

Sabbatical Report – Term 4 2008 with research base through to Term 4 2009

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Focus:

To consider/investigate/research best practice of Networked Learning Communities with the goal of applying best practice to the Otumoetai Learning Community.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the Ministry of Education for selecting me for this sabbatical . The Otumoetai Primary School Board of Trustees is also thanked for granting me leave to pursue this professional development. To my two DPs, many thanks for more than “keeping the ship afloat”. To my colleagues and their staff for willingly completing research questionnaires and to my colleagues in the Bradley-Stoke area of Bristol, UK for allowing me free range within their schools..

Preamble

The Otumoetai Schools Learning Community, comprising one secondary school, an intermediate and six contributing primary schools with some 5000 students engaged in a four year Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHSAS) initiative.

Changes in government and educational priorities saw funding for the 4 year project cut midway through the third year. This naturally impacted on “final outcomes” and as such the following discourse acknowledges the impact of this.

Key to success of the EHSAS initiative of necessity, demanded a very high level of collaboration across and between the schools.

“The next phase of educational reform will need new methods of delivery excellence and equity in a system which responds to the diverse needs of individual learners and gives schools autonomy to create local solutions. Teachers and schools will need to work together – and networks are a powerful organizational form. School-to-school networks which are focused on learning offer a foundation for genuine transformation based on knowledge embedded in teaching practice.” DfES. 2004. (Department for Education and Skills. UK).

Research findings from the National College for School Leadership 2004 (NCSL) Nottingham show that schools involved in networks have seen that networks:

- Broaden the teacher expertise and learning opportunities available to students
- Provide a direct mechanism for sharing expert teacher practice
- Provide diversity, flexibility and range of opportunities that no single school can offer
- nurture creativity, role-taking and innovation to improve learning and teaching
- lead to improvement in student attainment
- lead to improved teaching

A core principle of the Networked Learning Communities programme, as developed by NCSL between 2002 and 2006 has been the importance and centrality of a clear focus on student learning. This has been shown to provide the impetus for wide participation and drives the active learning. Providing for student needs on a wider stage than one school provides the unifying moral purpose that underpins successful learning networks. The NCSL experience has shown that all networks need to plan to ensure that they are clear about the systems, roles and responsibilities which will enable them to develop and flourish.

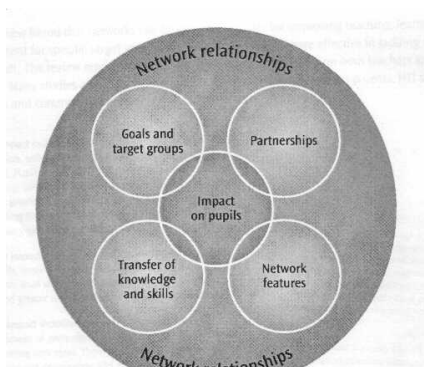
Sabbatical Purpose

To consider/investigate/research best practice of Networked Learning Communities under five key themes with the goal of applying best practice to the Otumoetai Learning Community.

Themes

1. Impact: *Pupil impact* to consider improved attainment, engagement, motivation, self-confidence and increased independence as learners.

Teacher impact to consider gains in knowledge, understandings and skills, extending inclusiveness of practice, new communication and networking skills and greater understanding of the learning process.



School impact to include increased community liaison, development of professional learning community and skill in importing new ideas.

Other impacts considering parental involvement in goal-setting, assessment and support and parental mentoring programmes.

2. Transfer of Knowledge and Skills:

Peer-to-peer collaboration to support the transfer of knowledge and practice

“Expert” input in a facilitation role – “experts” being teachers as mentors, specialists in literacy, Waikato University specialization in leadership

Communication by “face-to-face”, ICT or print based – degrees of effectiveness (Research indicates “face-to-face” as most effective. NCSL 2004) - collaborative on-site planning, coaching and mentoring

Use of conferences, formal and informal meetings as “training” events as means for colleagues to describe and use new knowledge. The role of CPD.

3. Goals and Target Groups:

NCSL research indicates that effective networks had highly specific goals and that through this a greater sense of inclusiveness and empowerment was evident. Collaboration is seen as reducing isolation and a shared moral purpose helps to build a sense of ownership.

4. Partners:

The role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI), in this instance Waikato University, in the inter-school partnership. The role of parents in partnership; NCSL research shows increased parent and community involvement in successful Networked Learning Communities (NLC)

5. Network Features:

NCSL research has shown that structural features and processes have been important in successful NLCs. Three factors to be considered in this are size, scale and geographical spread, duration/longevity/sustainability of network, and the notion of specific focus/clearly defined aims.

One further ‘theme’ to be considered is that of **sustainability** – how an effective Learning Network might become self-sustaining.

Perceived Benefits

- This professional learning experience will further build on professional development in leadership
- *“School-to-school networks which are focused on learning offer a foundation for genuine transformation based on knowledge embedded in teaching practice.”* (DfES) The Otumoetai Learning Community will benefit from first hand experience of successful networked learning community practice
- From the preamble the following enhancements within Otumoetai Primary School and the Otumoetai Learning Community could be expected to evolve
 - broadening of teacher expertise and learning opportunities available to students
 - provision for a direct mechanism for sharing expert teacher practice
 - provision for diversity, flexibility and range of opportunities that no single school can offer
 - nurturing of creativity, role-taking and innovation to improve learning and teaching
 - improvement in student attainment
 - improved teaching
- The development of seamless transitions between primary, intermediate and secondary for students and parents given common practice and expectations between schools
- A direct link to the Ministry goals of extending high standards across schools by both formal and informal links between principal colleagues and teachers within and across schools.
- This professional development and the focus of the sabbatical factored into the school’s annual plan in literacy development building on the existing work being done as a part of Ministry contracts in Literacy and ICT that the school is currently working on.

Why Learning Networks?

The old adage of "two heads are better than one" speaks to the value of cooperation and collaboration for the common good. Research is showing that schools face many challenges in transforming the quality of student learning experiences and thus of raising student achievement levels. Going it alone is not a sensible option. There are sufficient

pragmatic reasons for cooperation - *"The next phase of educational reform will need new methods of delivery excellence and equity in a system which responds to the diverse needs of individual learners"* DfES. 2004. There is a real need to be innovative to create the new knowledge - sometimes to recreate the lost knowledge from ill-considered educational reforms - and practices needed. Having access to a great diversity of minds available through "a cooperation of schools" creates opportunities for the airing and dissemination of new ideas. A network of schools can provide a diverse forum of rich experience where a wide range of ideas can be created, debated and challenged. It has been said that teaching is what teachers do. Again, if we always do what we have already done we will always get what we have already got. Simply, what we have already got is insufficient to meet the needs of today's learners. Without the opportunity to pragmatically debate and challenge, to seriously consider our teaching practices, which learning networks can facilitate, the chances of transforming outcomes for our students is heavily negated. This really means that collaboration across, within and between schools is a necessity rather than an optional extra.

Characteristics of Successful Networked Learning Communities

Successful NLCs have an overarching moral purpose in that the schools involved believe they can achieve more for students if they work together. As well as having this core belief the successful NLC will also have a specific unifying focus. This focus will respond to the needs of the network and be something that all participants - teachers, students, parents - can understand. Through the focus the NLC will add value to students' learning, and teacher learning, in ways that would not have been possible if a school were working alone. (NCSL, 2005, Developing a network learning focus. In "What are we learning about?" Establishing a network of schools, Nottingham, NCSL)

Key idea: data - the network learning focus must be based around evidence from research and practice and make it easily understandable.

There appears no particular blueprint for a successful NLC except that its structure needs to make sense to the schools involved and the needs of their students. The structure however will most likely evolve from the initial purpose for the NLC. The structure can then be shaped to enable the purpose to be achieved by the network participants. The successful NLC is most often the result of an identified local need, or challenge that encourages schools to work together for the benefit of the students of the area.

Flexibility of thought and direction is important given that over time as a successful network develops, its needs and priorities will also develop and change. It is seen as crucial that members take on board that the focus is relevant to current challenges and that reviewing the focus can inject fresh life. The role of principals and lead teachers at this point is important and they may find that they are no longer the sole decision makers. The principles behind identifying the adapted or changing focus will still rely on the review of appropriate data.

Teacher "buy in" is essential for effective outworking of a NLC. Only when teachers know about, understand and believe in the focus of the NLC will they get involved. Ensuring that these key people - teachers, leaders, support staff - understand what the NLC is trying to achieve, getting them involved in interesting work together, and acting as advocates for others is essential to the successful network's development. The key people require dedicated time to work together on shared activities, including accessing research, school visits and sharing outcomes. This needs to happen at a network level and making time for such inquiry groups to meet will not work if only five of the eight schools agree. The re-ordering or orientation of resource around key network activities has to be accepted as a priority for all stakeholders.

If teachers are a key resource so also can be external funding. However helpful and necessary this funding is the key is to find ways to align existing funding streams to support the network. This may necessitate pooling individual school resources for certain services or provision across all schools in the network. Critically, all members of the network need to invest commitment - time and money included - if the NLC is to survive long-term.

Key idea: an effective NLC will need to align time, financial and people resources across their network in order to do the work on behalf of the whole

A critical friend from outside of the network can provide a very useful and independent reference point for network direction and working. Certainly in the area of research and enquiry, evaluation, customized professional development and mentoring this can prove invaluable. The critical friend can also provide advice and support to network leaders, provide challenge and help avoid "group think", bring discipline to research or enquiry projects and help access new ideas and knowledge beyond the network. (NCSL, 2006, "What does a critical friend do?" In Network leadership in action: Network Leadership Roles, Nottingham, NCSL)

Regular contact with other NLCs by way of conference and workshop, with local agencies like health, social services, and local authorities can often provide access to specialized expertise and build partnerships with other local agencies.

Key idea: A trusted but challenging critical friend to work with the network will ask, "Have you considered ... ? How about ... ?"

A key activity of an effective NLC is that it creates and provides for challenging teacher learning to take place through sustained combined work and collaborative enquiry. This crosses the boundaries within and between schools and allows for teachers and other school staff to learn together, to innovate and to enquire into practice. The most effective activities are structured interactions between staff from the participating schools that centre on the NLC focus. All learning that takes place needs to be "on behalf" of all the schools involved. That is when one group of teachers is developing new skills or knowledge, that these outcomes are shared across the schools for the mutual benefit of both teachers and students. It is acknowledged that gathering people from multiple schools can provide challenges but the NLC's success relies on this happening. By ensuring ground rules are established for roles and responsibilities the facilitator will be able to maximize the impact of combined work and collaborative enquiry.

Research has shown that that there is a direct relationship between the active involvement of school principals in network activities and student gains; that principals and other formal leaders such as Lead Teachers need to model collaborative learning by visiting other schools, undertaking shared professional development or establishing their own joint work groups.

Key idea: Best NLC activities are those that include rigorous and challenging collaborative work and enquiry and that clear protocols and purpose are evident in these activities between adults in the network.

Effective NLCs involve and impact on both adults (teachers, support workers etc) and students. The work that the adults engage in always directly relates to, and affects, students. However recognition is also given to the fact that it is hard to achieve significant change unless the students are active members of the network. An effective NLC will consider the following four key dimensions:

- Student involvement in school development
- Students as researchers
- Student feedback on teaching and learning

- Students as peer tutors.

While both teachers and students are key learners in a NLC it most likely exists ultimately for the welfare of the students and as such their views on the effectiveness of learning activities are usually well-informed.

Key idea: Work on creating a network culture that emphasises partnership with students about what really matters - their learning.

A further key feature of a successful NLC is effective facilitation. The facilitator possesses skills in group dynamics, learning processes and can access sources of expertise and knowledge. Such a facilitator ensures that as many people as possible are involved in the activities of the NLC as this makes it easier for the various groups of people to work and learn together. Along with providing support and challenge the facilitator also encourages learning to be shared. Facilitation represents a set of skills that will come from a range of people both inside, and outside of, the NLC. It should not be seen as a "sole charge" position. Facilitation is central to the work of the principals, lead teachers and those leading enquiry groups and includes developing the network, collaborative learning processes and enquiry, and NLC data and knowledge creation and communication.

Key idea: As facilitation is a key leadership role it should be undertaken by a wide range of individuals in the NLC - this supports and enables the growth of facilitation skills.

Further to the above, sharing leadership beyond those in the formal leadership roles builds leadership capacity and can be a strategy for growing future leaders. The range of initiatives across varying levels of schools can provide all staff and students with opportunities to develop leadership skills as leaders of teams focused on identified network activities. The effective network can only function with the input of many so the notion of distributed leadership takes on special meaning. The provision of time and space for others to lead becomes the challenge school leaders need to pick up on, both individually and as a network.

Key idea: It takes many to ensure a NLC functions effectively. Recognition needs to be given to the value distributed leadership.

An effective NLC ensures that teacher learning really impacts student learning. This, after all, is most often the key purpose in the creation of a NLC. For this to happen active coordination is needed within, and between schools for shared professional development, enquiry groups and inter-school visits. This allows participating staff access to a broader

range of views and starting points than if they were working solely within their own school. Consideration by the NLC leaders would be given to ensuring that teacher learning activities are rigorous, challenging and appropriate to the identified needs, activities are properly resourced both in terms of personnel and physical resource, and that inside and outside expertise is used to observe, challenge, collate, utilise, and feedback on the impact of such learning. Again, effective an NLC will look beyond its own resources for new knowledge and understandings and use this to better inform and improve teaching practice. Collaborative enquiry into teaching practice which may involve delving into current research and theory and the analysis of this may best be supported by a critical friend/partnership with the appropriate research/tertiary background. The enquiry based practice will always be driven by current data and evidence from within and across the schools of the network.

Key idea: The learning development undertaken by teachers needs to relate directly to improving outcomes for students.



The schools of the Otumoetai Learning Community made a successful application to the Ministry of Education for funding under the Extending High Standards across Schools initiative in 2007.

The scope of the project was as follows:

- (a) The proposal as approved by the Ministry of Education sets the goals as:
- Raising student achievement in reading across the whole learning community and as evidence is generated showing increasing student performance to include performance in writing.
 - Developing social capital amongst all professional participants of the learning community simultaneously with intellectual capital to move beyond a plateau in individual school and learning community improvement by shared enthusiasm and commitment.
 - Maintaining and increasing levels of collaboration between and within schools, their families/whanau and the wider community.
 - Developing further "Te Honohonotanga" the partnership between the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools and Ngati Ranginui Iwi to raise the reading performance of all Maori students at every level in participating

schools.

(b) These translated into the following aims and objectives of the project:

- Establishing baseline data on the competency levels of all students in the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools in reading and writing.
- Monitoring progress of these students in reading and writing at the end of Year 1 and at Years 4, 6, 8 and 10 during the period of the project.
- Establishing baseline data on existing 'social capital' within the Otumoetai Learning Community
- Fostering co-operation between the staff of the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools in the improvement of reading and writing ability of their students.
- Fostering co-operation between the staff and students of the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools and their families/whanau and the broader community.
- Furthering the partnership between the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools and the Ngati Ranginui Iwi in the promoting of reading and writing
- Monitoring progress in the growth of such 'social capital'.
- Identifying and disseminating good practice strategies in the teaching of reading and writing within the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools.
- Producing profiles that clearly identify the 'Otumoetai Student as a Reader'.

(c) Identifiable outcomes of the project:

- Statistical data on the reading ability of the students within the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools and a comparison of these against national norms at Years 1, 4, 6,8 and 10.
- The identification and sharing of good practice activities within the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools.
- The accumulation of data on the growth of social capital within the Otumoetai

Learning Community Schools through the use of surveys and any other appropriate means.

- The production of shared strategies for the teaching of reading across the Otumoetai Learning Community Schools.
- The production and dissemination of progress reports on the project at the end of each school term.
- The establishment of a formal arrangement between the Cluster Learning Community.
- The production of profiles of the ' Otumoetai Student as a Reader'

In summary then, the prime focus of the project was on 'social capital' or more accurately on improving the level of collaboration and relationships within and across schools. Over the four years it was hoped that a high level of co-operation and trust would be developed. Of particular importance would be the primary schools and their ability to develop across-schools co-operation. This was seen as the greatest challenge.

The EHSAS project was an umbrella project which was significantly different from other projects being considerably bigger in scale and seen to be more significant.

It would be imperative to achieve a high level of 'buy-in' and 100% commitment for this project to succeed. The role of the Lead Teachers was seen as vital.

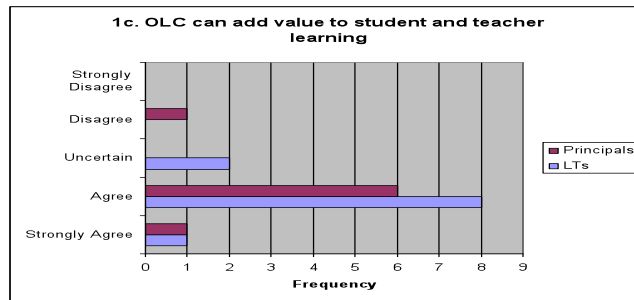
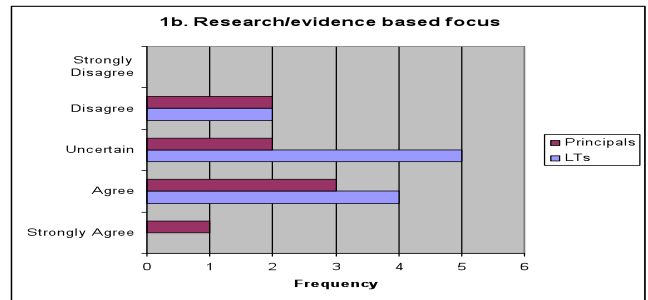
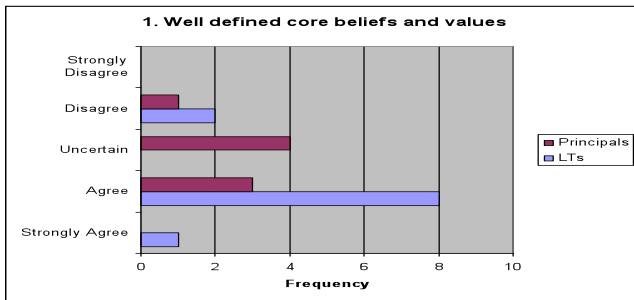
Reading was chosen as a focus because of its centrality and ease of measurement but was really a means to the greater end of in-school and inter-school co-operation; the measurable goal being to achieve a level where 95% of students were reading at or above their chronological age.

The project sought to measure reading ability of all the children and of social capital within and across schools.

Initial Stock-take of NLC Characteristics within the Otumoetai Learning Community

Survey results of our stocktake to establish a “where we are” picture of our Otumoetai learning Community as measured against the characteristics of successful learning networks. A key assumption is the goal of 95% of our students reading at, or above, their chronological ages is the context by which we are attempting to establish a viable, flexible and dynamic learning community among our Otumoetai schools.

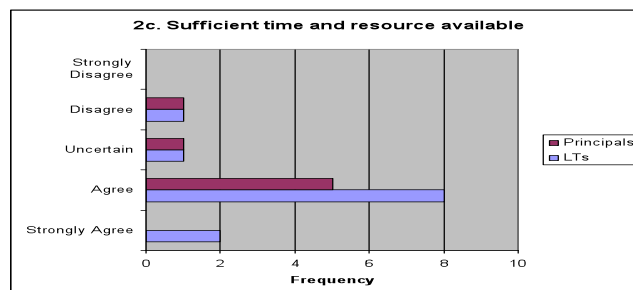
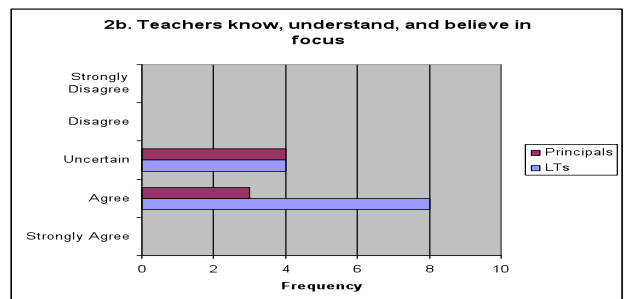
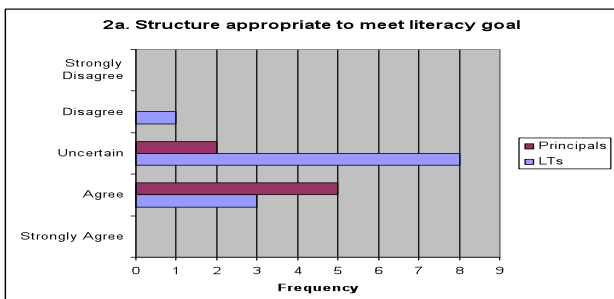
1. Core beliefs and values



Comment:

- Needs to be a part of a school culture before it can flow into a network
- Core beliefs are not sufficiently worked through/developed
- Each school has its own beliefs and focus and we haven't discussed these as a cluster

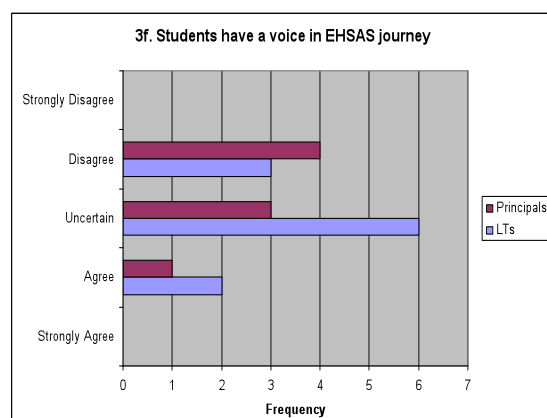
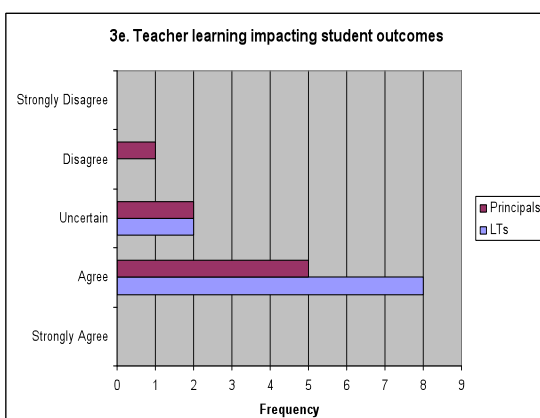
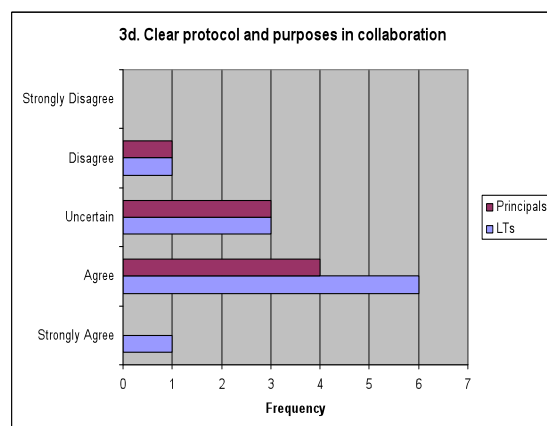
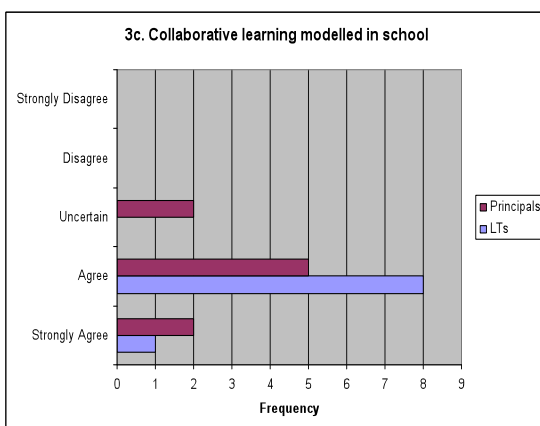
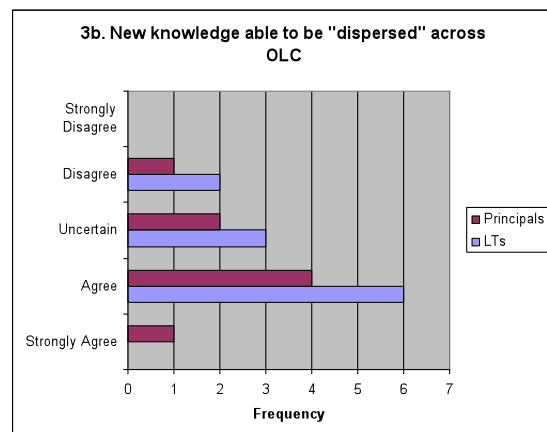
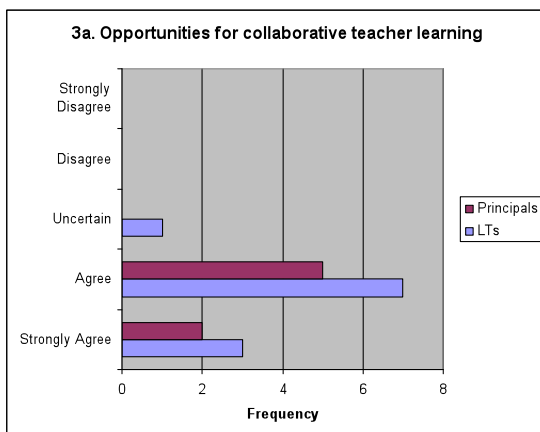
2. Structure of our EHSAS-based Learning Network



Comment:

- *The present structure is allowing relationships to build between the schools and in time will cross over to meeting the key literacy goal*
- *Teachers are becoming more aware of the focus and extending their belief beyond literacy to building a learning community*
- *Really cannot think of a better structure – doubt really that staff** staff would be conversant with EHSAS aims*
- *Slow start but feel most staff are hooked in now*
- *LTs have designed a plan with specific phases to set direction*
- *Some teachers have not understood that the reading is the vehicle for developing a “learning community” and social capital*

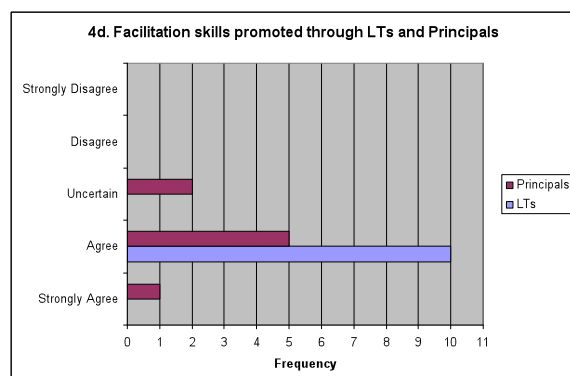
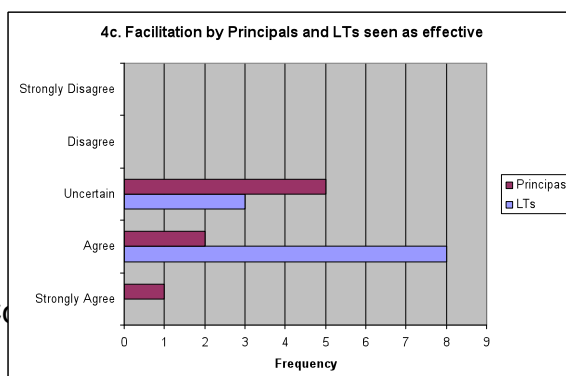
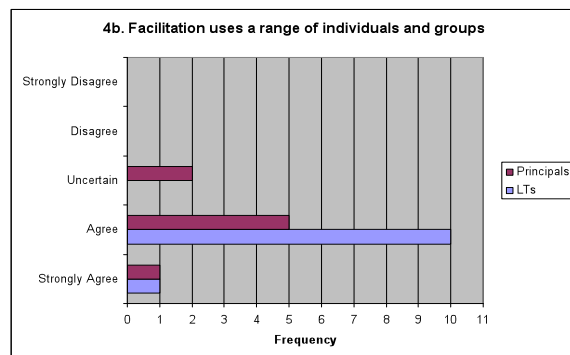
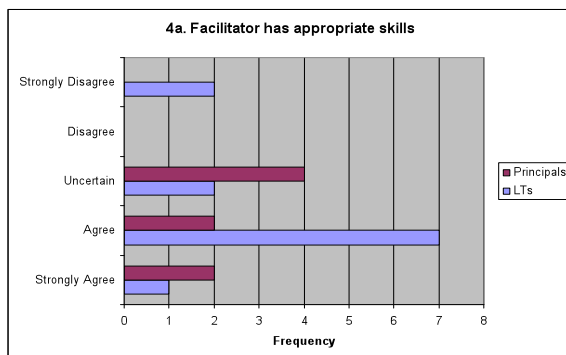
3. Teacher Learning



Comment:

- *There is the opportunity to allow students to have a voice in the EHSAS journey but I don't think all schools have used student voice – we haven't as yet*
- *Processes are developing for opportunities for individual teachers to disperse knowledge of reading across the cluster. No student voice*
- *Protocol and purpose evident in our school/teacher learning impacting student learning but not as a result of EHSAS*
- *Student voice was built in at the beginning of the contract*
- *Collaborative learning is growing slowly within my school environment*
- *Collaborative learning needs to be further developed*
- *At **school student voice is becoming more and more important. Very uncertain about protocols across cluster*
- *Collaborative learning is becoming more and more significant*
- *The collaborative learning is more within teams than across the school*
- *Constant feedback to students about their learning encouraged*
- *Staff have opportunities to learn off each other – observations of reading lessons etc*
- *Staff have been very positive about recent text and data workshops*
- *Too early to know if teacher learning is impacting student outcomes*

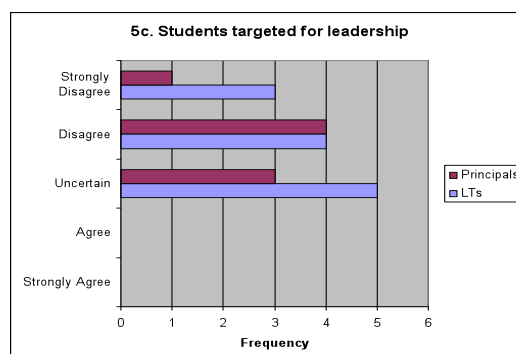
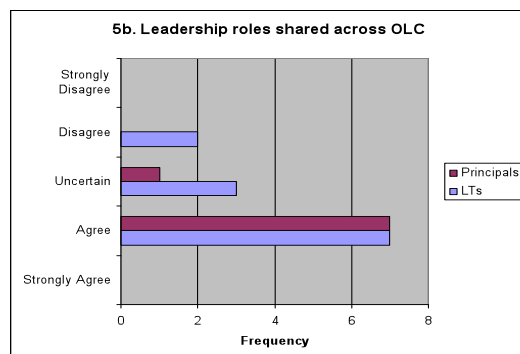
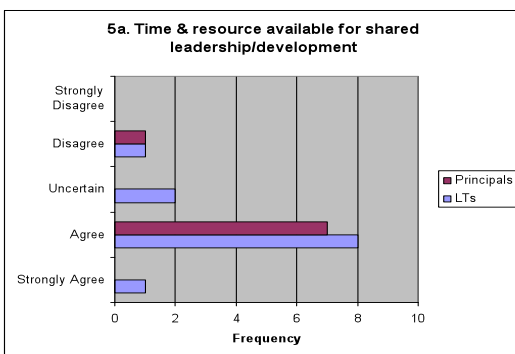
4. Facilitation



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- *It's a bit early to see real results yet as the sharing really only got underway successfully in the second half of last year and is continuing this year*
- *Facilitation by LTs only started this year. Outcomes yet to be seen*
- *Results of facilitation will be seen more clearly as the year goes on as LTs have only just started to lead sessions – early days*
- *A range of individuals within the LT group are given opportunities to facilitate sessions. The facilitator is seen as a “minutes man” rather than a leader of education around reading*
- *Feedback from sessions led by LT has been positive. Not sure whether it is seen as effective though*
- *Who is the facilitator? We need a more competent, informed facilitator*
- *Facilitation needs to have more teacher input*
- *Facilitation by Principals and LTs is seen to be happening but uncertain as to the effectiveness*
- *TD was seen by most as “the expert” and would guide the learning process and professional learning. It is now the LTs leading the learning/development*
- *Others have opportunities to lead and facilitate at their school when hosting teachers*
- *The LTs are doing a fantastic job*
- *Staff have expressed their lack of confidence in the facilitator’s knowledge of teaching and learning knowledge and skills in literacy*

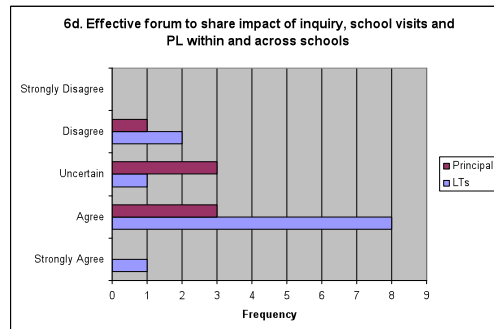
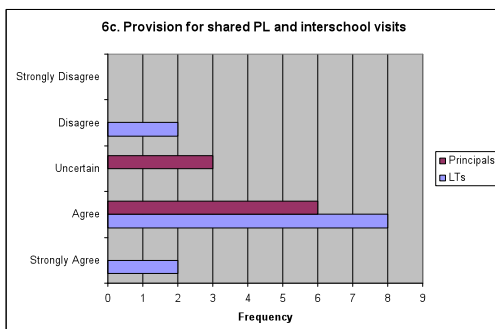
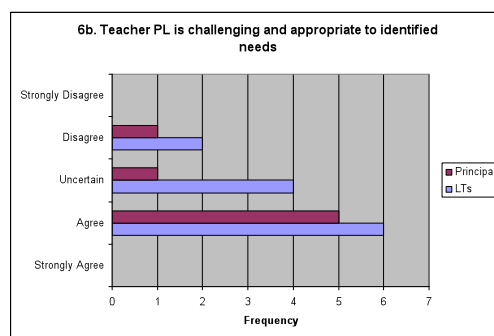
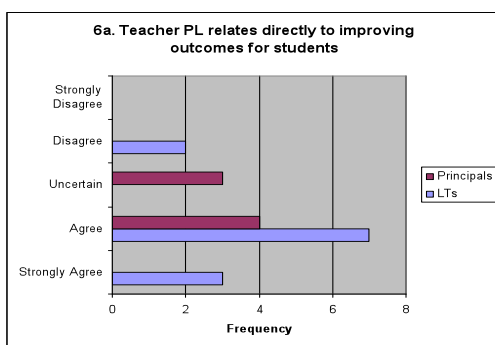
5. Distributed Leadership



Comment:

- *Leadership/facilitating by an “expert” in the field would have created more powerful “buying in” from LTs and other teachers on school staff*
- *Leadership roles are shared. Each age group has a LT responsible for their PD*
- *Many LTs are classroom teachers and this can make EHSAS an add-on to regular C/R work*
- *Student voice very important at senior levels*
- *Students in our school are yet to lead their learning, however they do set goals*
- *Great potential here*

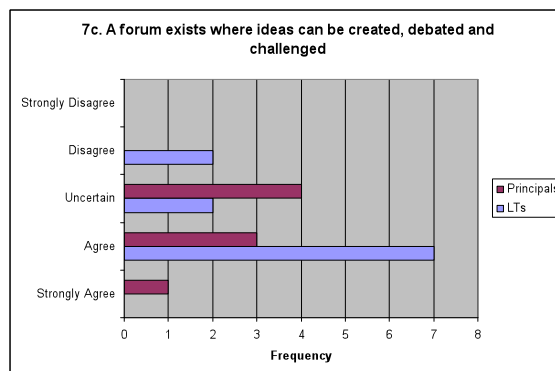
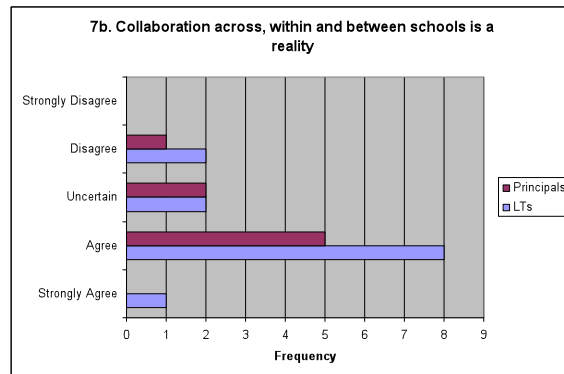
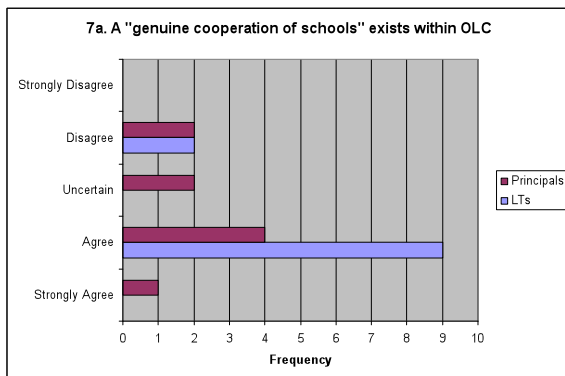
6. Focus



Comment:

- *Facilitation by “expert” in reading – teaching of strategies, comprehension skills etc – would have allowed for greater credibility on the part of the facilitator*
- *Mostly relationship building*
- *At the moment – actual learning activities year group banded – not due to identified needs*
- *Little learning development has happened yet Teacher needs are being identified and implementation of programmes specific to their needs is being undertaken now. Not present at start of contract. Interschool visits just beginning to happen.*
- *Work still to do with interschool visits*

7. Reality Check



Comment:

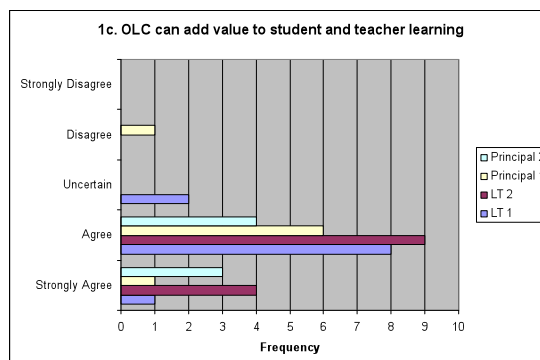
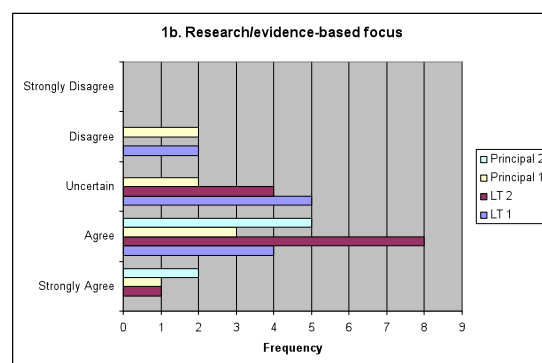
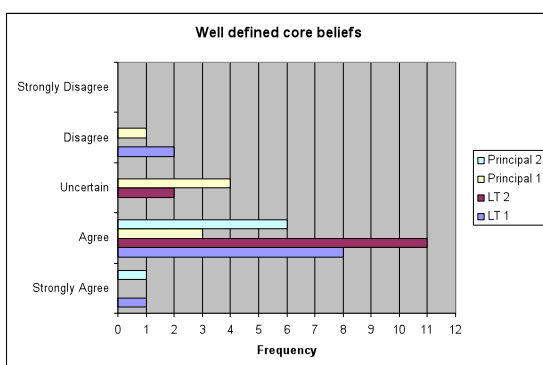
- *Opportunities to “talk reading” with teachers from other schools is healthy and welcomed by most involved*
- *Relationship and trust strong between schools and staff members between schools*
- *The future looks exciting – although it has taken a long time to get to this stage – preplanning would help*
- *The debating and challenging is just beginning at teacher and LT level*
- *Beginnings – the culture for the desired levels of collaboration and trust need to exist within individual schools before it can be across schools and needs to be viewed as “big picture” before it can become a reality. The initiative may be too early with not enough buy-in by schools. Working flat out to get it embedded in our culture and also develop teacher understanding around “reflection” is a key.*
- *Negative impacts exist where teachers have an expectancy that any component of EHSAS will be done in paid release time. “If we were rowing the same waka to the same island this would not be so evident.”*
- *Degree of collaboration depends on the identified level – still work to be done*
- *Only to some degree – genuine?*

- *I feel that schools are now on board with this initiative*
- *It will be very interesting to see what the rest of the cluster believes is happening in this initiative*
- *We're getting close – but not there yet.*

Second Stock-take of NLC Characteristics within Otumoetai Learning Community

The second stock-take posed the same scenarios as the first some 10 months later. The graphs display comparison between the first and second stock-takes.

1. Core beliefs and values

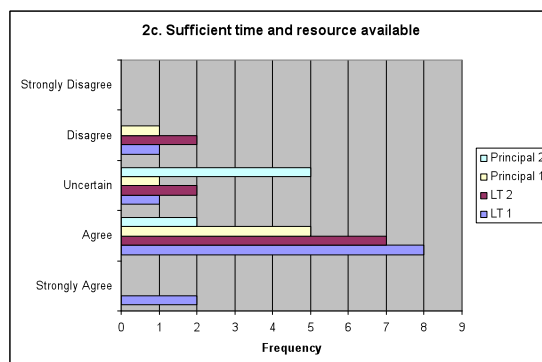
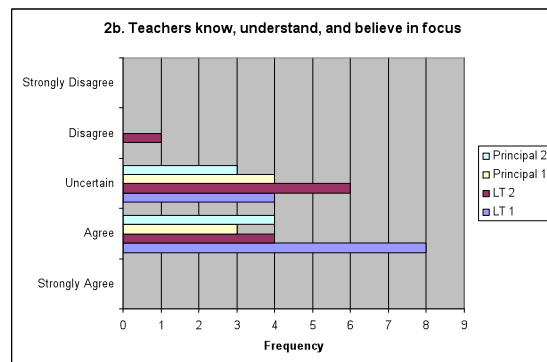
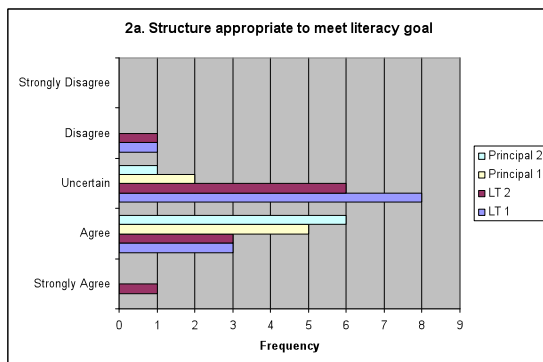


Comment:

- *Potential to add value to student and teacher learning*
- *Having a shared focus ensures that student needs are being identified and catered for*
- *Being able to liaise with other schools provides a great wealth of knowledge and expertise to draw from to meet student needs*
- *No doubt that this has grown and developed during the EHSAS contract – particularly primary, intermediate, learning centre, homerooms as part of the college. Many parts of the college operation still are unaware*

- *Core beliefs are well defined – focus is clear*

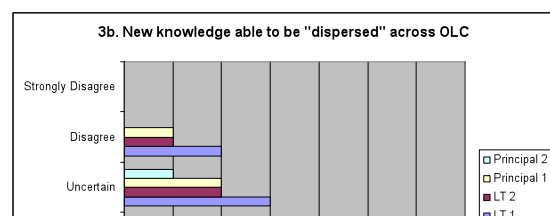
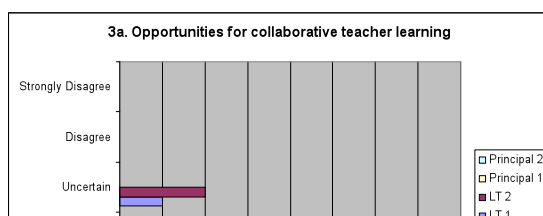
2. Structure of our EHSAS-based Learning Network



Comment:

- *LTs are very focused and driven to enhance social capital*
- *Present structure is appropriate*
- *With the “end of EHSAS” we can no longer say we have sufficient time*
- *Difficult to release teachers too often – students need stability*
- *Teachers know about and understand the focus but not all believe in the potential for long term benefits*
- *Time and resource have been great. Pity the “plug has been pulled”*
- *Not sure if all staff view “EHSAS” as being helpful to them – not seeing the bigger picture of improving outcomes for students*
- *This EHSAS contract seems ton have achieved little*

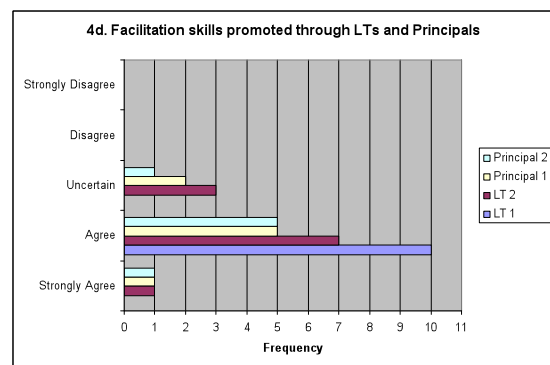
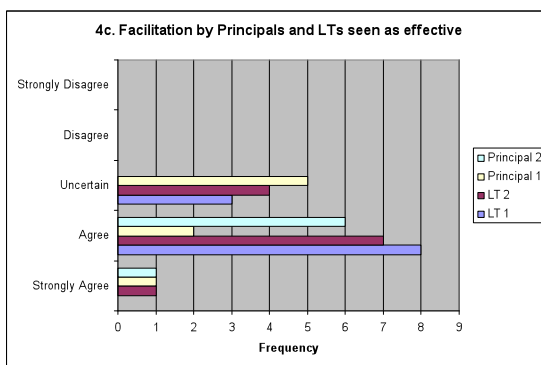
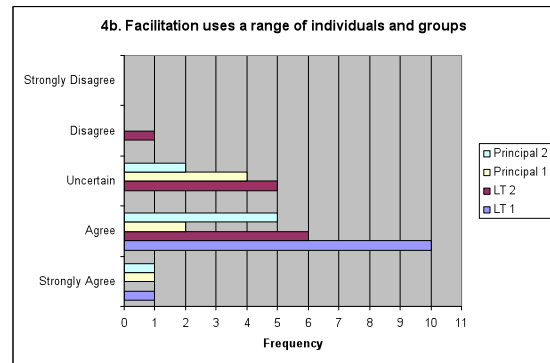
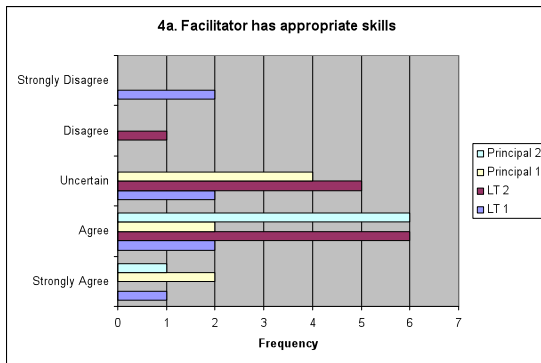
3. Teacher Learning



Comment:

- *There has been a significant increase in buy-in from all staff*
- *What did we learn that was new?*
- *Have had many year group meetings involving time for sharing*
- *“Target Student” results generally improving*
- *Seems to be more about improving teachers than informing students*
- *It has been fantastic to be able to meet with other teachers at same Y6 across cluster*
- *New ideas have been shared by a variety of people which will hopefully lead to links in literacy teaching across schools*
- *Next step is to involve students in the journey*
- *Collaborative spirit across homerooms and English Dept*
- *Work with EHSAS has tied in well with other PD to significantly impact on student learning/engagement*

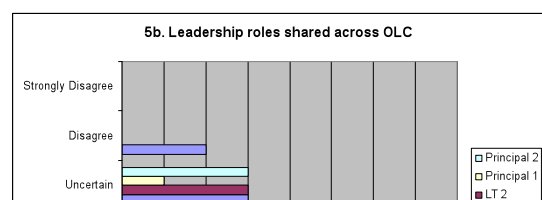
4. Facilitation



Comment:

- *Effective especially from LTs. LTs have really stepped up and driven the project*
- *Staff of **School “stuck in the mud” with attitude towards facilitator*
- *Skills for LTs could have been promoted more effectively*
- *Facilitator needs to have expertise in the areas of learning being covered by the contract so as to provide understanding and direction*
- *LT facilitation skills well promoted*
- *Only seems to be about three schools sharing/facilitating workshops – greater participation from others needed*
- *Many opportunities for effective facilitation especially where people are proactive*

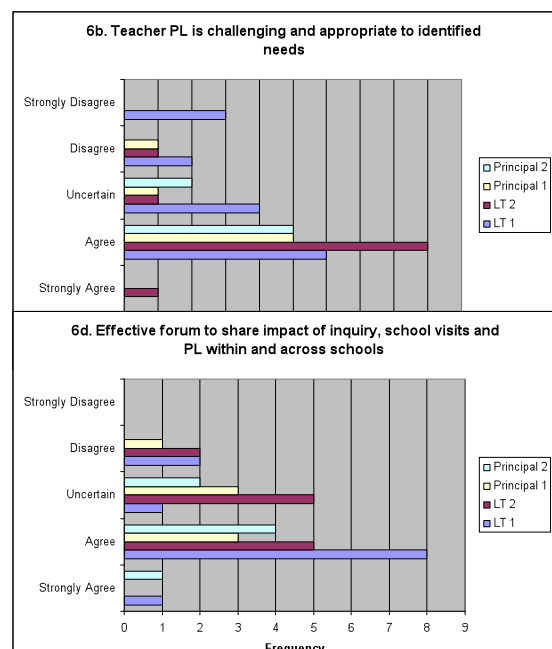
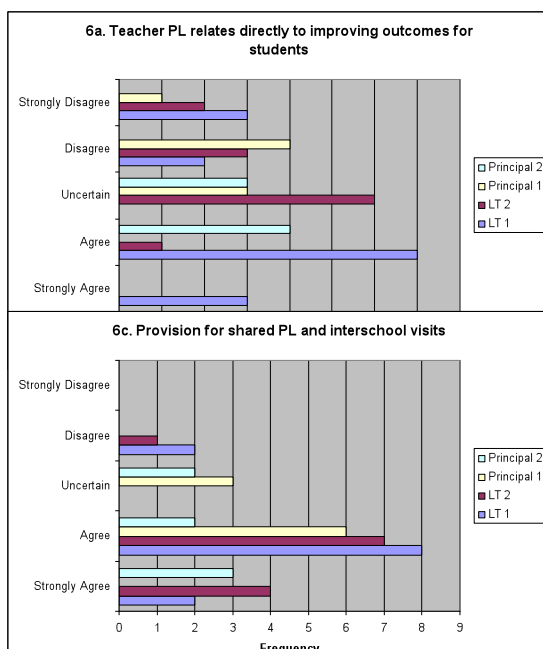
5. Distributed Leadership



Comment:

- *Many feel they do not know what was going on*
- *Opportunities for leadership have*
- *Good resource available to “make it happen” been varied – from leading a workshop to organising cluster days.*
- *The load has been shared among class, LTs and senior management*
- *Students not targeted as leaders at this stage*
- *I believe that if the contract were to continue then student voice would be the next area to be targeted*

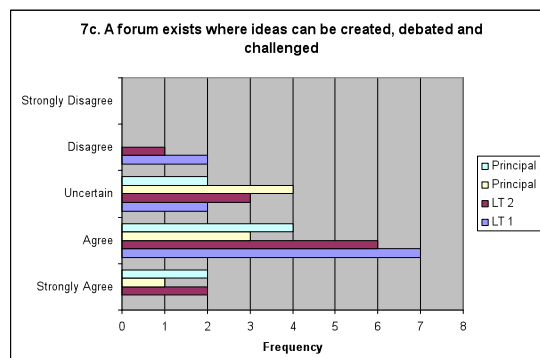
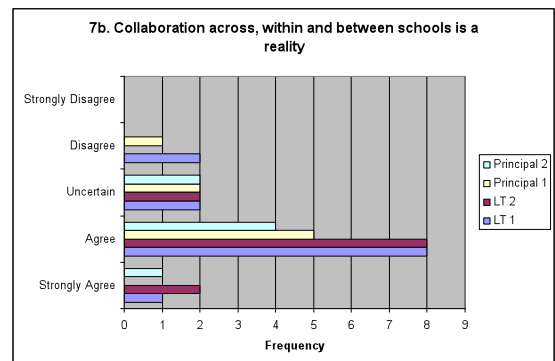
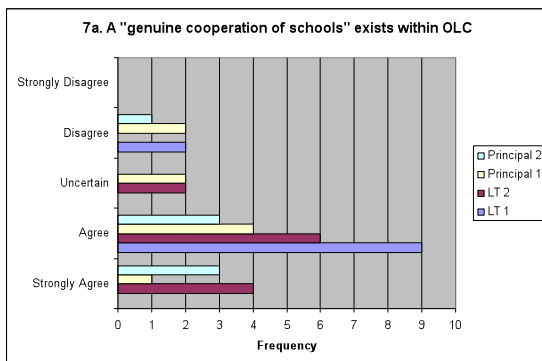
6. Focus



Comment:

- *Forum existed in Principal and LT meetings*
- *Disappointed in the overall focus – feel more could have been achieved if we had “begun at the beginning”*
- *All workshops have been in relation to literacy and building relationships*
- *Workshops set up so there is adequate time for discussion*
- *Bus trip school tour a real plus*
- *The overall vision of EHSAS is to improve outcomes for students so sharing has been based around this.*
- *To make it even more effective there could have been more meeting of teachers’ individual needs*
- *No doubt about the connections between teacher learning and student outcomes*

7. Reality Check



Comment:

- *We have started a more robust form of collaboration with obvious spin-offs*

- *This is a natural forum for further discussion/moderation for National Standards cluster wide*
- *The real challenge is keeping it going from here. There is much good will – excellent interactions between college and intermediate*
- *Collaboration is happening between schools but not all schools. We are quite different to the other schools in our cluster and would probably prefer to look to schools with a high Maori population. Like seems to attract like.*
- *There have been some positive relationships formed across schools. Teachers have been willing to share ideas and resources and are more comfortable in taking part in dialogue with teachers from other schools*
- *I feel that leadership has become more open, relaxed and sharing and open to challenge and debate*
- *We have not contacted other teachers across the cluster except for planned school visits and PD sessions*
- *Collaboration between some schools more than others*
- *Be interesting to see if it continues with the MOE decision to stop funding*
- *Seemed stranger with/between some schools than others*
- *Open forum will be compromised with lack of funding*
- *Be great to have a discussion around possible future focus and targets that might benefit OLC*

The key purpose of any Networked Learning Community (NLC) is to make a difference to children's learning. Implicit in this statement is the close examination of all practices and procedures that create an environment conducive to positive student learning. Of the key markers in the above surveys probably the most important relate to teacher practice.

Returning to the original premise, the old adage of "two heads are better than one" speaking to the value of cooperation and collaboration for the common good the data has shown a positive change over ten months. Teachers have been very open about the benefits, indeed the enjoyment, of working with other teaching professionals across other schools; of visiting other schools and seeing first hand quality teaching; of being affirmed in their teaching practice; and of growing their teaching practice through dialogue, observation and research.

In considering a theme of negativity of comment throughout the data this has been identified as coming from two teachers from one school. Circumstances in "selling" the

EHSAS project, and consequent teacher buy-in were impacted by the school administration of the time. A new administration overcame to some extent this “problem” although with the cessation of MOE funding for the EHSAS project it is not anticipated that the students of this school will benefit as students in the other schools have been seen to by way of school and teacher attitude.

As important as the goal of “95% of students reading at, or above their chronological age” has been in the EHSAS project, underpinning this has been the very strong desire to build social capital. The theory of social capital can be summed up in two words, “relationships matter” (Field, 2003). The social capital that has existed within and between the school principals of the OLC has been built up over some time. As a new principal entered the OLC the existing social capital very quickly enabled the newcomer to become an integral part of the OLC in short time. The trust within this group has been a major factor in the successful growing of social capital across the schools at teacher level.

The key building blocks of social capital include trust, engagement and connection, collaborative action, shared identity and shared values and aspirations. For those schools who, prior to the EHSAS project, had undertaken school-wide focused professional learning the EHSAS journey has proven “easier”. Two schools, in particular had recently completed two year literacy contracts that had really paved the way for interschool interactions. For both of these schools much work had been done in breaking down walls between classrooms and across each school; in encouraging engagement, connection and collaborative action between teachers and building up that all-important component, trust. These two schools have continued to work together on a joint project around building teacher capacity.

Again, implicit in this is relational trust and dialogue. A ten year study of Chicago school reforms concluded that schools with a high degree of “relational trust” are more likely to make the kinds of change that help raise student achievement (Bryk & Schneider 2002). They go on to suggest four signs for identifying and assessing relational trust in schools: Respect – do we acknowledge one another’s dignity and ideas? Competence – do we believe in each other’s ability to fulfil our responsibilities? Personal regard – do we care about each other enough to go the extra mile? Integrity – do we trust each other to put children’s needs first even in the face of tough decisions?

When put in the context of one’s own school it is quickly evident that within a staff there is a great diversity of attitude, of personal and professional confidence and regard, and of the

willingness to trust. To build such social capital takes time and starts with those “at the top”. Of essence then is dialogue, open, frank and free. Since our relationships are defined by the quality and content of our communications a powerful tool schools can engage and work with is dialogue within and across the school community. Preskill et al, 2002 state, *“In our view there is no surer route to community building and to fulfilling the promise of democracy and lifelong learning than through the deepening of good, ongoing dialogue. Such dialogue can increase student achievement, transform teaching and learning and renew relationships that connect communities to schools.”*

The development of such process has been seen to be very successful within the OLC over the latter period of the project. While developing skill in dialogue takes time and practice where it has been used effectively within and between schools has been highly regarded by teachers as a positive outcome of the project. The professional talk around students and around professional practice is seen to produce positive outcomes for students. During such learning conversations mutual growth is an outcome – the relationship and the task get equal attention. When whole school communities are drawn into conversation there exists a forum for people to share and express diverse views, to negotiate and reaffirm directions and vision and build social capital.

A factor highlighted in successful learning networks is student voice. In the context of the OLC student voice is an area not realised at the time of the cessation of the project. Research indicates that good NLCs involve and impact both adults and students within their network. While the work of adults within the NLC directly relates to and affects students it is recognised that it is hard to achieve anything significant unless the students are active members of the network – leading and contributing to network activities. There was a degree of students involvement at the early college levels but this was not seen across the primary school levels. Future development of the OLC could well consider the following student dimensions: student involvement in school development, students as researchers, student feedback on teaching and learning, and students as peer tutors. The peer tutoring role is one that is often used within the classroom context, the other dimensions however have not often been touched upon.

Two other areas of NLCs that were highlighted in the above data gathering/stocktake were those of leadership and facilitation. Criticism of the facilitator was quite evident and mostly concerned a perceived lack of knowledge of “the reading process” as a key context of the project. The facilitator was employed to facilitate group dynamics and learning processes.

This was the understanding of the principal group but was not the understanding of numbers of teachers. The facilitator was never employed as an expert on literacy, rather he was employed to facilitate the sharing of the combined expertise that existed within each school. It was the view of a few that “answers” would be given that would enable “miraculous” change to the teaching of reading. This was never an objective; rather it was seen as important that teachers engage in dialogue, build social capital, and as a group determine directions in teaching and learning that would positively impact student achievement. A “quick fix” was never anticipated nor should it have been. The facilitator did effectively, from the majority perspective, successfully develop the network, encourage collaborative learning processes and enquiry, and communicate clearly the outcomes of meetings, workshops, conferences, and data interpretation.

Effective networks need dedicated leadership that isn’t differential to any individual school. (NCSL 2006). The effectiveness of the OLC is directly related to the vision energy and effort of those who took on the leadership role. Given the diversity and nature of the schools involved in the OLC the structure is necessarily both complex and fluid meaning that the leadership task was/is not always a simple one. At various levels it has required strategic input to the design of activities, processing and communicating outcomes and maintaining a clarity of purpose and focus.

Sharing the leadership took on particular importance as the Lead Teachers “ran with” the project. It could well be said that the LT buy-in has been/still is the critical factor in determining successful outcomes for schools and students. Most LTs acknowledged their capacity for leadership, and opportunities for leadership had grown and expanded. (It can be noted that three of the LTs have been promoted to principal and deputy principal roles during the last eight months.)

The key thought here then is that an effective network requires a style of leadership that is shared, collaborative and facilitative.

Sustainability of the OLC is an ongoing challenge. Under EHSAS funding has been available to facilitate the development and growth of the network. With the withdrawal of funding by the incoming government a year earlier than expected the notion of sustainability had/has not come under serious consideration. For the OLC to continue its EHSAS mode of operation will take continuous work and commitment from leaders and the network’s schools. The ongoing success of the network over time will be largely

dependent upon its perceived relevance and value to its member schools and the extent to which it remains active and focused on advancing outcomes for students and teachers.

For the OLC to be sustained in its present form, or indeed a modified form will require a form of reflection that will focus on maintaining and developing what is working well, changing or stopping what is not effective and adapting to new possibilities in response to internal change, and the obvious external change that has already occurred.

This may mean that within the OLC smaller partnerships are set up between schools that reflect common needs and directions – and this will depend on leadership buy-in of the worth to students and teachers of such partnerships.

An ongoing challenge for the OLC is to further reflect on the effectiveness of the EHSAS journey of the last two and a half years under the following headings:

The extent to which it has

- had an impact on student learning and social development
- impacted on staff morale and practice, with the potential for developing leadership capacity
- put in place the characteristics and processes that have become a “part of the way we do things around here”

The end of 2010 should see another survey to establish the degree to which the OLC has been able to/has wanted to continue in its EHSAS format. The time leading up to this will certainly determine its future. It would be hoped that the OLC will be able to adapt sufficiently to continue to advance the academic and social welfare of students and the professional learning of teachers.

The Bradley-Stoke Experience

The visit to schools in the Bradley Stoke area north of Bristol was undertaken to see how the NCSL initiative in developing networked learning communities was developed/was being developed. The area was chosen on the advice from the South Glos Leadership Academy responsible for much of the professional development around networked learning communities.

The school communities had all been established in the 1980s with the exception of Bradley Stoke Community School established in 2005 as the new secondary school. The stereotypical view of concrete and asphalt jungles was quickly dismissed as all the schools were very green with good amenities and open spaces.

In talking with head teachers and classroom teachers there was an evident tension between the primary and secondary systems. The key concern centred around transition from primary to secondary and the variation of expectations held by the three secondary schools of what their new student intake should possess by way of skills and knowledge. Only BSCS had taken any real initiative to “confront primary shortcomings”. However, BSCS’s “confronting” was considered by the contributing primary schools to be very positive.

A key factor that emerged relating to a “reluctance and reservation” for the local primary schools to collaboratively network was SATs – the government’s Standard Assessment Tests in English, Maths and Science. SATs has created an environment of competition between schools as so much depends on the school’s results and 7 years and 11years. Schools’ results being freely published as league tables have a major impact on school funding and resourcing and community perception of how well a school is performing.

[Primary schools’ KS2 results published](#)

Posted on Wednesday 2nd December 2009 at 8:29 am by SH (Editor)

Bradley Stoke primary schools have registered another good set of results in Key Stage 2 (KS2) tests taken by pupils in year 6 (ages 10 and 11).



Best performing school (based on aggregate scores for maths, English and science) was St Mary’s Catholic Primary School with a score of 289 out of a maximum possible 300.

Comparison with results from 2008 show that Bowsland Green Primary School has improved its score from 203 to 278, while Holy Trinity Primary School’s score has dropped from 300 to 233.

All the 2009 (2008) KS2 results for Bradley Stoke schools:

- St Mary’s Catholic Primary School 289 (296)
- Bowsland Green Primary School 278 (203)
- Bailey’s Court Primary School 272 (284)
- Wheatfield Primary School 267 (258)
- Meadowbrook Primary School 257 (219)
- Holy Trinity Primary School 233 (300)
- Stoke Lodge School 218 (245)

Five of the six schools achieved results above the national average of 247. The average score in South Gloucestershire was 254.

No explanation is ever given as to the factors affecting a school’s performance and the league tables only reflect a very narrow curriculum. My visits to the above schools showed a wealth of “value added” substance in classroom programmes none of which is reflected

above. Part of the school programme witnessed included students practising for the tests – certainly a responsibility of the school to prepare the students but hardly conducive to learning.

BSCS was the first to initiate a forum to share concerns around school transitioning. Handwriting and spelling were identified “deficiencies” as these two areas had a very low weighting in the primaries given the focus of SATs. However BSCS concerns did not necessarily match with those of the other secondary schools so there existed a real tension in the BS school community. So while dialogue was being encouraged at this level it did not constitute a networked learning community within the parameters outlined at the beginning of this paper. Common links were being sought between schools and GATE was seen as a link between BSCS and the primaries but not as a link between the primaries.

Networking Between Schools

1. While the SATs influence was large schools still found purpose in working collaboratively on initiatives to raise student achievement. Funding for such initiatives came through a national bidding process, funds successfully bid for then accessed through the LEA.

The context of one local primary schools’ NLC initiative was raising standards in writing through geography and history.

Having set the purpose of the collaborative work the process to achieve the goal of improving writing was relatively straight forward.

- Working parties of teachers with geography expertise planned a two year programme commencing with the Year 3 students following them through Year 4.
- Communication to get it working in classrooms and across schools and provision for teachers from across the schools to get together
- Activities and events were planned to bring th students from the four schools together
- Children were learning with and from children
- Challenging for some schools to follow through on an agreed teaching scheme
- Did impact on writing – benchmarking a key part of the project
- Collection of data to further inform teaching from Reception to Year 6.

- SATs data not used for assessment to learn. Tools for meaningful assessment developed with learning objectives aligned to students' needs. Similarities in assessment methodology
- Data available to parents – parents' evenings highlighted the importance of accurate data and meaningful target setting.

This NLC had a specific purpose and timeframe and within both proved a worthwhile initiative. Further cross school collaboration has not resulted from this.

School principal comment:

- Networking does not occur naturally. Much external demand distracts from meaningful change. Encourages reaction rather than proaction
- Our schools are in competition with each other.
- Parents do look at the academic record of SATs. Open rivalry between parents but not HTs
- Really works against collaboration.
- Negates celebrating good practice
- New HTs don't always encourage network – so many other issues including SATs
- Within schools coaching and co-coaching form part of our collaboration
- Be nice to work with another school, to work with another HT. Competition puts a hold on that
- In spite of this a collegial network does exist.

2. A "School Improvement Partner" (SIP) network was formed between three primary schools based on collaboration between the Head Teachers of the schools.

- The purpose for this network was self review of each other's schools.
- It set out to look at a particular focus in each school and determine what factors supported or detracted from the school's aims.
- It took snapshot views and fed these back to the school concerned enabling the school to reflect on the success or otherwise of its practice.

From this informal network came a Deputy Head Teachers' network within the cluster of schools that focused on aspects of learning. An outworking of this has been combined staff meetings where three schools will meet together to dialogue and share best practice.

- Deputy HT cluster meeting every 6 -7 weeks with own agenda
- Inter-visitation in threes investigating "stuff of own choosing"
- Sharing across schools. Best practice network in curriculum. GATE, maths. LEA helps facilitate

- Not a network of teachers as such – eg, Year three teachers.
- Key Stage 2 meetings within and across schools
- Strong desire to meet across schools
- Five in-service days (LEA provision) all teachers to visit other schools. Feedback and feed forward

3. An area under close scrutiny was that of transitions between primary and secondary school. There appeared a real dissonance in primary and secondary school philosophy. However one secondary, BSCS, was making a major effort to “walk and talk” with its feeder schools. A dynamic here was that the LEA had total control over enrolments in schools and this presented difficulties for parent choice.

- BSCS was at the “cutting edge” of initiating smooth transitioning. Little coordination between primaries but secondary prepared to network. Increasing secondary knowledge of what primaries are about, and what primaries prioritize
- Setting a uniformity of expectations – genuine two-way communication establishing “far and reasonable”. Expectations “HT to HT” cluster meetings, “This is what we would like...”
- SEAL – social emotional aspects of learning – while nationally driven was an area of local focus
- Trusting relationships being built up. BSCS founded 2005.
- Feeder primaries use BSCS facilities, teaching staff, sports coordinator, design, music, languages, PE – building stronger relationship
- Invasion days – Year 6 student visits and peer mentoring
- Regular meetings with HTs of contributing schools
- Advanced skills teachers working with teachers
- Smoothing the anomalies between schools – one primary has gone to the extent of having keyed lockers for its Year 6 students in preparation for secondary school.
- Programme factoring in Resilient, Reflective, Resourceful, Responsible – that these four elements should be integral to all learning/personalised learning
- Skills of leadership, organisation, literacy and numeracy
- BSCS teachers to primary schools – parents aware as a positive. Disseminating good practice across schools.

Summary and Future Directions

The “English experience” did not provide the hoped for insight into successful networks of learning communities. It did however point to the fact that the OLC was well grounded in

both theory and practice and had/has the potential to achieve very positive outcomes for students, teachers and the Otumoetai community.

It was very clear that the National Testing process in England was not producing the raising of achievement levels it was charged with doing. Quite the opposite was being seen with the 11 year test at Year 6 making Year 6 an “inputting experience” for students as opposed to a learning experience.

Comment around the National Testing regime was roundly critical from teaching professionals and parents alike. It certainly inhibited cooperation and collaboration between schools. (See addendum). From a cynic’s point of view this could well parallel NZ’s educational journey into National Standards.

The progress made by the OLC in developing social capital across its schools has shown many positive outcomes to date. Further surveys of the growth of social capital are being undertaken by the EHSAS facilitator. Prior to the EHSAS initiative the cluster had already identified and moved to reduce the discrepancies in language teaching to enable the Year 9 and 10 students to be better prepared for the rigours of NCEA.

A next positive step, and one which points to the sustainability of the network without specific MOE funding, I would suggest relates to the transitioning of students through the year levels. I believe the cry that is heard at OPS is heard similarly across our schools – “these kids should know this by the time they come to my class level”.

This will involve teachers talking to teachers within their own school to determine a “set of consistent skills, attitudes and values” that will encourage a smooth transitioning within the school and then between the schools of the OLC.

This will also involve dialogue with pre-school institutions that feed into our six contributing schools. This dialogue within, across and between the members of the OLC and the greater Otumoetai community cannot help but have positive outcomes for our students.

In concluding, while the five key themes of the original sabbatical purpose have not featured as highly as first proposed I do believe the key goals of a networked learning community, as below -

- Broaden the teacher expertise and learning opportunities available to students
- Provide a direct mechanism for sharing expert teacher practice
- Provide diversity, flexibility and range of opportunities that no single school can offer
- nurture creativity, role-taking and innovation to improve learning and teaching
- lead to improvement in student attainment

- lead to improved teaching
- have to a large measure been achieved within the shortened span of the EHSAS initiative undertaken by the Otumoetai Learning Community. There is every reason to believe that the OLC will proceed with other initiatives that will foster worthwhile outcomes for students and teachers and thus our community

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- Establishing & Network of Schools
- The Impact of Networks on pupils, practitioners, organisations & the communities they serve.
- Networked Learning Communities – ‘characteristics of networked learning’ – what are we learning?
- Leading together to build social capital
- 20 Questions about Learning Networks – a guide for school leaders
- What are we learning about ...? Sustaining a network of schools?

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Addendum

Report into Primary Education – The Guardian Newspaper, Friday 20 February 2009

Children's lives are being impoverished by the government's insistence that [schools](#) focus on literacy and numeracy at the expense of creative [teaching](#), the biggest review of the primary school curriculum in 40 years finds today.

The review finds:

- Children are losing out on a broad, balanced and rich curriculum with art, music, drama, history and geography the biggest casualties.
- The curriculum, and crucially English and maths, have been "politicised".
- The focus on literacy and numeracy in the run-up to national tests has "squeezed out" other areas of learning.
- The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which sets the curriculum, have been excessively prescriptive, "micro-managing" schools.

The review accuses the government of attempting to control what happens in every classroom in England, leading to an excessive focus on literacy and numeracy in an "overt politicisation" of children's lives. Despite this too many children still leave primary school having failed to master the 3Rs.

SATs have also narrowed the scope of what is taught in schools, it claims, concluding: "The problem of the curriculum is inseparable from the problem of assessment and testing."

The deranged drive to shoehorn every child into a nitpickingly defined definition of normal progress in education is a bubble that has to burst eventually. In the mean time how many potential geniuses are being hammered down in to boxes by a regime that sincerely believes 'teaching to the test' is in fact the point of schooling. A senior DCSF speaker actually said that at a conference I attended (as a then local authority rep) last year. Mind boggling.

The National Curriculum, SAT's and the attendant 'league tables' have taken the concept of education out of our schools. These schools have become on the whole, training grounds, where the sole aim is academic, so called, 'success'.

Comment from parents and teachers:

I have hated the way the children are only valued if they are good at maths and reading/writing. Those whose skills lie in other areas (art, PE, music etc) aren't acknowledged by the system as being of value, are

labelled as "non-achievers" and forced to spend even more time doing the stuff they don't enjoy, so there's even less time for them to spend on the parts of the curriculum in which they excel.

In my opinion, primary school should be about giving the children a wide range of experiences so that they can find out what they enjoy and what they're good at. This narrow focus on literacy and "numeracy" has been killing the creativity and joy of school time for both teachers and pupils.

And when a school does its best and raises the SATS marks to the level that satisfies HM Gov, the next year there may well be a light drop or a levelling out of the figures. Then, of course, the school isn't doing as well as before and gets a bollocking.

What struck me more than anything was how stressed and anxious both teachers and pupils seem to be these days, particularly in later Key Stage 2. In one class of ten-year-olds preparing for tests, the anxiety and, yes, fear, in the atmosphere was palpable. I spoke to the teacher afterwards and she just said that the pupils have to get through the tests, they just have to.

When our son started Primary School, it soon became obvious that the 'education' on offer was so tightly structured, he would never be educated in a broader sense. We have done our best to make up the difference, in spite of a degree of indifference from the education professionals, by encouraging out of school activities, including astronomy.

As a teacher of Year 2 I would support wholeheartedly the abolition of testing for 7 year olds. Yes teachers do "teach to test" because test results are not just used to inform on children's progress but are also used unfairly to judge a teacher's competence. Unrealistic targets are set from on high and test results are expected to show improvement year after year irrespective of the ability of the cohort doing the test.

As a parent and a school governor I entirely agree that there are far too many "tests" and statistics. Education should be more about what is drawn out of young people than what is drummed into them.

As teachers we are supposed to try and create confident speakers, readers and writers who will be able to use English as a tool in their work, as well as in a social and leisure context. SATs do not contribute to this, in fact it hinders a broad and balanced, interesting and motivating curriculum.

As an ex-junior school teacher, I advise every parent to remove their child from the tests using up the ten days that they are allowed per annum to miss school. Take your children on holiday instead!

As a Year 9 English teacher and KS3 co-ordinator for SATS, I totally disagree with the SATs. No teacher is against assessment - we use many assessment methods continually - but this type of testing is narrowing the curriculum, leaving little room for the development of ideas and discrimination in reading.

In my view, SATS are taking the pleasure out of learning for many students and pressurising teachers to 'teach to the test' - rather than teaching for meaning, understanding, critical thinking and pleasure.

Schools need good SATs scores so they spend ages on revision and practice sessions - it isn't learning any more, it's a series of rehearsals. No wonder children misbehave - where's the joy in learning?