and educational leaders want for their students. It became the core document for learning and teaching for the Wagga Wagga CSO. Dalton and Anderson’s major commitment is to the long-term work with schools and educational systems, where they engage with school leaders and teachers to build effective professional learning communities and authentic student learning communities grounded in learning and teaching practices that prepare today’s learners for tomorrow’s world.

Appendix 2

Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults

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Appendix 2

'Today's Children: Tomorrow's Adults' Principles and Practices for Learning and Teaching in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga

Rationale

'I have come in order that you may have life - life in all its fullness.' (Jn 10.10)

The Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office is committed to providing a system of education which is true to this mission of Jesus Christ, and which, at the same time, recognises and acknowledges the sacredness and uniqueness of each individual, created in the image of God (*Gen 1.27*) and carved on the palm of God's hand (*Is 49.15*). It is also aware of the following expectations of the Catholic Church in respect of its schools:

'Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps people direct their thoughts, actions and wills according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes their norm of life.' (Catholic Schools, par. 34)

'The Catholic school is committed to the development of the whole person, since in Christ, the perfect person, all human values find their fulfilment and unity. Herein lies the specifically Catholic character of the school.' (Catholic Schools, par. 35) This Office believes that a life-giving education, based on the values of the Gospel, must also recognise the kind of world in which its present students will be adults:

'As we enter the 21st century, we find ourselves charged with the responsibility of preparing young people to thrive in a world characterised by rapid and accelerating change, an amazing explosion of information and choices, and an urgent need for people and nations to build healthy relationships and work together for worthwhile, ethical purposes.'

(Dalton & Anderson, 1997)

The Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office is therefore committed to assisting its system of schools to prepare young people for tomorrow's world by expecting them to provide an education which is congruent with the values of the Gospels and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Such an education will enable young people to:

- grow and develop as whole human beings
- live Christian, Gospel-based values
- maximise their talents to achieve their personal best
- become responsible, contributing members of society
- play an active part in shaping a better world for all.

‘Our children’s futures, and that of the planet on which we live, depend on a system of education that produces young people who are creative, critical, cultured, compassionate and courageous, and are able to demonstrate that in their daily lives. On their behalf, as parents and educators, we should settle for nothing less.’ (Anderson & Dalton, 1997)

Guiding Principles:

The Adults Our Children Will Need To Become

To realise such a system of education, we must hold firmly in place a vision for the kinds of adults our young people need to become, and understand the principles that drive this vision. The Wagga Wagga CSO is committed to helping children grow into adults who are:

Spiritual

People who have developed a sense of wonder, awe and mystery as an important foundation for their spiritual life, who understand prayer as crucial in building a relationship with God, who demonstrate familiarity with scripture and an understanding of the teachings and traditions of the Catholic Church as a ‘cornerstone’ toward achieving this relationship.

Inquirers

People with a lifelong love of, and search for, learning; people who are curious, who question, who know how to investigate and have the skills to conduct constructive, purposeful research into a wide variety of topics and issues.

Thinkers

People who are able to think creatively and critically, who can make sound decisions and tackle complex problems, who know how to access, use and apply learning processes and information in many different contexts.

Reflective

People who are accustomed to thinking about their thinking and learning, who reflect before action, during action, and after action, who are able to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in a thoughtful, constructive manner, and work toward improvement through purposeful planning and goal-setting.

Adaptable

People who exhibit a healthy ‘change quotient’ i.e. who welcome and question change, and know how to work with change; people who use their initiative to explore and create new roles, ideas and strategies, who are open-minded, resourceful and flexible, who take risks in their learning.

Knowledgeable

People who have a deep understanding of significant ideas and concepts which have personal as well as global relevance and importance, who can see patterns and relationships in systems and daily life, and use them to make connections between ideas.

Communicators

People who can receive, express and represent ideas and information in multiple modes and forms, and make appropriate choices for a wide range of audiences.

Collaborative

People who know how to work effectively with others, who demonstrate appropriate teamwork and interpersonal skills in a wide variety of work and personal situations.

Principled

People with a distinguishing combination of emotional, intellectual and moral qualities, such as perseverance, courage, loyalty, honesty, a sense of justice and fairness, respect for self and others, confidence, who work to live these qualities in all aspects of their lives. In our Catholic schools, these principles are the values by which Jesus lived, i.e. Gospel values.

Caring

People who show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others, who have a sense of responsibility and commitment to action and service involving social justice issues, situations and causes beyond themselves.

Global Citizens

People who are able to view the world as an integrated community, who understand interdependence, who value cultural diversity, who are able to take the perspective of other people, and consider a range of viewpoints in decision-making, relationships and daily life.

Healthy

People who understand the importance of physical and mental balance and personal well-being, who have a positive relationship with themselves as well as with others, who demonstrate a sense of individual and group responsibility.

Learning Communities: a 'big picture' framework

These guiding principles help us to hold clear long term goals for the children we teach. These are the outcomes that ultimately matter. They provide the doorway into how we approach curriculum. They drive the curriculum, rather than the other way round.

'Great teachers ...carry inside their hearts and their heads, as part of their deep inner core, an enduring set of principles by which they teach and lead... such principles offer guidelines against which to measure the worth of external resources. They provide a holistic or 'big' picture for us all to work towards...' (Dalton & Boyd, 1992)

These principles can best be realised through student membership of caring and effective learning communities, where the spirit of support and challenge work in harmony, where relationship is the glue that holds the community together, and where gospel values such as respect, acceptance, and inclusion are the foundation upon which everything else is built.

'There is growing acceptance of the idea that general improvements in student academic performance and social and moral development will only occur when classrooms become learning communities' (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Of course, when teachers themselves are members of professional adult learning communities they are more able to achieve authentic learning communities for, and with, their students. The essential nature of these professional learning communities is dealt with in other diocesan support materials; our focus in this policy is on the young people we teach and care for.

The principles reflected in the profiles of 'tomorrow's adults', and the critical contribution of learning communities toward realising these, are generally not made explicit in state, national and international policy and curriculum documents. They are, however, implicit in the learning and teaching practices, strategies and processes which underpin all of these documents.

While there are several (usually common) Key Learning Areas identified across curriculum and course advice documents, and the terminology used may differ from state to state or country to country, their common emphases is significant, and the same kinds of generic learning and teaching practices are evident.

The work of Dalton and Anderson in this endeavour highlights six major constructs that underpin learning and teaching across all Key Learning Areas:

AN EFFECTIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

- Meaningful learning
 - Inquiry
 - Collaboration
 - Communication
 - Self-responsibility
 - Human Development
- © Hands On, 1997.

Implementation of these constructs in our learning and teaching practices are essential to helping students to achieve the kinds of outcomes mandated in curriculum profile and course advice documents, and importantly, to become the kinds of adults who can function effectively in the future.

Effective learning and teaching practices

The following learning and teaching practices are relevant and important across all sectors of schooling, K-12. They are keys to providing a consistent approach for students across the curriculum, and to teachers and students developing a 'big picture' of learning and teaching of overwhelming information.

Meaningful learning

Effective teachers:

- gather as much student information as possible
- find out what students already know and can do
- help students actively construct understanding
- provide varied learning experiences, strategies and resources to meet diverse needs
- provide focused small group and 1:1 teaching with students
- connect new learning to students' lives

- focus learning on important questions, concepts and processes
- foster explicit connection-making between ideas and processes across the curriculum and subject boundaries
- make purposes and goals explicit
- help students apply/transfer learnings to new situations
- engage students in authentic learning
- focus on assessment as an integral part of learning, using a wide variety of formats

Inquiry

Effective teachers:

- engage students in meaningful inquiry and research
- use an inquiry framework for program planning purposes
- understand the links between inquiry and constructivist learning
- explicitly teach investigative and research processes and skills
- have students pose and explore questions - their own as well as those of others; philosophical as well as practical questions
- use mistake-making and error as an important part of the learning process

Communication

Effective teachers:

- regularly engage learners in meaningful dialogue with peers
- model invitational language
- teach non-verbal forms of communication
- develop student skills with multimedia
- teach students effective questioning skills
- encourage written conversation
- provide for multiple ways to represent thinking, ideas and information
- help students use styles appropriate for different audiences, purposes and contexts

Collaboration

Effective teachers:

- understand the power of student partnerships
- make explicit the benefits of working together
- match collaborative groupings (team size, membership and duration) to needs and purposes
- use collaborative structures in a purposeful way
- embed teamwork principles in collaborative work
- explicitly develop a wide range of collaborative skills
- actively foster perspective-taking
- involve the broader community beyond the classroom

Self-responsibility

Effective teachers:

- honour the intrinsic motivation of students
- use language that actively encourages self-responsibility

- promote student self-understanding and metacognitive awareness
- foster on-going reflection on learning
- model and make explicit creative, critical and problem-solving skills and processes
- help students select and use a wide range of learning how to learn and thinking tools, techniques and processes
- invite student negotiation and choice in learning
- teach students the task and organisational skills to learn to manage their own learning
- actively involve students in self-assessment
- help students learn to take responsibility for their behaviour by using gospel, social-ethical values as the base to work from
- focusing on student construction of understanding
- teaching appropriate problem-solving strategies and skills, and constructive ways of resolving conflict

Human development

Effective teachers:

- build unity and a sense of belonging in the classroom
- help students to appreciate and value diversity
- help students develop as principled, ethical human beings, displaying values such as respect, fairness, courtesy, responsibility and kindness
- co-create with students class norms based on these values
- develop in students effective habits of mind and qualities such as initiative, resilience, adaptability, imagination, persistence, confidence courage and enterprise
- integrate the spiritual with other aspects of learning
- place a focus on creating the new (products, models, information) rather than simply reproducing what is known
- help students to pro-actively vision and create preferred futures, in ways that have personal, school, community and global relevance
- offer opportunities for students to work in the service of others - to show care and make a contribution within and beyond the school

Expectations of schools

We can only prepare young people to thrive in the future when we are clear about what we stand for. This document sets out an overview of what the Wagga Wagga Diocese is committed to, and what our education system ought to be about. Our purpose in so doing is to articulate a set of beliefs and principles that drive learning and teaching in each of our schools, and to provide guidelines that we can aspire to.

These guidelines have implications for teachers, principals, parents and students, for the kinds of learning communities that we build and the well-being of the people in them. They have implications for the practical learning and teaching that takes place, both with students and adults, and for the curriculum in terms of what and how we teach.

Our expectation is that these policy guidelines will drive the core purpose of all schools in our Diocese, and that, with the support of practical documents to be developed,

schools will work to align and enhance their daily practices with these beliefs and principles. This is our vision for education in the Wagga Wagga Diocese, and for the children that we care for and teach. They are our hope for the future.

Catholic Schools Office Wagga Wagga

Mission and Vision Statement

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Appendix 3

Diocese of Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office Vision and Mission Statements

Vision Statement

In keeping with the evangelising Mission of the Catholic Church the Diocese of Wagga Wagga develops and affirms Catholic Schools which:

- are committed to Jesus Christ and his Gospel;
- know and celebrate our Catholic faith tradition;
- educate the whole person: body, spirit, heart and mind;
- promote education in the service of a better world;
- provide our students with reasons for living, hoping and loving.

Mission Statement

Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wagga Wagga are committed to being:

A Community of Faith

centred on Christ and the sacramental life of the Church living Gospel values according to Church teaching working to foster the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth learning about and living our Catholic faith while respecting the faith traditions of others demonstrating the relevance of faith to life and contemporary culture

A Community of Learning

helping students to find and nurture their gifts and talents, providing a comprehensive curriculum of quality and challenge for all valuing effort, achievement and excellence in learning, respecting competence and dedication in the staff, modeling the integration of Catholic faith and learning using technology to enhance teaching and learning

A Community of Care

welcoming and including students and their families, respecting the dignity and uniqueness of each student, providing a safe, secure and stimulating environment conducive to learning, ensuring fairness and justice within appropriate discipline structures, promoting self-esteem and critical thinking in students

A Community of Service

complementing and supporting the role of parents, working in partnership with priests and the parish and local communities, promoting outreach to the poor and disadvantaged, modelling and promoting use of each other's gifts for the benefit of society, encouraging an attitude of stewardship to all creation

Data Collection Instruments

- 4.1 Learning and Teaching Practices Survey
- 4.2 Notes for Address to Principals at Diocesan Principals' Conference
- 4.3 School Newsletter Pro-forma
- 4.4 Letter to Principals
- 4.5 Individual Interview Questions
- 4.6 Group Interview Questions
- 4.7 Information Letter for Participants
- 4.8 Participant Consent Form
- 4.9 Permission Letter From Parents

Today's Children Tomorrow's Adults **STAFF SURVEY**

Dear Colleague,

Currently I am participating in a Doctorate of Education program with the Australian Catholic University.

With a broad research theme of Revitalising Learning and Teaching, an attempt will be made to evaluate the effectiveness of the Learning Community Institute and impact of the *'Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults'* framework document on the Primary School Communities of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga.

Interviews, focus groups and this survey will be instruments used to collect relevant data.

Following is a Learning and Teaching Inventory. Could you please take a little time to reflect on your learning community journey, students and classroom learning and teaching strategies, then tick (✓) each of the following learning and teaching practices using one of the following five point scale:

1. Always
2. Mostly
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Your response sheet should be handed to your principal in the supplied sealed envelope before next Wednesday. Arrangement will be made to collect all surveys. If you require more space for comments please attach additional sheets.

All response sheets will be treated confidentially and you or your school community will not be identified in any way in the final published report.

Thank you for your time, efforts and reflections of your learning community journey.

Yours sincerely

Kerry Mowett

Response Sheet
For
Effective Learning and Teaching Practices

Meaningful Learning Do you as a teacher:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/> gather as much student information as Possible					
<input type="checkbox"/> find out what students already know and can do					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students actively construct understanding					
<input type="checkbox"/> provide varied learning experiences, strategies and resources to meet diverse needs					
<input type="checkbox"/> provide focused small group and 1:1 teaching with Students					
<input type="checkbox"/> connect new learning to students' lives					
<input type="checkbox"/> focus learning on important questions, concepts and processes					
<input type="checkbox"/> foster explicit connection-making between ideas and processes – across the curriculum and subject boundaries					
<input type="checkbox"/> make purposes and goals explicit					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students apply/transfer learnings to new Situations					
<input type="checkbox"/> engage students in authentic learning					
<input type="checkbox"/> focus on assessment as an integral part of learning, using a wide variety of formats					
Identify factors that have assisted <u>Meaningful Learning</u> in your classroom/school.					
Identify factors that have hindered <u>Meaningful Learning</u> in your classroom/school.					

Response Sheet
For
Effective Learning and Teaching Practices

Inquiry Do you as a teacher:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/> engage students in meaningful inquiry and research					
<input type="checkbox"/> use an inquiry framework for program planning Purposes					
<input type="checkbox"/> understand the links between inquiry and constructivist learning					
<input type="checkbox"/> explicitly teach investigative and research processes and skills					
<input type="checkbox"/> have students pose and explore questions – their own as well as those of others; philosophical as well as practical questions					
<input type="checkbox"/> use mistake-making and error as an important part of the learning process					
Identify factors that have assisted <u>Inquiry</u> in your classroom/school.					
Identify factors that have hindered <u>Inquiry</u> in your classroom/school.					

Communication Do you as a teacher:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/> regularly engage learners in meaningful dialogue with peers					
<input type="checkbox"/> model invitational language					
<input type="checkbox"/> teach non-verbal forms of communication					
<input type="checkbox"/> develop student skills with multimedia					
<input type="checkbox"/> teach students effective questioning skills					
<input type="checkbox"/> encourage written conversation					
<input type="checkbox"/> provide for multiple ways to represent thinking, ideas and information					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students use styles appropriate for different audiences, purposes and contexts					
Identify factors that have assisted <u>Communication</u> in your classroom/school.					
Identify factors that have hindered <u>Communication</u> in your classroom/school.					

Response Sheet
For
Effective Learning and Teaching Practices

Collaboration Do you as a teacher:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/> understand the power of student partnerships					
<input type="checkbox"/> make explicit the benefits of working together					
<input type="checkbox"/> match collaborative groupings (team size, membership and duration) to needs and purposes					
<input type="checkbox"/> use collaborative structures in a purposeful way					
<input type="checkbox"/> embed teamwork principles in collaborative work					
<input type="checkbox"/> explicitly develop a wide range of collaborative skills					
<input type="checkbox"/> actively foster perspective taking					
<input type="checkbox"/> involve the broader community beyond the Classroom					
Identify factors that have assisted <u>Collaboration</u> in your classroom/school. 					
Identify factors that have hindered <u>Collaboration</u> in your classroom/school. 					

Response Sheet For Effective Learning and Teaching Practices

Self-responsibility Do you as a teacher:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/> honour the intrinsic motivation of students					
<input type="checkbox"/> use language that actively encourages self-Responsibility					
<input type="checkbox"/> promote student self-understanding and metacognitive awareness					
<input type="checkbox"/> foster on-going reflection on learning					
<input type="checkbox"/> model and make explicit creative, critical and problem-solving skills and processes					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students select and use a wide range of learning – how – to learn and thinking tools, techniques and processes					
<input type="checkbox"/> invite student negotiation and choice in learning					
<input type="checkbox"/> teach students the task and organisational skills to learn to manage their own learning					
<input type="checkbox"/> actively involve students in self-assessment					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students learn to take responsibility for their behaviour by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Gospel, social-ethical values as the base to work from • Focusing on student construction of understanding • Teaching appropriate problem-solving strategies and skills, and constructive ways of resolving conflict 					
Identify factors that have assisted <u>Self-responsibility</u> in your classroom/school. 					
Identify factors that have hindered <u>Self-responsibility</u> in your classroom/school. 					

Response Sheet
For
Effective Learning and Teaching Practices

Human Development Do you as a teacher:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/> build unity and a sense of belonging in the classroom					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students to appreciate and value diversity					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students develop as principled, ethical human beings, displaying values such as respect, fairness, courtesy, responsibility and kindness					
<input type="checkbox"/> co-create with students class norms based on these values					
<input type="checkbox"/> develop in students effective habits of mind and qualities such as initiative, resilience, adaptability, imagination, persistence, confidence, courage and enterprise					
<input type="checkbox"/> integrate the spiritual with other aspects of learning					
<input type="checkbox"/> place a focus on creating the new (products, models, information) rather than simply reproducing what is known					
<input type="checkbox"/> help students to pro-actively vision and create preferred futures, in ways that have personal, school, community and global relevance					
<input type="checkbox"/> offer opportunities for students to work in the service of others – to show care and make a contribution within and beyond the school					
Identify factors that have assisted <u>Human Development</u> in your classroom/school. 					
Identify factors that have hindered <u>Human Development</u> in your classroom / school. 					

Response Sheet for Effective Learning and Teaching Practices

Learning Community Institute provided a professional development springboard for teachers to engage in the Learning Community Journey. Reflect on your <i>Institute</i> experiences and comment on the effectiveness of the following:		Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Planning	1 Is founded on teacher needs.					
	2 Is relevant to teachers' interests and experience.					
	3 Provides enough flexibility to accommodate the needs of individual teachers.					
	4 Clearly defines goals, process and outcomes.					
	5 Involves committed participants.					
	6 Offers equal access to all teachers regardless of their geographical location or type of school.					
	7 Brings together teams of classroom teachers.					
	8 Requires preparation by participants.					
	9 Addresses various levels of need (e.g. teacher, school, system).					
Facilitation	1 Involves leaders with expert knowledge and practical know-how.					
	2 Locates activities in pleasant and comfortable surroundings.					
	3 Involves teachers drawn from both similar and diverse professional settings.					
	4 Provides high-quality 'user friendly' materials and resources.					
	5 Has the support of the school executive.					
Implementation	1 Demonstrates a clear relationship between theory, research and practice.					
	2 Provides opportunities for active engagement.					
	3 Contains both structured and unstructured times, with participants able to reflect upon implications for their professional practice.					
	4 Makes optimal use of time available.					
	5 Involves modelling of exemplary practice.					
	6 Sequences and spaces activities over time.					
	7 Builds knowledge and knowledge through action research.					
	8 Balances of curriculum and pedagogical issues.					
	9 Uses a variety of presentation styles.					
Application	1 Involves planned follow-up.					
	2 Creates a feeling of excitement, empowerment and ownership.					
	3 Translates into practice knowledge and skills gained in professional development.					
	4 Demonstrates accountability for student outcomes.					
	5 Supports teachers' accountability for student outcomes.					
	6 Rewards participation and achievements through academic credit, employer recognition, career advancement opportunities, or remuneration for time spent.					
	7 Encourages transferability of learning across school sectors and subjects.					

Identify “Institute” factors that have assisted your Learning Community journey.

Identify “Institute” factors that have hindered your Learning Community journey.

Any other comments.

Thank you for your valued assistance.

Kerry Mowett

School Location:

☐ Isolated Community ☐ Rural Town ☐ Rural City

Appendix 4.2

Notes for Address at the Annual CSO Wagga Wagga Principal's Conference regarding the purpose and nature of the Research

Currently involved in Doctoral Study with the ACU.

Research is focusing on documenting the Learning Community journey

- especially the role of the Institute
- and the identification of the principles & practices outlined in the document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*' (TCTA).

The research will attempt to establish to what extent the explicit learning and teaching strategies are being implemented in the Primary system of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga. The research will establish the significance of the Institute as a model of effective professional development and educational change.

To collect relevant data a series of interactive methods will be used including:

Survey

Interview

Focus group discussion

Now that final approval has been received from the ACU Ethics committee, and with your permission and assistance, I will send to each primary school teacher a survey that asks them to rank how the indicators listed in TCTA, of effective learning and

teaching, are being implemented in their classrooms. The survey will also ask teachers to reflect on their “Institute” experience.

The survey is anonymous and confidential. Individuals or schools will not be identified in any way in the final report.

The survey will also ask teachers to identify those factors at school level that assisted or hindered the implementation of TCTA principles.

From this research some recommendations may be identified for our schools, professional learning and development and other diocese or systems considering changes to their learning and teaching culture, practices and policy.

I would appreciate your support and positive encouragement of your teaching staff to complete and return the survey.

Appendix 4.3

School Newsletter Pro-forma

Learning and Teaching Review

Mr Kerry Mowett from the Catholic Schools Office will be conducting a discussion group at this school to assist in Australian Catholic University doctoral research.

The focus of the discussion will be on learning and teaching. Students and parents nominated for the discussion group will each receive a letter inviting your participation, and outlining the process. He looks forward to your co-operation and support.

Appendix 4.4

Letter to Principals

[date]

Dear [name],

Enclosed please find copies of the '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*' Learning and Teaching Practices Survey.

This data collection process is part of my Doctor of Education research work at the Australian Catholic University. I would appreciate your assistance in distributing and collecting the survey sheets among your teachers.

Some schools have indicated that 15 minutes at the end of their next staff meeting will be set aside for staff to complete the survey.

Please be assured that the individual survey is totally confidential. Teachers or schools will not be identified in any way. Your school name on the back of the envelope is simply a way of recording who has sent in their returns.

Teachers may write additional comments about TCTA if they so wish and attach to the completed survey.

Enclosed is a stamped envelope, please send all returns back **before [date]**.

Thank you for your co-operation and support.

Kerry Mowett

Appendix 4.5

Individual Interview Questions

1. You experienced a Learning Community Institute a few years ago. I wonder if you could recall how you were feeling at the end of the Institute – what was going through your mind?
2. What changes have there been for you, and your practices as a result of the Institute? What purpose did the Learning Community Institute serve?
3. You have been down the track of building your class/school as a learning community for a number of years now. Can you reflect back and tell us about the journey you have taken – some of the steps along the road?
4. Your journey to becoming a learning community has had successes along the way. Would you mind reflecting on the successes in your classroom/school?
5. What are the greatest rewards for your learning community journey?
6. You have made some significant progress. Along the way there are obviously things that have challenged you. What do you see as some of the more prominent challenges that you have had to face and how have you dealt with those?
7. We live in a real world and staff have a diversity of views. Part of that diversity may be some blocking behaviours. Can you talk about how you dealt with this blocking?
8. What has been the hardest thing for you to undertake during your learning community journey?
9. Are there any specific strategies that you have used that engage and share vision with your school community?
10. What advice or tips would you give others about influencing other staff on the next stage of the journey?
11. What do you still need to do?
12. What has been the impact of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga document '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*' on learning and teaching?
13. '*Today's Children, Tomorrow's Adults*' document provides a basis for identifying effective learning and teaching practices in the classroom. Could you comment on your understanding of how widespread these practices are applied in your classroom and in the classrooms within your school (or Diocese)?

Appendix 4.6

Group Interview Questions

1. Teachers attempt to use a variety of learning and teaching strategies to help students develop skills, knowledge and understandings. What have been some useful strategies used by your teachers that have helped you learn?
2. Are there processes used by teachers that you find unhelpful for your learning?
3. What would you like to experience more of in your classroom?
4. If you could change anything in your school or classroom that would help students with their learning, what would they be?
5. Parent: Have you noticed any particular event where your child has spoken about classroom learning and/or teaching?
6. Parent: What type of homework activities best help your child to engage with learning?

Appendix 4.7



Information for Participants

Dear Participant,

Currently I am participating in a Doctor of Education Research Project with the Australian Catholic University.

With the broad research theme of “The impact of the Learning Community Institute on Learning and Teaching”, an attempt will be made to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the ‘*Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults*’ framework document on the primary school communities of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga.

Interviews, surveys and group discussions will be used to collect relevant data.

I seek your participation in an interview/focus group to talk about your experiences and views regarding your Learning Community journey.

If you decide to participate in this study and investigation, I will ask you a number of questions about your Institute experience and ‘*Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Adults*’ document. Your responses will be treated confidentially and you or your school community will not be identified in any way in the final report.

You will determine the length of the interview/focus group through the level of details in your response. However, it should not take more than 30 minutes. Notes will be taken of your responses only. You are entitled to stop the interview/focus group at any time if you choose to do so. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the study and investigation at any time without giving a reason.

Your involvement is appreciated and you are most welcome to ask any questions regarding the objectives of the study and investigation or any of its components. Any questions you may have regarding the study and investigation can be directed to the researcher:

Mr Kerry Mowett
McAlroy House
Tarcutta Street
Wagga Wagga
NSW 2650

Tel: (Work) 02 6921 1200 (Mobile) 0428 257 550

The Human Ethics Research Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this research. In the event that you are not happy with the manner in which you have been treated during the process, or if you have a query that the researcher has not been able to answer, you may write care of:

Chair, HREC
c/o Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Locked Bag 2002
Strathfield NSW 2135
Tel. 02 9701 4159
Fax: 02 9701 4350

Your concerns and queries will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

You are requested to sign two copies of the consent form accompanying this letter to show your agreement to participate in the study and investigation. Keep one copy for your records and return the other copy to the researcher who is conducting the interview with you.

Thank you for the time, your interest and participation in this study and investigation.

Yours sincerely

Kerry Mowett
Researcher

Participant Consent Form

STUDY AND INVESTIGATION OF THE DIOCESE OF WAGGA WAGGA LEARNING COMMUNITY JOURNEY

I, _____ have read (or listened to) and understand the information provided in the Letter to Participants and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way. I agree to the activity being taped if the researcher sees this as appropriate.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: _____
(block letters)

SIGNATURE: _____ Date: _____
NAME OF RESEARCHER CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW:

KERRY MOWETT

SIGNATURE: _____ Date: _____

Note: Two copies of this consent form are required: one copy for you to sign and keep for your records and one copy for you to sign and return to the researcher conducting your interview.

Appendix 4.9



PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: REVITALISING LEARNING AND TEACHING

NAMES OF STAFF INVESTIGATORS or SUPERVISORS: DR. JIM WOOLFORD

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER : KERRY MOWETT

I (*the parent/guardian*) have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my *child, nominated below*, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree *that research data* collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way. I agree to allow my child to be audio-taped if the researcher sees this as appropriate.

NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:
(block letters)

SIGNATURE DATE.....

NAME OF CHILD
(block letters)

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER:..... DATE:.....

Note: Two copies of this consent form are required: one copy for you to sign and keep for your records and one copy for you to sign and return to the researcher conducting your interview.

Appendix 5

Approval

5.1 ACU Ethics Committee Approval

5.2 CSO Wagga Wagga Approval

Appendix 5.1

Australian Catholic University
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Jim Woolford Sydney Campus

Co-Investigators: A/Prof Charles Burford Sydney Campus

Student Researcher: Mr Kerry Mowett Sydney Campus

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

Evaluation of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga learning community journey.

for the period: September 2004 to March 2005.

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: N2004.05-5


The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
 - security of records
 - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
 - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
 - proposed changes to the protocol
 - unforeseen circumstances or events
 - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed:  Date: 18/8/2004
(Research Services Officer, Strathfield Campus)

Appendix 5.2



Diocese of Wagga Wagga
Catholic Schools Office



A.B.N. 36 345 537 994

P.O. Box 1012 (205 Tarcutta St.) 2650 ♦ Telephone: (02) 6921 1200 ♦ Fax: (02) 6921 2986 ♦ E-mail: office@csowagga.catholic.edu.au

18 October 2002

Mr Kerry Mowett
Principal
St Michael's Regional High School
Church Street
WAGGA WAGGA NSW 2650

Dear Kerry

Your continued commitment to your Doctor of Education is commendable and one that is encouraged.

In principle you are permitted to conduct research in our Diocese. However, there is an expectation of confidentiality in data collection and reporting processes and in the methodology of conducting the focus groups, interviews and survey which meet the University's and the Catholic Schools Office ethics guidelines.

Information regarding the methodology needs to be forwarded to me (via Judith Norris) before any research is carried out, thus informing us of the time, tasks etc required by participants.

As has been assured by you, any published material will not identify individuals or individual school communities. Furthermore, any anticipated material that is to be published will be forwarded to me.

Kerry, I wish you well through this part of your Doctorate.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'S. Marchant'.

Stephen Marchant
Director of Schools

Committed to being a Community of Faith, learning, Care and Service