The Implementation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme in a School:
The Complexity of Curriculum Change

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This Dissertation is dedicated to

Mary Chapman

whose memory lives on in the hearts of those who love her

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Chapter 1   Development and Introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme

1.1 Introduction

The focus of this inquiry is to examine the complexity of curriculum change in the context of an exploration of the LCAP within the author's own school. One of the principal tasks the LCA co-ordinator faces is to support teachers in implementing and delivering a radically different programme within the constraints of an existing teacher culture and organisational structure. Through a qualitative study about aspects of the dominant teacher culture in the author's own school a deeper understanding of these constraints is sought.

This study will acknowledge the existence of levels of cultural domains and attempt to seek out elements of these in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity inherent in a curricular change such as the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. However the author takes cognisance of the fact that the literature highlights the complexities involved in revealing the fundamental, underlying shared convictions that guide behaviour and shape the way group members perceive, think and feel. She is aware that exploring the truly cultural level of an organisation or its underlying assumptions requires ideally a sound knowledge of the setting's history, a considerable time commitment on site and varied methods of collecting data. Considering the timeframe in which this study had to be conducted and the nature of implementing the LCA programme-

effectively constituting a second-order change requiring teachers not just to do old things differently but also to change their beliefs and perceptions-it was felt that interviews were the most appropriate choice of research tool.

The first chapter of this study traces the origins of the LCAP. It locates the emergence of the LCAP as a senior cycle option in the broader context of educational development in Ireland and in the specific context of the author's own school.

1.2   Background and Development of the LCAP

Some of the determining factors that led to the introduction of the LCAP can be traced back to a period of great change between 1965 and 1972.

The publication of the OECD Report "Investment in Education" exposed a major weakness in the Irish educational system, namely the inequality of access to second level education among the varied socio-economic groups. (OECD, 1966). The introduction of free second level education in 1967 and the abolition of the Primary Certificate greatly increased participation rates in second level education. When the school leaving age was increased to 15 in 1972 the numbers leaving full-time education with at least a Group or Intermediate Certificate increased dramatically:

> Large numbers of teenagers who would previously have sought employment were staying on at school beyond the end of compulsory schooling.
>
> (OECD, 1991, p.18)

The implications of this were acutely felt by teachers who were facing new problems with pupils of a wider range of ability and social background in more

crowded classrooms. This change in student profile highlighted the need for a more

inclusive educational system. Pre-vocational education incorporating vocational

relevance combined with a sound general education thus entered the Irish

educational landscape.

Two pre-vocational programmes in particular the Vocational Preparation and

Training Programme and the Senior Certificate Programme will be analysed below

as they contributed greatly to the evolving process that eventually would lead to the

introduction of the LCAP in 1995.

The Vocational Preparation and Training Programme developed from pre-

employment courses that were aimed at addressing the issue of rising youth

unemployment. The Department of Education launched the programme in 1984 and

targeted students who did not wish to pursue the traditional Leaving Certificate.

The programme wanted to:

> Bridge the gap between the values and experiences normally
> part of traditional education and those current in the adult world
> of work.
>
> (Ireland, 1984, p.6)

During its first year of operation 50% of post-primary schools in the country

provided the programme. This suggests the initiative responded to an identified

need. The programme provided a dual focus by highlighting the importance of

literacy, numeracy and manipulative skills greatly valued by employers but also

emphasised vocational skills. In 1985 the programme was extended as a two-year

alternative to the Leaving Certificate. The features of the VPT programme that were particularly relevant to the LCAP and would later be incorporated into it were:

- The inclusion of specialist vocational courses

- The emphasis on work experience

- The aim of preparing students for adult and working life

- The introduction of group project work

- The emphasis on personal development of the student

- School based assessment

The above features present challenges to teachers, to existing curricula and to the school as a whole. In particular, the adoption of specialist vocational courses and of practices such as work experience, group project work and school based assessment within the constraints of an existing teacher culture and organisational school structure raise questions. Questions that will re-emerge at the time of the LCAP's introduction...

The Senior Certificate programme evolved from the Spiral I and Spiral II projects initiated by the Curriculum Development Centre, Shannon, Co. Clare. These programmes formed part of the European Communities Actions Programme for Transition. The main thrust of these projects was:

The development of alternative senior cycle programmes leading to national certification flexible enough to make possible the assessment of the variety of learning experiences considered important for the period of transition from school to adult life.

(Curriculum Development Centre, 1990, p.1)

The Senior Certificate programme ran from 1984 to 1995 serving mainly the

southern part of the country. Up to sixty schools offered the programme during this

period.

Key features underlying the programme included:

- An emphasis on work experience

- An emphasis on social education

- The inclusion of computer applications/information and communications technology as a mandatory course

- A two-year senior cycle programme

Again there are challenges inherent in the key features outlined above.

An emphasis on social education in any curriculum unaccompanied by the sourcing

of suitable and up-to-date resource materials, an understanding of the complexities

involved in engaging pupils with little interest in broad contemporary issues and a

more extensive use of active, experiential and student-centred methodologies will

have little impact. The inclusion of information and communications technology as

a mandatory course is futile unless schools allocate adequate time for the

acquisition of ICT skills and access to ICT facilities for all of their students.

The relevance of these alternative programmes for the LCAP extends beyond the obvious features they share but lies in the fact that a significant number of teachers during this period gained experience and expertise in curriculum development and in teaching non-mainstream senior cycle courses. The initiation, implementation and institutionalisation of these programmes provided them with a unique opportunity to explore new materials, new teaching approaches, new methods of assessment, changes in teacher-pupil relationships and afforded them an opportunity to examine their existing beliefs, values and assumptions in relation to teaching and learning.

The existence of these alternative programmes enhanced the debate on the development of senior cycle education in Ireland which re-emerged strongly after the NCCA's publication of a consultative paper entitled "Senior Cycle: Issues and Structures" in May 1990. This document exposed the fact that the established Leaving Certificate was no longer meeting the needs of a significant number of students and stated:

> 23% of Leaving Certificate students take all subjects at Ordinary level and often there is a mismatch occurring between candidates' abilities, interests and aptitudes on the one hand and the syllabus and examination on the other hand.
>
> (NCCA, 1990, p.3.)

The consultative paper clearly identified the main issues at stake:

- Catering for the diversity of student needs

- Offering a balance between social development, vocational preparation and preparation for further education

- Offering a broader range of subjects

- Investigating the relationship between ordinary level Leaving Certificate and Senior Certificate/VPT programmes

- Exploring the idea of mixing courses from different programmes

(Freeman, 2002, p.21.)

The need to combine on the job training with a strong back up from vocational and technical schools emerged as a strong priority.

The Culliton Report (Ireland, 1992) raised the notion of an alternative Leaving Certificate and suggested that:

> What is needed is a parallel stream of non-academic vocationally oriented education at second level which commands widespread recognition, respect and support and in which the involvement of industry will be crucial.

(Culliton, 1992, p.54)

Not only did the Culliton report stress the importance of the education system responding to market needs as was highlighted in the OECD Report of 1991 but it also warned that at second level vocational education was increasingly being crowded out by the academic stream.

The Green Paper "Education for a Changing World" was published in April 1992. Among its main aims were:

To establish greater equity in education-particularly for those who are disadvantaged socially, economically, physically or mentally.
To broaden Irish education – so as to equip students more effectively for life, for work in an enterprise culture and for citizenship of Europe.

(Ireland, 1992, p.5)

Whilst not received very well in educational circles the Green Paper did reflect the

recommendations made by the NCCA:

The Leaving Certificate results reveal that there are many students for whom the examination, as constituted at present is unsuitable. Of all the second-level students presenting at least five subjects in the Leaving Certificate in 1991, some 15% failed to obtain five Grade Ds.

(Green Paper, 1992, p.98)

The Green Paper's recognition that a stronger curricular base was required to cater

for the wider range of ability level and to prepare students more effectively for

working life in a rapidly changing technological environment was timely.

In addition the document demonstrated awareness of what would be involved in

accomplishing this enormous task:

Not only will it be necessary to address the content of what our students learn, it will be equally important to address the way they learn, including teaching methods, assessment of progress and the nature of the links between schools and the working world.

(Green Paper, 1992, p.39)

It is a task in which teachers have a pivotal role to play. One in which many of their

familiar routines and traditional beliefs, values and assumptions in relation to

teaching and learning to date will be challenged.

The Green Paper took cognisance of the strong traditional attachment of parents

and students to the Leaving Certificate and pointed out that any future

developments in relation to senior cycle should take place under the umbrella of the

Leaving Certificate:

> There is merit in providing for all options and all ability levels within the
> Leaving Certificate, rather than through the alternatives of Leaving
> Certificate and Senior Certificate.

(Green Paper, 1992, p.99.)

This recognition of a degree of conservatism towards education confirmed the view

expressed in the OECD Report "Review of National Policies for Education":

> The weight of the classical humanist tradition is enormous, not least because
> of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is
> widely admired even though unattainable by the majority. This dominance is
> likely to prevail unless the authorities are able to develop either a much more
> powerful parallel system of technical/vocational schools or a restructured
> general secondary education curriculum.

(OECD, 1991, p.69)

In response to the Green Paper the NCCA published the policy document

"Curriculum and Assessment Policy, Towards the New Century" in 1993.

This document recommended that the current Senior Certificate and VPT courses

should be subsumed into a single senior cycle course. Among the suggested titles

for this course listed in the document was the Leaving Certificate Applied.

(NCCA, 1993)

The "LCAP-Rationale, Philosophy and Operational Plan" was published by the

NCCA in October 1993. It outlined a schedule for the development of the

programme that was to be introduced on a phased basis into schools in September

1995.

The Report on the National Education Convention that took place during the same

month raised some valid concerns that later came to bear on the programme:

> Would the LCAP be perceived as having low status in schools? What
> prospects awaited students on completion of the programme? What effect
> will the LCA have on the Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate? How can it be
> offered as an option in anything but very large schools?

> (Coolahan, 1994, p.76)

With the publication of the White Paper on Education "Charting our Education

Future" explicit reference was made to a separate and distinct form of Leaving

Certificate known as the Leaving Certificate Applied currently being developed

and to the underlying principles that would inform it.

The White Paper stressed the importance of ensuring that the talents of all students

were recognised and stated:

> This programme will focus on the needs and interests of students using a
> variety of methodologies, making maximum use of local resources and
> paying particular attention to the involvement of the local community.

> (White Paper, 1995, p.52)

The above proposals and the curriculum orientations they contain present a number of challenges in the areas of teacher development, curriculum development and school development. Some of which include:

- An openness and willingness to take on change combined with a long term commitment to a wide range of support strategies

- Changes in the school's existing organisational structure e.g. schoolday, timetable

A highly relevant question in this context worth exploring further is:

To what extent is the school's structure committed to facilitating the need for professional collaboration and collegiality among members of the LCA teaching team?

- Teachers to alter their traditional roles, their allegiance to familiar pedagogical routine, their current understanding of curriculum

- Teachers to move from a context of isolation towards professional collaboration with colleagues

A highly relevant question arising from the above is:

What do LCA teachers regard as radically different about teaching and learning in the LCA programme and to what extent has this impacted significantly on their own role and pedagogy?

- The identification, access and availability of teaching and learning resources in the local community to enhance the capacity for learning from outside schools

- Schools to take more initiative in creating opportunities for co-operation and involvement with employers and enterprises

A highly relevant question in the above context requiring further exploration is:

How congruent or incongruent are these two challenges with established programmes and practices among teachers in the school?

The above challenging questions require a response inextricably linked to a changing culture of schooling. The quality of that response lies in its capacity to effect concomitant developments in teacher, curriculum and school development.

1.3 Introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme in Irish Schools

1.3.1 Underlying Principles

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained two-year Leaving Certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The programme emphasises excellence in a broad range of achievements. It is an innovative programme in the way students learn, in what they learn and in the way their achievements are assessed. The programme is characterised by educational experiences of an active, practical and student centred nature. Among its core underlying principles are:

- The preparation of participants for adult and working life and the development of their literacy and numerical skills

- Meeting the needs of those participants who are not adequately catered for by other Leaving Certificate programmes or who choose not to opt for such programmes

- Establishing the concept of integration as a central element of the programme structure and of the participants' learning experience

- Providing opportunities to develop the participants' processes of self-evaluation and reflection

- Having a strong community base so as to complement the school or centre as a learning site

- Promoting the use of a broad range of teaching methodologies and participant centred learning

- Having an appropriate range of modes and techniques available for assessing the progress of the participants

(Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.8)

1.3.2 Programme Structure

The LCA programme comprises of three elements:

- Vocational Preparation (including Guidance, Work Experience, Enterprise, English and Communications)

- Vocational Education (including two Vocational Specialisms, Mathematical Applications and Introduction to Information and Communications Technology)

- General Education (including Arts Education, Social Education, Leisure and Recreation, European Languages)

The courses are designed on a modular basis. A module is of thirty hours duration. Each year of the two-year programme is divided into two sessions, September to January and February to May, to facilitate the modular structure of the courses. A module within a given course is usually completed within a session. Over the two-year duration of the programme the participants complete 44 modules effectively taking up 44 X 30 hours = 1320 hours.

The quantity of modules and the need for a two-year plan make the designing of the timetable in a traditional 45 period school week technically difficult. The LCA Support Service provides a template for a possible school timetable. They recommend block arrangements for work experience because it allows for the possibility of the greatest number of class periods for each module as opposed to one-day a week releases for work experience. Single periods are deemed unsuitable because of the demands inherent in practical courses, task work and out of school activities. The need for blocking double and triple periods minimises school disruption but the actual practice of timetabling triple LCA classes has its own challenges for students and teachers.

Assessment

Assessment of the Leaving Certificate Applied takes place over four sessions (approximately half a year each) during the two years under three headings:

- Satisfactory Completion of Modules   31%   (62 credits)

- Performance of Student Tasks   35%   (70 credits)

- Performance in the Final Examinations 34% (68 credits)

This gives students with a poor performance record in written tests an opportunity to gain credits in other assessment formats. An interesting development is that the provision of varied assessment procedures used in the LCA programme are now being considered in the proposals for the future development of senior cycle education in Ireland by the NCCA. In developing appropriate assessment for LCA students the value of Gardner's multiple intelligences theory was recognised and students are provided with opportunities to have their creativity awarded through task work and key assignments.

However when most of the teaching experience of the LCA teacher remains with traditional programmes strongly driven by summative assessment, the criterion-referenced approach used in the assessment strategy of the LCA programme may pose a significant challenge to teachers' competencies and exposes the need for adequate teacher support in this area.

Credits

In order to attain credit for completing each module students must satisfy two criteria:

- Complete the key assignments related to the module.

- Attend for a minimum of 90% of the module classes

This places the onus on students to work well while the ongoing accreditation encourages them to make a similar effort for the next module.

Tasks

A task is a practical activity and/or process of reflection through which the student integrates and applies learning experiences gained from undertaking the LCA programme to the development of a product, the investigation of an issue, the performance of an action, the provision of a service, the staging of an event, personal reflection.

Over the two years each student completes seven tasks. They are:

- 1 Vocational Preparation Task

- 2 Vocational Education Tasks

- 1 General Education Task

- 1 Personal Reflection Task

- 1 Contemporary Issue Task

- 1 Practical Achievement Task

To receive credits for a Student Task a student is required to:

- produce authentic evidence of task completion

- produce a task report

- present for interview

The only exception to this set of requirements is the Personal Reflection Task, which does not have an interview component.

Final Examinations

At the end of two years students sit final examinations in the following course areas:

- English and Communication
- Vocational Specialisms (2)
- Mathematical Applications
- Languages (2)
- Social Education

These examinations consist of a significant practical element. They use oral, aural, video and written formats recognising that the dominance of the linguistic mode in traditional formats was a considerable factor in poor performance of non-academic students.

1.3.3 Developmental Nature of Implementation

The LCAP was introduced in 53 schools involving 1200 students on a developmental basis in September 1995 so as to facilitate the support required for such a radically different Leaving Certificate Programme.

It is now open to all schools to apply to the Department of Education and Science for approval to offer the LCAP to their students.

Schools providing the LCAP are given additional resources by the Department of Education and Science. These include: an annual capitation grant of 160 euros per LCA student, a once off grant of 16,500 euros for computer and communications

equipment in the LCVP/LCAP, 5100 euros for equipment for subject specialisms

and staffing on the basis of 1.25 teachers per group of twenty pupils.

The in-career development for LCA teachers is provided by a dedicated support

service that today forms part of the Second Level Support Service to schools.

1.3.4 Achievements of the Leaving Certificate Applied

A report on the "National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied

Programme was published in 2000. (Department of Education and Science, 2000)

It provided details in relation to the number of schools offering LCA and the

number of students participating in the programme during the period from 1995 to

2000. Whilst the numbers increased steadily over this period a peak was reached in

the school year 1999-2000 when 237 schools implemented the programme and

7500 students sat the LCA examinations.

The evaluation focused primarily on the implementation of the LCAP in schools

and examined the extent to which the essential aims and objectives of the

programme were realised. The conclusions from this report verified the

considerable positive impact the programme was having on students. The report

indicated that students showed considerable commitment and application to

achieving within the programme and were motivated by the realisable short-term

goals that are an intrinsic feature of the LCAP. Students taking the LCA learned to

take responsibility for their own learning and many of them have developed in their

ability to communicate, in their self-confidence and self-esteem. The retention of

many LCA students in school until the completion of Senior Cycle education and

their encouraging attendance rates were identified as specific indicators of the

success of the programme by the inspectors. Increased competence in ICT among

students and meaningful work experience placements also benefited many LCA

students.

In describing the overall outcomes of the LCAP the report highlighted primarily the

impact of the programme on students in particular:

> The success of the Leaving Certificate Applied both nationally and within a
> particular school can be judged by its effect on the students.
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p. 74)

This is echoed in the concluding remarks of the report:

> The inclusion of the LCA as an integral strand of the Senior Cycle has
> proven to have enriched the educational provision for many young people in
> schools.
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.78)

The absence of any explicit evaluation of teachers or school context in the report is

worth noting. There is a vague inference in relation to the potential of the LCAP in

bringing about development not only within the programme but also at other levels

within the schools themselves. The in-career development of teachers and the

development of links with the community, local business and industry are among

the examples given. This study will highlight that whilst it is true that the

introduction of the LCAP may act as a catalyst in initiating dialogue between the

school, local business and industry, establishing and maintaining those links

requires schools to network in new ways and teachers to expand their current roles.

In relation to in-career development the report stated that:

> Involvement in the LCA has developed teachers through providing them
> with an enriched range of methodologies. The attendance at in-career
> development by the LCA Support Service has not only benefited the
> teaching within the LCA but has extended beyond this and has impacted
> positively on teaching in other subjects and programmes.

(Department of Education and Science, 2000, p. 76)

This study will seek to explore whether exposing teachers to an enriched range of

methodologies alone is a sufficient form of LCA teacher development and to what

extent such provision can have a positive impact on the current realisation of the

LCAP's curriculum, on the wider school context and on the prevailing teacher

culture in the school under study.

1.3.5 <u>Concerns in relation to the Leaving Certificate Applied</u>

Since the publication of the "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving

Certificate Applied" in 2000 the number of schools offering the programme has

decreased.

Recent figures available from the Statistics Section in the Department of Education

indicate that 3299 candidates sat the LCA examinations in 2003. The number of

Leaving Certificate candidates that year amounted to 51055. The fact that the

numbers completing LCA have remained small over the past ten years in

comparison to the established Leaving Certificate signifies a continuing trend that

is best understood in the context of the LCA programme addressing the needs of a specific cohort of students. The considerable drop in the number of students participating in the LCAP since 2000 requires further analysis and exposes the urgent need for a more up-to-date report six years on. In spite of the above, a critical analysis of the concerns raised by the "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied" in 2000 remains a worthwhile undertaking for the purpose of this study. The concerns can be grouped under three headings: curriculum development, teacher development and school development. Curriculum development:

- There is a need to provide more up-to-date and relevant teaching and learning resources in courses without set text books.

- There is potential for more extensive use of active teaching and learning strategies

- Student Tasks could be used more effectively as a means for integrating courses.

- The teaching of Social Education would be enhanced by the use of methodologies that help develop students' investigative skills along with their personal and social competencies.

The above concerns raise questions about the understanding of curriculum LCA teachers possess. This study desires to explore some of those questions in greater detail: What is it like for LCA teachers to engage in a course without a set text

book? What is the nature of the student/teacher relationship within the LCAP?

What opportunities are there for colleagues to access and develop awareness about

other courses in the LCAP?

Teacher Development:

- Due emphasis by teachers on the goal of independent learning or on

  involving LCA students in locating and using relevant information and

  promoting their personal responsibility, initiative, reflection, self-evaluation,

  self-confidence and co-operation has not been attained in certain schools.

- There is scope for a more systematic approach to involving and interacting

  with parents and the wider community in the planning of work experience

  and student tasks

- There is a need for LCA teachers to reflect and evaluate upon their own

  performance

These concerns are linked to the way LCA teachers view and interpret their role in

a programme that is not so much content driven than processed-oriented. By

sponsoring the voices of LCA teachers themselves this study seeks to identify and

understand how familiar they are with the concepts of a negotiated curriculum and

independent learning. Is asking LCA teachers to interact with parents, colleagues

and members in the wider community requiring different and more complex

competencies from them as distinct from interacting with LCA students? What

opportunities are provided in any given school week to facilitate a culture of

reflective practice among the members of a LCA teaching team? One wonders if adequate attention is paid to such pertinent questions during the rare opportunities for LCA ongoing in-career development.

School Development:

- The absence of adequate access to equipment for a substantial element of practical work hampers the realisation of active learning approaches in some courses

- There is a lack of regard for existing school facilities in offering certain vocational specialisms

- There is a lack of regular scheduled meeting time for LCA teachers impeding the development of professional collaboration and cross-curricular integration in a planned and coherent way

- There is a lack of access to ICT facilities in some schools experienced by LCA students

- There is potential for further development of the links between the school and the community through community work, community care and work experience

- Timetabling does not always ensure adequate provision for all the mandatory

(Department of Education and Science, 2000, pp.73-78)

The above concerns illustrate how delivering the LCAP's curriculum with its emphasis on experiential/discovery learning and with its demand of access to a variety of source material both inside and outside the school requires an adaptation to the organisational structure currently in place in our schools.

In the light of the aforementioned constraints, this study seeks to highlight the need to develop the school context in which a curricular change such as the LCAP is to be adopted in addition to developing teachers' knowledge and skills as well. It is not difficult to envisage how the impact of paying insufficient attention to all three levels of development-teacher, curriculum and school-can seriously constrain the realisation of the LCAP's intentions in spite of its obvious potential visible in the positive student outcomes inspectors described earlier in this chapter.

1.4   Introduction of the LCAP in the Author's Own School

The decision to go ahead and adopt the LCAP was made by the principal of the school in May 2000. He had decided not to get involved in 1995 but to adopt a wait and see approach until the programme was more established nationwide. His assessment of the desirability and feasibility of adopting the programme into the school five years later was informed by:

- An increasing enrolment from 300 students in 1988 to over 500 students in 2000 displaying a wide range of aptitudes and abilities

- The presence of a cohort of senior cycle students whose needs were not adequately catered for by the school in spite of its policy ideals stating the opposite

- The principal's judgement that the school's cultural climate was open to change and ready to make a shift from a "selective mode" (characterised by minimal variation in the conditions for learning in which a narrow range of instructional options and a limited number of ways to succeed are available) to an "adaptive mode" (in which the educational environment can provide for a range of opportunities for success and where the intent is to focus on the needs and potential of each individual.) (Darling-Hammond cited in Hargreaves et al, 1998, p.643)

- The principal's awareness of the LCAP as an existing quality innovation in the Irish educational landscape

- The excellent reputation of the LCA Support Service and the LCA Section of the Department of Education in helping schools implement the programme

- The extra funding available

- The principal's eagerness to solve the problem of an increasing cohort of senior cycle students who were no longer motivated by the types of learning currently on offer in the traditional L.C. and the L.C.V.P. of the school

The case for innovation was made during a staff meeting at the end of May 2000 by the principal and the LCA programme was implemented the following September.

The co-ordinator and teachers of the programme were selected at the end of August. In-service provision took place during the month of September and October whilst the curricular innovation had been adopted and was up and running in the school.

The particular approach taken in introducing the LCAP in the school under study was impeded by overall time-constraints; by a lack of awareness about the need to go through phases in change-management; by unexpected changes in staff turnover and by a very short time span between the decision to adopt and implement the LCAP. One could argue that as a result of the above mode of initiation leading directly into implementation the reasons for initiating the curricular change and the gathering of evidence about relevance, readiness and availability of resources in relation to it, did not receive the attention they require. As a consequence and highly relevant given the particular focus of this study, the opportunity to reflect upon various components of the culture in the school under study such as its expectations for students, the students' own expectations, expectations for teachers, beliefs of what counts as acceptable educational practice and basic beliefs and assumptions about the desirability of this curricular change into the school prior to its adoption was sacrificed.

This research study is an attempt to provide LCA teachers with a renewed opportunity to reflect upon the above, six years after the decision was made to go ahead with the programme in the school and to gain insight into their perceptions

regarding the initiation, implementation and institutionalisation of a complex curricular change such as the LCAP in the context of their own school.

Summary

Chapter one has outlined the particular focus of this study and identified the reason why it was undertaken. It traced the origins of the LCAP both in the general context of educational development in Ireland and in the specific context of the author's own school.

The chapter that follows will provide an overview of the literature in relation to change management. More specifically the chapter will expose the complexity inherent in a curricular change such as the LCAP, present the challenges in realising a culture of professional collaboration and explore the subjective reality in which LCA teachers are expected to implement changes in their pedagogy.

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Chapter 2   Review of Literature

2.1   LCA and Change Complexity

As has been shown in chapter one, the LCAP is one example constituting a

curricular change of considerable proportion. The programme invites teachers not

only to teach new content and embrace new technologies but also to alter their

underlying beliefs, values and taken-for-granted assumptions. Those entrusted

with the initiation, implementation and institutionalisation of the programme need

to familiarise themselves with the different levels of change management, each of

which need careful consideration.

The LCA Programme Statement stresses in its opening pages that the programme

is characterised by:

> -the use of teaching styles which actively involve the participants in
> locating and using relevant information, and which promote personal
> responsibility, initiative, independence, reflection, self-evaluation, self-
> confidence and co-operation
> -a variety of teaching and learning processes including group work, project
> work and the use of individualised learning assignments
> -a teaching approach designed to address and meet the needs of the
> participants
> -the identification and use of teaching and learning resources in the local
> community and interaction with employers and enterprises
> -an appropriate range of modes and techniques for assessing the progress of
> participants
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.11)

When analysing the above characteristics it becomes obvious that certain

expectations of LCA teachers are raised. They are encouraged to provide learning

and teaching experiences of an active, practical and student-centred nature, to

emphasise out-of-school learning and work experiences, to achieve inter-

disciplinary and cross-curricular integration and to engage students in group and team-work.

One could even argue that the LCAP promulgates a new image of teaching: one in which the teacher assumes a role beyond that of a didactic classroom instructor and instead becomes a facilitator of learning. Relating to students as autonomous, dynamic learners and developing their higher order thinking skills within application contexts is radically different from relating to students in passive and sedentary roles. Sergiovanni has warned that such a teacher role is not without its challenges. He stresses how tough taking responsibility for one's own learning is under ideal conditions but becomes virtually impossible when we keep asking students to play the ability game of learning rather than the task game of learning:

> When we ask children to play the task game of learning, we ask them to master tasks that are challenging and interesting. Students come to understand that what is valued is mastery, hard work, taking on challenges and making progress. In this culture the emphasis is on the development of ability rather than the demonstration of ability.
>
> (Sergiovanni, 2001, p.74)

In addition, the programme requires teachers to adopt new teaching repertoires for example active teaching approaches and differentiation. Elliot Eisner has illustrated how difficult it is to bring about changes in robust factors such as teacher's internalised images of their role and their familiar pedagogical routines. (Eisner, 1998)

Facing a curriculum change of such proportions is by no means an easy task for teachers and unlikely to be successful if:

> The change is over-complex, not understood, poorly communicated, over demanding on individual and existing resources, unclear and untested. On the other hand the change is likely to be successful if it is congruent with

existing practices in the school, understood and communicated effectively, triallable and tried, seen to be an improvement on existing practice by participants.

(Morrison, 1998, p.17)

It will not take teachers too long to discover that the design and intended practices of the LCAP are not only incongruent with existing practices but also require the adoption of new practices and the abandonment of other practices. Those eager to proceed with implementing new curricula should never underestimate the complexity inherent in that discovery. If as Sarason has argued "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think" (Sarason, 1971, p.193) or as Hoyle has stated "The most fundamental form of innovation is the transformation of teachers" (Hoyle cited in McClelland and Varma, 1996, p.45) questions of how to understand the change process from the perspective of the practitioner, how to tune into where teachers actually are in terms of their actual practice and how and why they think as they do must become priorities for those entrusted with introducing curricular changes.

Michael Fullan has identified three components or dimensions at stake when introducing a new programme. All three are important aspects of curriculum change and together they represent the means of achieving a particular educational goal. They include:

the possible use of new or revised materials (direct instructional resources such as curriculum materials or technologies)
the possible use of new teaching approaches (i.e. new teaching strategies or activities)
the possible alteration of beliefs (e.g. pedagogical assumptions and theories underlying particular policies or programs)

(Fullan, 1991, p.37)

Although the nature of the change process is complex, unpredictable and multi-dimensional, there are some key insights and ideas in the literature enabling us to comprehend the intricacies of curriculum change better and correspondingly to develop the mindset and instincts to take more effective action.

Most researchers acknowledge the emergence of three broad phases at various intervals throughout the change process:

> Phase 1- variously labelled initiation, mobilization or adoption-consists of the process that leads up to and includes a decision to adopt or proceed with a change.
> Phase 2- implementation or initial use (usually the first two or three years of use)-involves the first experiences of attempting to put an idea or reform into practice.
> Phase 3- called continuation, incorporation, routinization or institutionalisation-refers to whether the change gets built in as an ongoing part of the system or disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition.
>
> (Fullan, 1991, pp.47-48)

One needs to keep in mind that this only represents a very general and oversimplified image of what is in reality a much more detailed and snarled process.

Nevertheless it is important that those entrusted with the co-ordination of a multi-level social process involving many people develop a nuanced and sensitive approach towards some of its key features.

Whilst the total time perspective and the sub-phases of the change process can never be precisely demarcated, what is evident from Fullan's view is that the change process is lengthy and may take several years. Thus it is important that programme co-ordinators or curriculum leaders, if they are to be effective in leading change, are appointed at the initial stage of consideration of the possible

introduction of the new programme and continue to lead it through to the point of its implementation.

The complexity inherent in trying to realise a particular feature of the LCAP namely cross-curricular integration will be the focus in the pages that follow. They will seek to illustrate how the implementation of cross-curricular integration is based on the underlying assumptions that teachers are willing to move from their current context of isolation towards professional collaboration and that educational leaders are ready to make necessary changes in the school's organisational setting to facilitate it. Without sufficient attention to a number of factors which will be outlined subsequently, such a major shift requiring both a cultural and structural re-orientation within a school will continue to be underestimated by the implementers of curricular changes.

2.2 Towards a Culture of Professional Collaboration

2.2.1 Introduction

One of the key features in the LCA programme is:

> Establishing the concept of integration as a central element of the programme structure and of the participants' learning experience.

> (Department of Education and Science, 2000.p.8)

The LCAP is cross-curricular in so far as learning which takes place in the different courses within the programme is linked together. This is achieved primarily through specific student tasks. A Student Task is a practical activity and/or process of reflection through which the student integrates and applies learning experiences gained from undertaking the LCAP to the development of a product, the investigation of an issue, the performance of an action, the provision of a service, the staging of an event, personal reflection.

The Student Task has thus a crucial role to play in helping students integrate the knowledge and skills that they have acquired in the different curriculum areas. This was acknowledged in the "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied" in 2000 when inspectors noted "apart from the student task, cross curricular integration remains an elusive goal." (Ibid, p.49)

Cross-curricular integration requires that teachers of different courses in the programme develop a team approach:

> Excellent teamwork by the LCA teaching team ensures cross-curricular integration of the student tasks

> (Ibid, p.51)

Arguments outlining the need for teamwork among teachers have never been more compelling than in contemporary educational literature.

David Tuohy, for example, acknowledges that:

> Modern schools show an increasing need for teamwork among teachers. Teachers may be involved in teams relating to a particular subject department, a curricular development or a team-teaching project... Requirements for teamwork in schools may arise from devolved management structures, educational planning groups and pedagogy.

> (Tuohy, 1994, p.47)

One of the seven interlocking components in Michael Fullan's outline of what the new work of teachers will entail states:

> Teachers will have to work in highly interactive and collaborative ways, avoiding the pitfalls of wasted collegiality, while working productively with other teachers, administration, parents and business and community agencies.

> (Fullan, 1993, p.81)

The inspectors in the "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied" recommended the establishment of formal meetings of the LCA teaching team to ensure that curriculum integration occurs in a planned and coherent way. They indicated that in 52% of schools evaluated, there was a need for such formal meeting time and that LCA teachers themselves felt the need for more meeting time. The fact that:

> In many schools meeting time was not scheduled for LCA teachers to facilitate planning and cross-curricular integration

> (Ibid, p.75)

and that curricular integration rarely occurred outside the context of the Student Task illustrates an underestimation of the curricular orientations contained in the LCAP and the challenges they pose to a school's teacher culture and organisational capacity.

This enquiry will seek to ascertain whether this still remains the case six years later at least in the context of the school under study. The study will be sensitive to the fact that realising cross-curricular integration implies that teachers move from their current context of isolation towards professional collaboration with colleagues and that educational leaders make necessary changes in the school's organisational setting to facilitate it. This is a major shift requiring both a cultural and a structural re-orientation within the school. In planning for the adoption of such a shift Fullan argues that sufficient attention must go to the gathering of evidence about matters of relevance, readiness and resources.

Relevance includes:

> The interaction of need, clarity of the innovation and utility or what it really has to offer teachers and students.
>
> (Fullan, 1991, p.63)

Most initiators of curricular changes discover very quickly that reform cannot work unless its key participants know and understand the why, what and how of the reform.

Readiness can be interpreted either at an individual or at an organisational level and will form the focus of two subsequent headings in this section.

The element of resources concerns the accumulation and the provision of support as a part of the change process and forms the final consideration in Fullan's planning for initiation. However, he displays an awareness of what initiating curricular changes in Irish schools may look like in reality:

> Ideally a combination of all three should exist at the launch stage, but it is not always possible to sort out the three elements of relevance, readiness and resources in advance. It may be necessary to start on a small scale and use this as leverage for further action. (Fullan, 1991, p.64)

In the context of realising cross-curricular integration within the LCAP and using it as a lever for change one is, in essence, looking at readiness for individual and organisational change in the school's cultural setting from teacher isolation to teacher collaboration.

2.2.2   An Individual's Readiness

In order to establish an individual's readiness for change adoption he or she must be provided with the opportunities to work out questions such as: Does the change respond to a perceived need I can identify with? Is it a reasonable, practical and realistic change for me personally? Do I possess the necessary skills, knowledge and disposition to adopt the change in a meaningful way?

Those initiating curricular innovations such as the LCAP must acknowledge the importance of establishing an individual's readiness for change. Not in the least because the present context of teacher work, most teachers have been embedded in for years, is characterised by "isolation, protection from outside interference and walls of privatism." (Fullan, 1993, p.34) In a culture as the one outlined above, teachers have developed characteristic orientations to their work which Lortie calls "presentism, conservatism and individualism." (Lortie cited in Hargreaves, 1992, p.220) Callan has clarified presentism as "being caught up in present and immediate matters" and as "concentrating on short-term concerns for the class." (Callan, 1998, p.3)

He defines conservatism as:

> School staffs not discussing, thinking about or committing themselves to
> more fundamental changes which might affect the context of what they do.

(Ibid, p.3)

In such a very individual type of work environment teachers do not place a priority on professional collaboration because the necessity for them to interact professionally with colleagues simply does not arise. As acknowledged by Barth:

> Teachers' relations with one another are mostly marked by congeniality (being pleasant) but not collegiality (serious professional interaction)

> (Barth cited in Evans, 1996, p. 233)

This study will be sensitive to the above issue but seek to explore how LCA teachers who work in a culture characterised by individualism, conservatism and presentism and without adequate time to meet for example respond to demands for cross-curricular integration. The inquiry will pose the question: to what extent does this culture hinder the development of teamwork-a necessity for cross curricular integration to be realised? By listening to the voices of teachers currently engaged in the LCAP, the scope of their individual readiness and challenges they face in changing from a culture of individualism towards a culture of collaboration will be exposed.

At an individual teacher level, Schein has asserted that a person's acceptance of a new perspective depends much less on its intrinsic validity than on the person's own readiness to consider any new ideas at all. (Schein cited in Evans, 1996)

It will thus be important for implementers of curricular changes such as the LCAP to ascertain whether individual LCA teachers are open and ready to put their energies into collaborative efforts that mean not only more work but also more complex work with adults in addition to students. Do LCA teachers see this as relevant or does having to invest more time in the workplace and engaging in

higher levels of sophisticated adult interaction require changes of them that swim

too much against the tide of life and career they currently find themselves in?

It remains to be seen to what extent Evans' argument that:

> Efforts to enhance collaboration and collegiality in schools provoke apathy
> more than resistance; they just rarely get very far. Teachers aren't hotly
> opposed so much as disinterested.
>
> (Evans, 1996, p.233)

reflects the current realities of LCA teachers in this study.

The fact that LCA teaching teams can be quite diverse in their composition

including both inexperienced teachers who may lack confidence and teachers who

have taught for many years in a traditional way in a subject centred curriculum

that may find it difficult to adapt can be an additional contributing factor in

inhibiting collegial forms of consultation. Law and Glover have highlighted the

"incompatibility of individuals" in this context and the difficulties that arise when

asking such individuals to engage in cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary work.

(Law and Glover, 2000, p.125)

Huberman's insight that:

> Most teachers are likely to be able to work productively at a level of
> classroom practice only if they have broadly compatible educational beliefs
> and similar approaches to their teaching.
>
> (Huberman cited in Hargreaves, 1994, p. 205)

makes the job of promoting relevance and constructing a shared understanding

among LCA teachers through their interactions with one another within the

programme such a challenging one for LCAP co-ordinators.

2.2.3   <u>A School's Readiness</u>

In addition there is a school's readiness or "its organisational capacity to adopt

and implement an innovation" to consider as a key in bringing about successful

change. (Evans, 1996, p.199) One of the five components constituting school

capacity according to Newman et al is " the creation of school-wide professional

learning communities." (Newman et al cited in Fullan, 2001, p.64)

Little, Rosenholtz and Nias have provided helpful insights into what they look

like in practice. Judith Little has described different kinds of collegial relations

among teachers. They include: scanning for ideas and resources or storytelling;

help and assistance; sharing and finally joint work. (Little cited in Fullan and

Hargreaves, 1992, p.64) She argues that the fourth type joint work is the strongest

form of collaboration and the one most likely to lead to improvement. Joint work

involves deeper forms of interaction such as joint planning, observation and

experimentation. It implies and creates greater interdependence, shared

responsibility, collective commitment and improvement and more readiness to

participate in review and critique. If LCA teachers are to work effectively in

teams and fulfil the goals of cross-curricular integration, an ongoing sophisticated

class of interaction as described by Little under joint work is required. The fact

that joint work is dependent on the structural organisation of time, task and other

resources may be a contributing factor in understanding its rare occurrence.

According to Nias collaborative cultures need a high degree of both security and

openness among teachers to work well. Such cultures consist of pervasive

qualities, attitudes and behaviours that run through staff relations on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis:

> Help, support, trust and openness are at the heart of these relationships. Beneath that, there is a commitment to valuing people as individuals and valuing the groups to which people belong.

(Nias cited in Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992, p.66)

Stoll et al have also emphasised the importance of trust and the quality of relationships as two important dimensions of building successful learning communities. (Stoll et al cited in Harris and Muijs, 2005)

Rosenholtz's study of seventy-eight schools in Tennessee provides us with another glimpse of what the distinctive collaborative culture of learning enriched schools entails. (Rosenholtz, 1989) She illustrated that in such schools teachers worked together more than in learning impoverished schools. Most teachers, even the most experienced, believed that teaching was inherently difficult. Consequently they recognised that they sometimes needed help. Requests for and offers of collegial advice and assistance did therefore not imply incompetence but were part of a common quest for improvement.

The belief that teaching is inherently difficult and the recognition that one needs help is perhaps more easily acknowledged by members of an LCA teaching team than amongst teachers in more academic programmes. This enquiry will explore to what extent this may be the result of having to respond to complex and necessary challenges on a daily basis arising from the inclusion of a high proportion of special needs students in the LCAP; maintaining morale and motivation amongst students at risk of leaving school prematurely; trying to

realise cross-curricular integration and the adoption of an ethic of pastoral care that extends beyond the normal call of duty required of teachers in more traditional programmes.

If the contexts outlined above are to be realised in a traditional school setting, characterised by a teacher culture of individualism and arranged for separate subject teaching along didactic lines, a number of challenges need to be addressed.

2.2.3.1. *The Time Factor*

Providing time to create and accommodate opportunities for professional collaboration constitutes a structural change schools are expected to make. The enhanced teacher allocation at the rate of 1.5 whole-time teachers for each group of twenty LCA students is an example of a resource provided by the Department of Education and Science to allow team meetings to take place. However according to the "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme" inspectors noted that "time as a resource was not always effectively managed in schools" and that "in many schools regular meeting time was not scheduled for LCA teachers." (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.75)

This resource issue indicates the need for schools to review their use of the additional LCA staffing allocation. By providing time for LCA teachers to meet issues such as curricular integration or reluctance to embrace change in the context of a collaborative working culture have the potential to be addressed more constructively. Whilst it is obvious that the process of bringing about a

collaborative culture requires time, the power attributed to time itself can be overestimated. Evans shows an awareness of this in the following extract:

> A truly collaborative culture cannot be implemented simply by structuring interactive opportunities and work arrangements. These may help such a culture ultimately develop, though often they lead to contrived collegiality in which teachers are put through collaborative paces that have little impact and wither away.
> But they work at best, very slowly, and only as part of a larger sustained context that nurtures higher levels of mutual support and permits people to develop truly meaningful relationships rather than artificial connections- and only under a strong leader.
>
> (Evans, 1996, p.241)

Hargreaves is another writer who asked the pertinent question whether newly provided preparation time for teachers would bring about the development of collaboration and collegiality among teachers or whether the use of such time would be absorbed into the existing culture of individualism? (Hargreaves, 1994) Although his findings were more complex than the possibilities posed by either of those alternatives, it is interesting to note that contrived collegiality emerged in them as well. If schools are going to organise teachers' collaborative working relationships through meetings that are administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space and predictable and expect professional collaboration as an automatic outcome, they demonstrate a limited understanding of the intricacies involved in the process of reculturing.

2.2.3.2.   *The Support Factor*

The extent to which schools demonstrate a willingness to provide and /or develop assistance and support for their teachers beyond the stage of adoption is often a

good indicator of their overall readiness and commitment towards change
implementation.

Huberman and Miles examined twelve case studies of innovations in detail and
concluded that change-bearing curricular innovations live or die by the amount
and quality of assistance their users received once the change process was under
way:

> The forms of assistance were various. The high assistance sites set up
> external conferences, in-service training sessions, visits, committee
> structures and team meetings. They also furnished a lot of ongoing
> assistance in the form of materials, peer-consultation, access to external
> consultants, and rapid access to central office personnel… Although strong
> assistance alone did not succeed in smoothing the way in early
> implementation, especially for the more demanding innovations, it paid
> handsome dividends later on by substantially increasing the levels of
> commitment and practice mastery.
>
> (Huberman and Miles cited in Joyce, 1990, p.5)

Whilst the above quotation must be analysed in its particular context, it provides
this inquiry with two specific questions: Does the current reality in the school
under study fall short in providing the range and quality of assistance necessary
during the early implementation phase of curriculum innovations such as the
LCAP that require changes in teacher culture? What happens to the range and
quality of assistance once the curricular change reaches the phase of
institutionalisation? This study will seek to identify whether or not there is a
sufficient level of understanding on the part of the school regarding the depth of
change its LCA teachers are expected to embark upon. In particular, the study
desires to uncover the extent to which the experiences of LCA teachers
incorporate a social – psychological fear of change and/or a sense of lacking the

know-how or skills when trying to make a curricular change such as the LCAP

work in their own school. Their responses to the above issue may raise disturbing

questions for schools where curricular innovations appear to get implemented

smoothly but when analysed more closely never really get at fundamental,

underlying systemic features of school life nor change the behaviour, norms and

beliefs of practitioners and end up being grafted onto existing practices and often

being greatly modified if not fully overcome by those practices.

Little goes as far as warning that:

> Smoothly implementing sites seem to get that way by reducing the initial
> scale of the project and by lowering the gradient of actual practice change.
> This downsizing gets rid of most headaches during the initial
> implementation but also throws most of the potential awards away: the
> project often turns into a modest, sometimes trivial enterprise as a result.

> (Little cited in Joyce, 1990, p.9)

It remains to be seen to what extent the school under study pays heed to Little's

warning and allows the implementation of the LCAP to alter its existing practices

of schooling.

2.3   Changes in Pedagogy and Teacher Role

2.3.1 Introduction

From the reality in schools one understands that most of the teaching experiences

of LCA teachers lie elsewhere. Their long involvement with subject-based,

academically oriented programmes such as the established Leaving Certificate

and the Junior Certificate, strongly driven by summative assessment, has led them

to interpret their role in a traditional way. It is a teacher's role characterised by

transmitting information, producing exam results, providing a controlled, quiet

and orderly learning environment, relying heavily on text books...

The review of National Policies for Education in Ireland captured this reality of

school-learning aptly:

> Primarily didactic in nature, the teacher is the primary initiator, students
> work alone, lessons are structured around content with a focus on factual
> content, little or no small group problem-solving approaches, little use of
> computer/video technology.
>
> (OECD, 1991)

In a curriculum culture characterised by textbooks, examinations, factual

knowledge and didactic teaching the LCA's modular programme with its broad

learning outcomes and very little knowledge to transmit does not fit in easily. This

is further complicated by the fact that according to Sarason:

> Teachers have inordinate difficulty in thinking other than in terms of
> covering X amount of material in X amount of time.
>
> (Sarason, 1996, p.188)

It is not difficult to see how the intentions as outlined earlier in the LCAP's

rationale seriously challenge teachers to re-examine their role and familiar

pedagogical routines. Teachers attached to familiar pedagogical routines that have

been legitimate, acceptable and comforting for years will be reluctant to relinquish them in the face of a new programme that requires different pedagogical routines and that still has to establish its worth. Perhaps this explains the common phenomenon of teachers who sign up enthusiastically to a new educational reform but end up only making surface-level changes during implementation. As Evans puts so succinctly:

> They teach the new text and try the new method but without incorporating key elements of the reform and clinging, often without being aware of it, to familiar techniques and understandings.
>
> (Evans, 1996, p.78)

This study will be sensitive in tracking the above issue yet at the same time keep in mind Eisner's observation that traditional patterns of doing things are important sources of security for teachers and are often so ingrained that they seem to have a momentum of their own. (Eisner, 1998) The importance of familiar pedagogical routines and the meanings LCA teachers attach to them will be explored as part of this inquiry.

Robert Evans has conceptualised five crucial tasks of transition teachers must be helped to accomplish when facing changes such as the ones outlined above. Trying to implement change without having persuaded people of its necessity beforehand is unlikely to be successful. The most thoughtful and realistic approach Evans has encountered in beginning to accomplish this task is Schein's concept of "unfreezing" or:

> A matter of lessening one kind of anxiety, the fear of trying, but not before mobilising another kind of anxiety namely the fear of not trying.
>
> (Schein cited in Evans, 1996, p.56)

This is by no means an easy task and in the words of Schein himself "one of the most complex and artful of human endeavours. The initiator's task is to invite teachers to face up to realities they preferred to avoid until now, to raise their anxiety and guilt or even disconfirm their satisfaction with current practices. However, it is important that in embarking on this process the initiator manages to preserve the psychological safety of teachers. In reality this means attempting all the time to achieve a fragile equilibrium between pressure and support, change and continuity, confirming one's commitment to the teachers who must accomplish the change even as one expresses one's own commitment to change and urges teachers to act.

According to McLaughlin experience has shown that this balance between confronting teachers with the need for change on the one hand but at the same time conveying a clear message that they are valued and will be supported throughout the change process is essential:

> Pressure is required in most settings to focus attention on a reform objective, support is needed to enable implementation.

> (McLaughlin, 1987, p.173)

2.3.2 Subjective Change

Sufficient attention must also be given to the subjective reality of the teachers expected to implement pedagogical changes. It is a reality adequately captured in the quotation below:

> What happens when you find yourself needing new skills and not being proficient when you are used to knowing what you are doing (in your own eyes, as well as in those of others)? How do you feel when you are called upon to do something new and are not clear about what to do and do not understand the knowledge and value base of new belief systems?

> This kind of experience is classic change material. People feel anxious, fearful, confused, overwhelmed, deskilled, cautious, and – if they have moral purpose - deeply disturbed.
>
> (Fullan, 2001, p.40)

An ability to interpret and understand the array of possible responses referred to in the above extract is an important skill for change agents and implementers of pedagogical change.

Evans alerts us to two additional responses to change that may arise: resistance and reluctance. These are especially valid when teachers perceive the change as being conceived and imposed on them by others. (Evans, 1996, p.92) Another possible response includes feelings of inadequacy. These can arise when teachers are confronted with something different that brings them into a world of uncertainty. Callan describes this world as one where:

> Teachers are uncertain about whether they will be able to cope with the new knowledge and new ways of working and relating to students
>
> (Callan, 1997, p.27)

This enquiry will explore to what extent Callan's description matches the world of LCA teachers in the school under study. What is certain however is that teachers need support when asked to accomplish complex tasks of transition and that ideally this support should be personal, coherent and continuous. According to Fullan "there is no getting around the primacy of personal contact." (Fullan, 1991, p.132)

The implications of denying them that support is evident in Fullan's frequently quoted observation that pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation. (Fullan, 1992)

Teachers must also be given opportunities allowing them to work out their own meaning of what the pedagogical change actually entails for them and to enable them to make it their own:

> Change is a highly personal experience - each and every one of the teachers who will be affected by change must have the opportunity to work through this experience in a way in which the rewards at least equal the cost. The fact that those who advocate and develop changes get more rewards than costs and those who are expected to implement them many more costs than rewards goes a long way in explaining why the more things change the more they remain the same.
>
> (Fullan, 1991, p.127)

Several authors have highlighted the inherent constructivist meaning of change. Fullan warns against assuming that your vision of what the change should be is the one that should or could be implemented automatically. (Fullan, 1991) He promotes a view of implementation as a formative process in which you exchange your reality of what should be through interaction with the actual implementers in the field. Sarason has defined implementation ultimately as a practical undertaking depending for ninety-nine percent on what teachers do and think (Sarason, 1971) Marris has often stated that implementers cannot resolve the crisis of reintegration, a necessary step in the implementation process, on behalf of another:

> Reformers who press staff to innovate have already assimilated the reform and found their own meaning in it. They have already worked out a reformulation of purposes and practices that make sense to them, which may have taken them months or years to accomplish and may have caused them real distress. Denying others the opportunity to make a similar journey, criticizing them for not responding to explanations about change, dismissing their resistance or hesitation as ignorance or prejudice expresses arrogance and contempt for the meaning of other people's lives.
>
> (Marris, 1986, p.155)

The implementation process can thus be conceived of as an invitation to embark on a personal journey that is non-linear, that embraces rational and other faculties and that is dependent on the circumstances of one's particular context.

Evans has long advocated that a key factor in change is what it means to those who must implement it. He has written extensively on the primary meanings of change such as provoking loss, challenging competence, creating confusion and causing conflict and has described how these meanings encourage resistance. (Evans, 1996)

When those entrusted with implementing educational change in the school operate from an inadequate theory of implementation, denying individual teachers an opportunity to fashion their own meaning of change or failing to address the resistance generated in the face of curricular change, the gap between what change means to its authors as opposed to what it means to those who must implement it becomes a schism.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the unpredictability, the non-linearity, multi-dimensional and multi-factorial nature of the change process in general and in the context of the LCAP in particular. The importance of understanding the complexity inherent in the aforementioned process has been highlighted.

The chapter has demonstrated how considerations in planning for the adoption of a curricular change such as the LCAP requiring teachers to move from a culture of isolation towards professional collaboration must pay attention to the matter of readiness. Readiness was approached both in terms of individual and organisational factors. The resources of time and support were emphasised at school level. Finally the pedagogical changes inherent in the LCAP together with the subjective reality of teachers expected to implement them were explored in the last part of the literature review.

The chapter that follows will describe the approach and techniques that were adopted in this research study. It will look at the rationale and methodology for collecting data and the procedures used for analysis.

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Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter will outline the research methodology adopted to investigate the questions raised in chapter two in relation to the complexity of curricular change within the context of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.

It will begin by outlining the rationale for adopting a qualitative mode of research and highlight its features, possibilities and limitations. The strategy for data collection and researching will be described and in particular the qualitative research interview, the interview format, the key informants, the procedure, the research relationship and the piloting of the interview will be explained. Finally the chapter will describe how the data were analysed and how reliability, validity and trustworthiness were sought.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1   Origin of the inquiry

The broad focus of this enquiry is to explore teachers' perceptions in facing the complexity of curricular change inherent in the LCAP. In considering the nature of implementing the LCAP – effectively constituting a second order change requiring LCA teachers not just to do old things differently but also to change their beliefs and perceptions – it was felt that the study should seek to identify and obtain an insight into the experiences, views, perspectives, reactions, thoughts and feelings that a group of LCA teachers have of the programme within the context of their own school.

The underlying reasons for this were the researcher's current position as LCA co-ordinator in the school, her background experience and general interest in the topic. One of the principal tasks she faces as co-ordinator is to support LCA teachers in implementing and delivering a radically different programme within the constraints of an existing teacher culture in the school. In seeking to do so the researcher has developed a subtle awareness of the need to capture the realities of LCA teachers and in particular to listen to their interpretations of those realities in a meaningful manner.

This study provides the researcher with a unique opportunity to develop in a systematic way a deeper understanding of the aforementioned constraints and to place her in a better position to comprehend the complexity of change LCA teachers encounter both at an individual and at an organisational level.

Within the context of time and resources available and the researcher's experiences of six years co-ordinating the LCAP a reasonable portrayal of issues is hoped for.

3.2.2   Rationale for a Qualitative Mode of Research

Chapter one traced the origins of the LCAP and located its emergence as a senior cycle option in the broader context of educational development in Ireland and in the specific context of the researcher's own school.

Chapter two reviewed the literature on educational change noting its complexity and described the process of change LCA teachers embark on when implementing the LCAP. Certain issues relating to the realisation of the LCAP at an individual teacher level and at school level were identified in the literature. These included:

- The need for a culture of professional collaboration to enable cross-curricular integration

- The importance of acknowledging "readiness for change" both at an individual and an organisational level in schools

- The challenges LCA teachers face when confronted with changes in their traditional role and in their pedagogy

If implementing a programme, as Sarason has indicated, is ultimately a practical undertaking depending for ninety-nine percent on what teachers do and think, it seems appropriate that the perceptions and experiences of LCA teachers themselves with regard to the change complexity they encounter in the LCAP should be ascertained.

In doing so, the researcher is aware of the complexity of the phenomenon under study and realises that there are likely to emerge conflicting perspectives and interpretations from the LCA teachers in relation to what is or ought to be occurring within the LCAP in the school.

As the purpose of the study seeks to ascertain the perceptions of a number of key informants – namely the LCA teachers within one school – towards change complexity, professional collaboration and pedagogical changes in order to discover and learn what their views are and why they are that way, a qualitative mode of research was considered.

The appropriateness of such a mode was strengthened by the fact that the researcher had developed considerable empathy with what goes on in the LCAP, maintained an openness regarding the areas to be explored in order to ensure that issues deemed

important or relevant in the eyes of the participants could emerge and by the fact that the research was conducted in the participants natural setting, namely their own school.

In summary, the most determining factors in selecting the qualitative mode of research for this particular study were:

- A desire to capture LCA teachers' authentic reflections of their reality whilst at the same time acknowledging that every LCA teacher has their own view on what they perceive that reality to be

- A concern with searching for the meanings and interpretations LCA teachers assign to what they think, do and value in the LCAP in their own school

3.2.3   Features, Possibilities and Limitations of Qualitative Research

3.2.3.1 Features

This study is dominated by an interpretative research paradigm in so far as it attempts to describe and understand social phenomena rather than develop rules to control them:

> The interpretative research paradigm is primarily concerned with human understanding, interpretation, intersubjectivity, lived truth (i.e. truth in human terms)
>
> (Ernest, 1994, p.24)

However, post modernists increasingly warn that:

> Truth making in the research process is seductive but essentially naïve, that there is a multiplicity of truths, all of which have a legitimacy and are dependent on the positioning of each actor in the research context.
>
> (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p.37)

The interpretative approach rests on the premise that in social life there is only interpretation. Its purpose is to clarify how interpretations and understandings are formulated and given meaning in lived situations. In the words of Hilary Radnor:

> Professionals in the educational system construct personal meanings when they grapple with interpreting the social world of educational policy and making meaningful the implementation of that policy in the working practices of schools and in classrooms.
>
> (Radnor, 2001, p.4)

The researcher's challenge lies in finding out what the actor means in his action as distinct from what the researcher thinks the actor means by interviewing him. An intimate knowledge of the context in which the actors express their meanings thus becomes important for the researcher. As acknowledged by Woods:

> In interpretative work there are no absolute meanings detached from any social context, so we need to know something about that context to make sense of the meanings expressed in them.
>
> (Woods, 1986, p.74)

In adopting a qualitative approach, an approach the interpretative research paradigm lends itself to, the following description of the ethnographer's work resonated with the researcher:

> The ethnographer is interested in what lies beneath – the subjects' view, which may contain alternative views, and their views of each other. From these, the ethnographer may perceive patterns in accounts, or in observed behaviours, which may suggest certain interpretations. The social reality is thus seen to be composed of layers.
>
> (Woods, 1986, p.5)

Fraenkel and Wallen define the work as:

Documenting or portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing or interviewing them and relevant others.

(Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993, p.10)

The researcher in this study will try to achieve the above by conducting in-depth interviews with LCA teachers and the principal in the school and to a lesser extent by drawing occasionally on a number of inside observations she has accumulated in her capacity as LCA co-ordinator, thus conforming to the assertion of Bogdan and Biklen that the best-known representatives of qualitative research studies are:

Those that employ the techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviewing.

(Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.2)

Verma and Mallick see qualitative research as an approach to evidence gathering that:

Reflects the experiences, feelings or judgements of individuals taking part in the investigation of a research issue whether as subjects or as observers of the scene.

(Verma and Mallick, 1999, p.27)

Fraenkel and Wallen state that qualitative research involves obtaining a "holistic picture of what goes on in a particular situation or setting." (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993, p.10)

Bogdan and Biklen offer a broad definition of qualitative research:

We use qualitative research as an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics. The data collected have been termed soft, that is, rich in description of people, places and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalising variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context.

(Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.2)

They identify five features of qualitative research, which are:

- Naturalistic-that is the data are collected in the setting so that the researcher can experience and gain understanding of the natural environment

- Descriptive data-the data collected take the form of words and pictures rather than numbers so that a richness as close as possible to the raw data is obtained

- Concern with process-rather than outcomes and results

- Inductive-rather than seeking data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses

- Meaning-researchers are interested in how participants make sense of their lives

Cohen, Manion and Morrison go even further than this and outline eleven reasons that explain the rationale behind qualitative research and its particular view of the social world:

- People are deliberate and creative in their actions, they act intentionally and make meanings in and through their activities.

- People actively construct their social world

- Situations are fluid and changing rather than fixed and static; events and behaviour evolve over time and are richly affected by context – they are 'situated activities'

- Events and individuals are unique and largely non-generalizable

- A view that the social world should be studied in its natural state, without the intervention of, or manipulation by, the researcher

- Fidelity to the phenomena being studied is fundamental

- People interpret events, contexts and situations, and act on the bases of those events

- There are multiple interpretations of, and perspectives on, single events and situations

- Reality is multi-layered and complex

- Many events are not reducible to simplistic interpretation, hence 'thick descriptions' are essential rather than reductionism

- We need to examine situations through the eyes of participants rather than the researcher.   (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, pp. 21-22)

3.2.3.2   *Limitations of the Qualitative Approach*

The qualitative mode of research is not without its critics.

Bernstein for example has directed criticism at the overriding concern in qualitative research with the meanings of situations and the ways in which these meanings are negotiated by the actors involved. He poses the following question:

> And what of the insistence of the interpretative methodologies on the use of verbal accounts to get at the meaning of events, rules and intentions? Are there not dangers? Subjective reports are sometimes incomplete and they are sometimes misleading.

> (Bernstein cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.27)

Bernstein observes that what is overlooked in negotiated meanings is the fact that they presuppose a structure of meanings wider than the area of negotiation.

He argues that the very process whereby one interprets and defines a situation in itself *is a product of the circumstances in which one is placed.*

Cohen, Manion and Morrison expose the danger inherent in this when stating:

> The danger of interactionist and interpretive approaches is their relative neglect of the power of external-structural-forces to shape behaviour and events. There is a risk in interpretative approaches that they become hermetically sealed from the world outside the participants' theatre of activity – they put artificial boundaries around subjects' behaviour.

<div align="right">(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.27)</div>

This is an important point to consider as the experiences and perceptions of the LCA teachers sought in this study will also be influenced by external, structural factors that fall outside the immediate boundaries of the programme itself.

In interpreting the emerging data the researcher will have to display a heightened sensitivity to those outside forces.

However, the danger as outlined above by Cohen, Manion and Morrison can be addressed and minimised in the range of sources drawn on for databank purposes and also in the way data analysis and interpretation is subsequently engaged in. The manner in which the latter is engaged in is admittedly influenced by how one conceives of the phenomenon of the social construction of the world.

Another area of criticism is directed at the presence of the researcher in the natural setting and relates to the risk that the presence of an outsider may change the behaviour of those being studied, especially if the observational phase is of short duration. Whilst the data for this study were gathered over a relatively short period it was felt that the researcher was viewed as "part of the environment" because of her empathy and intense contact with LCA teachers in her role as LCA co-ordinator

extending a period of more than six years. Throughout this period she has had many

formal and informal opportunities to observe the behaviour of those being studied

and to interact with them on matters of teaching and learning in the LCAP.

Other problems in using a qualitative approach relate to its high demands on time

and resources. There can also be difficulties with data reduction as the quantity of

data can become daunting very quickly. Verma and Mallick highlight the problem

of contamination of data:

> It is important that, in making the records, the researchers avoid the
> temptation to contaminate the data by allowing their value systems to affect
> the record. However careful they might be, it is very difficult over the time
> taken to make the observations for the researchers to avoid becoming active
> participants in the environment and thus distorting the reality they are seeking
> to record.
>
> (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p.88)

Having considered the above, this particular study will pay prudent regard to the

meanings that are assigned to emerging issues. In addition the study will be

attentive to how the various elements of the research procedures are engaged in vis-

à-vis sampling, data induction and data analysis.

Bogdan and Biklen include reliability, the fact that procedures are non-standardized

and the difficulty of studying large populations with the qualitative approach as

further limitations.

3.2.3.3   *Possibilities of the Qualitative Approach*

Despite its limitations and difficulty, as outlined above, the ethnographic approach

has unique benefits:

> At its best, it provides data that are unobtainable by other means and, as we
> have seen, can generate hypotheses which can then be tested by other
> techniques.   (Verma and Mallick, 1999. p.89)

The fact that the qualitative approach is so accessible and has the potential to yield rich data, data that are newsworthy and that cannot be acquired in any other way form perhaps its greatest strengths.

According to Radnor a good interpretative qualitative research study will have:

> Explanatory and illuminating power about the situation under study, uncovering a multiplicity of individual perceptions about the situation and increasing understanding of issues that are present in the situation.
> (Radnor, 2001, p.38)

Bogdan and Biklen seem to be in agreement with her when stating:

> The worth of a study is the degree to which it generates theory, description or understanding. For a study to blame someone for a particular state of affairs, or to label a particular school as "good" or "bad", or present a pat prejudicial analysis can brand a study as superficial.
> (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.34)

3.2.4   A Strategy for Data Collection and Researching

3.2.4.1.   The Qualitative Research Interview

In planning a suitable strategy for data collection the researcher's decision was informed by the aim of this study: to explore, identify and understand the perceptions of LCA teachers towards change complexity, professional collaboration and pedagogical changes in the LCAP within the context of their own school. It was felt that in order to understand what makes LCA teachers do what they do, we need to ask them. This brings us in the realm of meanings. As Radnor points out:

> In terms of interpretive research, the meanings that people attribute to the social situations in which they find themselves are important data. Consequently, a means whereby such information can be successfully collected is needed. The interview format serves this purpose because the interview is an interactive human encounter in which someone seeking information asks for it and, more often than not, is supplied with it by another.
> (Radnor, 2001, p.49)

Interviews were selected as a method of data collection in this study and as the primary means of inquiring into the perceptions of LCA teachers regarding the complexity of curricular change inherent in the LCAP because the researcher was keen to understand at a deeper level the aforementioned perceptions. This qualitative study was guided by Mishler's model of the research interview as outlined below:

> At its heart is the proposition that an interview is a form of discourse. Its particular features reflect the distinctive structure and aims of interviewing, namely, that it is discourse shaped and organised by asking and answering questions. An interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other. The record of an interview that we researchers make and then use in our work of analysis and interpretation is a representation of that talk.
>
> (Mishler cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.80)

The reasons for selecting the above method of data collection were informed by the desire to try and establish a depth of conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee that moves beyond surface talk into a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings. It is one of the reasons why qualitative research interviews are typically referred to as "in-depth" interviews. (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.81)

In order to reach such a level of depth the interviewer in this study engaged with the interviewee over a prolonged period of one hour to one hour and a half so that a rapport could be established and a climate of trust could be fostered.

This also increased the opportunities for personalisation, for asking and for probing on behalf of the interviewer. It was felt that the direct interaction of the interview further enabled the respondents to say more about the areas under study in comparison to other methods of data collection such as the questionnaire. In

addition, the interview was favoured over the questionnaire because of its ability for handling more difficult and open-ended questions. A primary consideration in qualitative research is that the questions invite the interviewee to participate in a conversation. Open-ended questions are difficult in the sense that they are not easily answered with a discrete response, such as "yes" or "no" or a brief word or phrase. However they do provide the interviewer with a unique opportunity to delve for a richer description of data which may in turn enable a further natural probing of emerging issues.

3.2.4.2. *Interview Format*

In deciding what interview format to adopt, the level of skill required of the researcher to maintain the conversation around its format was a primary consideration. As this researcher was a novice interviewer, the development of an interview schedule as distinct from an unstructured interview or an interview guide was deemed to be the best alternative. Whilst all three formats are characterised by open-ended questions designed to reveal what is important to understand about the phenomenon under study, the interview schedule provides a structure consisting of "a detailed set of questions and probes." (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.83) Thus the researcher developed several open-ended questions under each of the three categories of inquiry suggested by the review of the literature: Change Complexity and LCA, Professional Collaboration and Changes in Pedagogy and Teacher Role. In developing the interview schedule for the principal an additional category of inquiry entitled Teacher Supports was included.

In the interview schedule for teachers questions one to five were designed to elicit responses from LCA teachers about their perceptions and experiences in relation to the complexity of the LCAP as a curricular change.

Questions six to nine sought to explore the level and nature of collaborative practices among LCA teachers in the contexts of cross-curricular integration and collegial interactions and to identify the factors that would enhance such practices.

Questions ten to fourteen sought to ascertain to what extent LCA teachers cope with and respond to the changes in pedagogy as advocated in the programme's substance and have altered their existing teacher role.

The researcher felt that the above outline would increase the comprehensiveness of the data, enhance data collection and allow her to anticipate and perhaps close logical gaps in the data. At the same time the format of the interview schedule ensured that the interview remained fairly conversational and situational. At all times the researcher remained conscious of Patton's advice:

> The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which the respondents can express their own understanding in their own terms.

<div align="right">(Patton cited in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p.97)</div>

3.2.4.3 *Key Informants*

The population selected for the interviews was a "purposeful sample" (Wiersma, 1995, p.214) as the researcher selected purposefully a group of LCA teachers in her own school in order to gain a richer and deeper understanding of their experiences with curricular change in the LCAP.

As Babbie has acknowledged:

Occasionally it might be appropriate for you to select your sample on the basis of your own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of your research aims. This method of sampling is called purposive or judgemental sampling.

(Babbie, 1990, p.141)

Purposive Sampling in this study consisted of purposefully selecting a group of people - in this case LCA teachers – to gain a rich and deep understanding of their perceptions in relation to the complexity of curricular change within the LCAP. The decision to confine the study to the LCA teachers within the researcher's own school rather than across a range of schools was informed by the following criteria:

- The researcher's intimate knowledge of the context and culture of the school in question and her deep involvement with the LCAP for more than six years were considered an advantage and were used in the validation of data which form part of a later discussion in this chapter.

- LCA teachers in one school are affected by similar structural constraints e.g. the school's timetable, the actual school building and layout and by cultural elements e.g. tradition of out of school meetings, collegial perceptions about the programme …

- Having considered time and other resource constraints it was decided to confine the research to a single site. This improved the ease of access to the research participants for conducting in-depth interviews

- A deep desire and genuine curiosity about understanding the experiences of members in the researcher's LCA teaching team more comprehensively informed the decision as well.

- Providing a platform and an opportunity for LCA teachers to speak their

  minds in a way and in such detail that rarely occurs within the normal

  constraints of a typical school day featured in the decision.

  As Stenhouse has indicated:

  Part of my job is to give people not merely that they have my ear, my mind
  and my thoughts concentrated on them but that they want to give an account
  of themselves because they see the interview as in someway an opportunity:
  an opportunity of telling someone how they see the world.

  <div align="center">(Stenhouse cited in Woods, 1986, p.69)</div>

Seven LCA teachers were selected to participate in an in-depth interview.

This selection was determined by the strategy of "maximum variation sampling"

where the researcher attempts to understand a social phenomenon by seeking out

persons that represent the greatest difference in that phenomenon.

Thus the selection of seven LCA teachers was determined by criteria such as

gender, age, length of engagement with the LCAP in the school, course element

represented and by characteristics pertaining to the LCA course itself.

- One LCA teacher was male, six were female broadly reflecting the current

  gender balance in the seventeen member LCA team of eighteen percent males

  and eighty-two percent females in the school

- The ages of the LCA teachers in the sample ranged from twenty four to fifty

- The length of engagement with the programme in the school among the

  various LCA teachers ranged from less than one year for two teachers, under

  two and a half years for two other teachers and over five years for the three

  remaining teachers

- Three LCA teachers were chosen from the general education course element and three were chosen from the vocational education course element. One LCA teacher was chosen to represent the vocational preparation course element of the programme

In order to obtain a leadership perspective the principal in the school was approached and invited to discuss his perceptions and experiences of engaging with the LCAP in his own school.

Whilst the above provided the researcher with the variability of random selection she remained cognisant of the goal in a qualitative study that is not to generalise.

3.2.4.4.   Procedure

The school principal through informal discussion granted research access to the site. The researcher approached each LCA teacher informally before inviting him or her to participate in an interview. The areas that would be discussed as part of the interview were communicated to participants in advance. As interviews were to be taped it was explained that recordings were for the purpose of the researcher's recalling and coding of information received. The confidentiality of the process was assured.

The interviews took place in a venue chosen by the interviewee and at a convenient time. The researcher made a conscious attempt to ensure that the interviewees felt listened to and especially that their points of views were appreciated in a non-judgemental way. During the interview, the researcher confined any discourse to questioning and to supportive words and gestures and no personal opinions were

communicated. The procedures adopted at the interviews adhered closely to

Tuckman's guidelines:

> At the meeting, the interviewer should brief the respondent as to the nature or purpose of the interview (being as candid as possible without biasing responses) and attempt to make the respondent feel at ease. He should explain the manner in which he will be recording responses, and if he plans to tape record, he should get the respondent's assent. At all times, an interviewer must remember that he is a data collection instrument and try not to let his own biases, opinions, or curiosity affect his behaviour. It is important that the interviewer should not deviate from his interview schedule although many schedules will permit some flexibility in choice of questions. The respondent should be kept from rambling away from the essence of a question, but not at the sacrifice of courtesy.
>
> (Tuckman cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001, p.279)

3.2.4.5   *Research Relationship*

The research subjects in another form of relationship knew this researcher. As a

result, the need for being particularly sensitive in how to pursue a research

relationship was perceived. It was obvious that the key informants knew the

researcher as the LCA co-ordinator in the school and as someone with an active

interest in the programme.

Bogdan and Biklen warn that:

> People who are intimately involved in a setting find it difficult to distance themselves both from personal concerns and from their common sense understandings of what is going on. For them, more often than not, their opinions are more than "definitions of the situation" they are the truth. Since a major part of your goal is to study what people take for granted, it is important that you do not take the same perspectives for granted. Others in the setting in which you are doing your research, if they know you well, are not used to relating to you as a neutral observer. Rather, they see you as a teacher or as a member of a particular group, as a person who has opinions and interests to represent.
>
> (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.52)

Certain sensitivities were therefore kept in mind for the duration of the research.

- The researcher recorded her feelings prior and immediately after each interview as a method to control any personal biases she may have and as a source for reflecting throughout the study

- When inviting LCA teachers to participate in the study it was clarified that this was a confidential study and in no way a means or vehicle for evaluating individual teachers or the LCA programme itself in the school.

Because the type of leadership demonstrated by the researcher in her role as LCA co-ordinator was largely "facilitative" and "enabling" in nature the request to conduct a qualitative interview was hopefully not perceived as a threat nor generated unnecessary fears in relation to a possible lack of knowledge about the LCAP.

The researcher's approach was reassuring and encouraging allowing participants an opportunity to share their own perspectives in relation to curricular change within the LCAP through the use of open-ended questions. Being part of the same school as the key informants meant that the researcher shared part of the 'LCA teachers' emotional world and is closer to them than an outsider who in many ways can never really know what it is like on the ground. The shared rapport and level of trust between researcher and research subjects not only enhanced the emerging data but also helped the researcher with interpreting the data in context. As acknowledged by Bogdan and Biklen:

Researchers can never eliminate all of their own affects on subjects or obtain a perfect correspondence between what they wish to study – the "natural setting" – and what they actually study - "a setting with a researcher present." They can however understand their effect on the subjects through an intimate knowledge of the setting, and use this understanding to generate additional insights into the nature of social life. Researchers learn to "discount" some of their data, that is, to interpret them in context.

(Deutscher cited in Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.35)

3.2.4.6.   *Piloting Interview Schedule*

In order to identify potential pitfalls in the interview schedules two pilot interviews were conducted by the researcher prior to the final eight and were subsequently listened to on tape. The first pilot interview revealed a tendency by the researcher to ask leading questions at times instead of cultivating the art of listening. The researcher's lack of confidence in her interview skills also emerged during the first pilot interview that was characterised by apprehension and anxiety on the part of the novice researcher. Through careful listening to the taped record of the first pilot interview she realised that she had adhered too rigidly to the questions of the interview schedule and on a number of occasions had imposed the exact order of questioning in the interview schedule on the interviewee. This prevented the interview schedule from becoming what it is intended to be: an enabling framework, loose, open-ended and flexible. Informed by this observation from Woods she realised that:

Alternative frameworks may occur as the interview proceeds, suggested by responses. The original is not lost, but aspects that are important to the interviewee only become apparent when they speak, and they may, in fact, absorb the original checklist.

(Woods, 1986, p.78)

Consequently the researcher made sure she created a more relaxed atmosphere and was totally familiar with the interview schedule prior to conducting the second pilot interview. During this interview she made a conscious effort to let go of the plan on occasions in order to respond to opportunities the interview situation presented. The second pilot interview brought home the benefits of preserving patience on the part of the interviewer. There was an increased comfortableness with interviewees' initial hesitations, delays or silences in the immediate aftermath of trying to respond to a question. Through 'waiting' and 'some gentle probing' at times, a fuller explanation and a clearer articulation of what the interviewee was trying to communicate emerged and provided for richer data.

There were no alterations made to the categories of enquiry in the light of the pilot interviews. However, the language in questions three and four under the category Change Complexity was simplified. A rather complicated question in the third category was divided up into two separate questions (eleven and twelve) to enhance overall coherence.

There was no pilot interview conducted prior to the interview with the principal, as he was the last person to be interviewed in the school under study. The researcher felt she had built up sufficient expertise in conducting nine interviews prior to the one with the principal. However, the insights gained from those led the researcher to alter the order of the first two questions in the category Teacher Collaboration. This was deemed necessary as it presented the questions more adequately as an inquiry into the level and nature of teacher collaboration as distinct from a specific inquiry into a curriculum design feature of the LCAP. In addition it was felt important to

invite the principal to consider the kinds of support provided to LCA teachers and to identify the areas where he perceived LCA teachers would benefit from further support. Thus a fourth category entitled Teacher Supports was included.

3.2.5   Analysis of Data

Analysing the data collected from eight transcribed qualitative interviews is a process that involves close examination of the data gathered.

In analysing the data for this qualitative study the six-step technique recommended by Hilary Radnor was employed:

> Topic ordering, constructing categories, reading for content, completing the coded sheets, generating coded transcripts, analysis to interpreting the data.

> (Radnor, 2001, p.71)

After having sequentially numbered the pages of the transcripts from each interview e.g. A5 = Interview Transcript A, page five, the first step was to list the topics that appeared on reading the whole transcript.

Whilst the questions in the interview schedule oriented around LCA and change complexity, professional collaboration and pedagogical changes gave access to some of the topics, additional ones did emerge. For example the topic of team teaching, the contrast between a singular approach and a more collaborative approach as experienced by some participants and the gap between the intentions as advocated in the LCAP's rationale as distinct from their actual realisation on the ground. These were drawn out from the transcript because they were either implicitly embedded in responses or explicitly stated in other responses. From this a

list of topics was compiled and each topic was put on a separate A3 sheet with the

topic name and its abbreviation (identifiable code)

beside it. The next step consisted of constructing categories within each topic. This

basically involved reading the transcripts again and identifying possible

subheadings under each topic. Each subheading was given a number, e.g. Topic

LCA and Change Complexity: Code = CCLCA

1 = reasons given for bringing in LCA into the school

2 = attitudes to the differential nature of the LCAP

3 = changes inherent in teaching LCAP

4 = level of difficulty experienced

5 = anticipated changes at school level

After completing the above the researcher began to highlight the main quotes in the

transcripts. Beside each quote she wrote the codename, the category number it was

linked to and a second number to indicate that this was the first quote under that

category found e.g. CCLCA 2.1: CCLCA is the code, two is the category heading

and one denotes that it is the first quote under that category found.

The fourth step involved taking the previously prepared A3 coded sheets for each

topic and inserting the appropriate codes in the correct places. This enabled the

identification of different chunks of data from the eight interviews to become

clearly visible on one sheet. Step five required the photocopying of the transcripts

so that a master-copy was kept intact at all times. The researcher then proceeded

with cutting and sticking the data under categories. This gave her access to all data

under these categories in one place. It was only after this step was completed that

the final analysis stage namely interpretation became possible. As Radnor has

stated:

> In this final analysis stage the data are subject to a refining process. By that I
> mean the chunks of data under the specific categories are read for different
> subtleties of meaning.
>
> (Radnor, 2001, p.88)

In engaging with these "subtleties of meaning" the researcher moves into the realm

of interpretation. Once she has compiled all her coded transcripts she is in a position

to write a summary of the findings generated by the data within each category as

interpreted by her. It is hoped that at this point the basis for an understanding of

what is going on in a particular setting will emerge and illuminate the phenomenon

under study.

3.2.6   Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

In the context of qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a fit between

what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is

being researched. Bogdan and Biklen define this as "a degree of accuracy and

comprehensiveness of coverage" (Bogdan and Biklen cited in Cohen, Manion and

Morrison, 2001, p.119) and do not share Wiersma's view of reliability as "the

extent to which studies can be replicated in both procedures and findings."

(Wiersma, 1995, p.272) It is important to acknowledge for the purpose of this study

that qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as:

> A fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting
> under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations.
>
> (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.36)

Careful piloting of the interview schedule, some training of the interviewer as part

of her M. Ed. programme and meticulous coding of responses enhanced the

reliability of the interviews conducted. Whilst cognisant of the fact that all

researchers have certain biases the researcher was conscious that her bias might

compromise the findings of this study. Verma and Mallick define bias as:

> The researcher's conscious or subconscious influence in the process of
> research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of data can distort
> the conclusion of an investigation.

<div align="right">(Verma and Mallick, 1999, p.105)</div>

The researcher was conscious of two issues in particular:

- As an LCA co-ordinator in the school, the researcher had been deeply

  involved in the LCAP for six years. She was aware that through her

  involvement she had developed views and perceptions in relation to what she

  deems to be good practice or otherwise in LCA teachers. She was conscious

  that this might influence her objectivity in collecting and interpreting the

  data. However, plenty of scope was given to the participating LCA teachers

  in this study to give their perceptions. The researcher's overall approach to

  the study was guided by the opinions of Bogdan and Biklen:

  > "..you are not there to give views, but to learn what the subjects' views
  > are and why they are that way...

  <div align="right">(Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p.99)</div>

- Because of her personal interest in the topic of the LCAP the researcher was

  aware that her opinions about the programme might influence her to ask

  questions in such a way to fulfil those opinions. However, careful

preparations of the interview schedule and piloting helped to address this issue.

The validity of any body of research refers to its quality of truth. Cohen et al have argued that validity in qualitative research is difficult to define and that perhaps understanding is a more appropriate term. (Cohen et al, 2001)

This study chose to use the interview method with eight key informants in their natural setting in seeking to ensure trustworthiness, validity and reliability and followed the advice of Wiersma that "in the absence of controls, the naturalness of the data enhances validity." (Wiersma, 1995, p.274)

Woods explains that interviews should be used in conjunction with other methods of research and that ideally they should be accompanied by observation. (Woods, 1986, p.88) On occasions during this research study, the researcher drew on inside observations. For example when teachers were outlining the changes in their role as a teacher in the LCAP the researcher would have witnessed some of them relating to LCA students in a manner that paid testimony to what they shared in interviews. On occasions the researcher observed teachers in the LCAP engaging in task work and in completing task reports with students. This enabled her to interpret and validate the emerging data regarding cross-curricular integration more succinctly. Teachers of various course areas regularly hand up completed key assignments in their various course modules. This provided the researcher with a unique opportunity to gain insight into their adopted teaching approaches. Often these matched their descriptions of how they addressed the learning outcomes in their

course during interviews. The researcher would also have observed formal and informal interactions among LCA colleagues enriching her understanding of the contexts in which LCA teachers referred to them subsequently in interviews. Whilst acknowledging that constraints of time and resources prevented this researcher from observing the eight interviewees over a prolonged period in addition to the eight in-depth interviews she conducted with each of them, the researcher has had numerous opportunities to observe the eight interviewees in the classroom, in the staff-room and at LCA team meetings in her capacity as LCA co-ordinator over the past six years. This enabled her, up to a certain extent, not only to validate the emerging data from LCA teachers and principal but also to testify that they espoused the qualities of integrity, honesty and openness at all times during the research.

Summary

This chapter has described the methodology adopted to explore the perceptions LCA teachers have of change complexity, professional collaboration and pedagogical changes in the LCAP within their own school.

Having described the origins of the inquiry, the features, limitations and possibilities of qualitative research the researcher then justified the interview method adopted in this study. Finally the chapter addressed the issues and concerns raised by the method adopted including reliability, validity and trustworthiness. The next chapter will describe and analyse the data collected.

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Chapter 4   Presentation of the Research Findings

4.1   Introduction

This research was undertaken to explore the perceptions of LCA teachers in relation to the complexity of curricular change within the context of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. The issues identified for study in the literature review and pursued through the research process included: LCA and Change Complexity, Teacher Collaboration and Changes in Pedagogy and Teacher Role. This chapter will present the data gathered from interviews with nine LCA teachers and their principal in the researcher's own school. It will also lead to the following chapter, which will discuss the findings in the light of the literature review and identify areas for further research and development.

The first section in this chapter will address the dichotomy that exists between the intentions as outlined in the LCAP's rationale on the one hand and teachers' actual experiences of trying to realise them in the school under study on the other hand. The second theme explores the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards change in general and to the LCAP in particular. Multiple change perspectives, which among other factors impact significantly on the attitudes of participants towards the LCAP, are revealed in the data.

The third theme in this chapter entitled "Teachers and Professional Collaboration" selects one of the key features in the LCAP namely cross-curricular integration as its starting point. Having exposed the gap between the ideal and the realisation of

the above principle, the challenges inherent in creating time for collaboration in the LCAP and in overcoming a culture of isolation in the school under study are highlighted in the data.

Finally the chapter presents some of the changes in the student-teacher relationship and in pedagogy as perceived by LCA teachers and places them in sharp contrast with the role and the pedagogy of teachers in more traditional programmes.

4.2   Leaving Certificate Applied: Intention and Practice

The first theme discussed in this chapter arose out of participants' initial experiences in relation to the ideals and realities of grappling with a curricular change of considerable proportion such as the LCAP. They were invited to articulate their personal awareness and understanding of what they perceived to be the LCAP's unique character and the reasons as to why the programme was introduced into the school. At the same time they were provided with an opportunity to express how they had translated the above into reality. This enabled the researcher to paint a picture of what the LCAP in theory but also in practice meant to them. A dichotomy between a sound theoretical awareness among teachers of the ideals espoused in the LCAP's rationale on the one hand and their actual experiences of trying to realise these ideals in their particular school context became evident in some of the data.

4.2.1 <u>Perceptions Regarding the Intentions for Introducing the LCAP</u>

The "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied"

referred to in chapters one and two, clearly outlines the intention behind the

introduction of the LCAP:

> To provide skills-based learning and preparation for adult and working life
> for students who might otherwise not be catered for adequately by other L. C.
> programmes.
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2001, p.25)

Additional factors identified by schools for offering the LCAP to students in the

Report were: student retention; the suitability of the programme to a particular

student target group because of its innovative structure, content and assessment; the

imparting of social, life and personal skills; the easing of discipline problems and

improving attendance rates. The perceptions of teachers in this study reflected by

and large the objectives of the LCAP as outlined above and a distinct rationale for

introducing the LCAP into the respondents' own school emerged strongly from the

data.

Six out of the ten participants in this study showed an appreciation of the diversity

among student abilities in their own school and of the fact that catering for and

retaining of that diversity was a determining factor that led to the introduction of the

LCAP. However, two teachers raised concerns as to whether the ideal of catering

for a specific cohort of students with a wide range of ability levels and of retaining

them in school by means of a programme such as the LCAP was in reality possible.

Paula expressed her doubts in relation to the above as follows:

> I certainly think the idea of trying to keep some of the students in school until they are a bit more mature, maybe until they are seventeen or eighteen is a good idea but I am not so sure that it suits everyone. I do think there are a very small number of students for whom school or what we offer them is just not appropriate. And I do feel that a small core of students cannot be catered for not even within the LCAP in the school.
>
> (Paula)

Elaine who highlights the costs involved also questions the effectiveness of

retaining students whose needs cannot be met within the context of the LCAP:

> In some cases school just isn't designed for certain students and in the meantime they can make life very, very miserable for others
>
> (Elaine)

4.2.2 Unique Character of the LCAP

All of the teachers and the principal who participated in this study were able to

articulate the distinct features in the structure and design of the LCAP which

included, as noted in chapter one, its practical oriented content, its continuous

assessment, its work experience element and its adaptability to a wide range of

ability levels in a comprehensive manner. When invited to outline the unique

character of the LCAP as distinct from the traditional Leaving Certificate reference

was made by all participants to the programme's continuous assessment in which

students accumulate credits over a two year period, to its work experience element,

to its distinct course areas and their specific content, to its alternative more practical

and hands on approach to teaching and student learning, to its focus on preparing

students for the real world when they leave school and to the specific cohort of

students usually at the weaker end of the academic range the programme attracts. A

sound theoretical insight into the differential nature of the LCAP in comparison to

the traditional Leaving Certificate was evident in the teachers' and the principal's

responses. However when probed a little deeper as to the practical consequences of those distinct features into the day-to-day life of the school a more complex reality was revealed. Three teachers for example questioned whether the potential of the LCAP for being radically different in the most positive sense that it could be had been realised to the extent it had originally been intended. Kathleen expresses their views most succinctly

> It's said that it is radically different and I presume that the initial plans were… that it would be… in theory. But in practice I don't see it as widely different and I don't know why that is because the course itself is so open-ended. You can go about it in a broad range of ways. You don't have to be bookish about it. I think it isn't as different as it could be…
>
> (Kathleen)

The principal's response when outlining certain aspects in the unique nature of the LCAP was also characterised by interjections that conveyed an element of doubt as to the potential realisation of those aspects. For example, after stating that the form of assessment in LCA is very different from the traditional Leaving Certificate he added "how well that works is another question…" And before expanding on the fact that the approach to teaching and learning in LCA is different he interjected "how much is open to question…"

Thus an interesting dichotomy became apparent to the researcher… a dichotomy between what certain teachers and the principal were convinced of "ought" to occur in schools if the principles as advocated in the LCAP's rationale were to be maximised to the extent they were intended as distinct from what they were convinced of "was" actually occurring in practice within their own school. In endeavouring to make sense of the gap between the LCAP in theory and in practice

three teachers hinted at a number of contributing factors. Whether or not the LCAP is as different as it has the potential to be depends upon the role of the LCA teacher, upon the efficiency with which teaching and learning resources in the local community are identified and used and on the extent with which the distinct nature and structure of the LCAP alters the existing system of schooling in which it is adopted.

Aine showed an awareness of how pivotal the role of the LCA teacher is in making the programme radically different from other mainstream programmes:

> The programme certainly gives the teacher plenty of scope to make it as radically different as he or she wants it to be. Definitely. But it's very much up to the teacher to make it as exciting or interesting as possible because there is no set structure you rigidly have to adhere to in your course.
>
> (Aine)

Kathleen too is aware that the teacher's role in LCA is crucial and feels that this is reinforced by the open-endedness of the programme and the broad range of ways teachers can approach their specific course requirements. Hence her advice that "you don't have to be bookish about it".

The potential for further development of the links between the school and the community through community work, community care and work experience as highlighted in chapter one was echoed by one teacher in this study. Mary who has been involved with the LCAP from the start observes:

> I think the LCAP could be based a lot more in the local community and that a lot more links could be established between the LCAP and the local community.   (Mary)

Another teacher felt that the meaningfulness of work experience in particular could be further enhanced if more specific links were developed between the vocational specialisms currently on offer in the school and industry in the local community. No matter how different the LCAP espouses to be in structure and in content two teachers who in spite of having only been recently involved with the program in the school expose another gap between reality versus ideal. Vanessa points out that:

> You still have an exam… They tend to come in expecting the course to be fun and to be active all of the time. They expect to be entertained and that isn't always possible or they won't learn…
>
> (Vanessa)

Whilst Edel indicates that:

> The LCAP is still a school-based programme. It still has to fit into the existing school year. You still have your core subjects such as English, maths and Irish…You still have to meet deadlines, get your projects done…like any other group of students in the school.
>
> (Edel)

These critical responses from teachers illustrate that a programme's rationale does not automatically mandate what matters. The contributing factors outlined by teachers above have a role to play and need to be acknowledged if the gap between theory and practice in the LCAP is to be bridged. Whilst teachers and principal were proficient in articulating the reasons for introducing the LCAP into their school and in outlining the programme's unique character, integrating them in reality into the day-to-day life of the school appears to pose more of a challenge. The extent to which those entrusted with the implementation of the LCAP in schools underestimate or address this challenge will be explored in the concluding chapter.

4.3   Teachers' Attitudes towards Change and the Leaving Certificate

      Applied Programme

The researcher was struck by the candid manner in which teachers articulated what change meant for them during interviews. Some of them went through extraordinary lengths to convey a genuine sense of their own attitudes to change in general. This enabled the researcher to develop an overall understanding of participants' change perspectives and paved the way for some further probing that led to uncovering participants' attitudes to the LCAP in particular. A striking feature that emerged subsequently was the direct relationship between attitudes to the LCAP in particular and teachers' attitudes to change in general. Five teachers communicated their change perspectives in a very positive way. These perspectives appeared to have influenced their attitudes to the LCAP significantly as will be illustrated below. Some of these teachers' perspectives were connected to their personality, their particular subject area, previous teaching experiences or to a specific course requirement in LCA such as a task for example. One teacher who described herself as fairly flexible in the face of changes in her work, in her role in the classroom or in her teaching approaches nevertheless confessed that she had a core of strong beliefs in relation to certain aspects of her teaching which led her to admit: "It would take a lot to make me change my mind about those". Her response to change in LCA was notably more conservative than the five teachers referred to previously. Three teachers displayed negative attitudes to change in general and responded cautiously when coming face to face with a curricular change of considerable proportion such as the LCAP. The principal's belief that there were three broad

categories of change perspectives in evidence among teachers in the school was

upheld by this enquiry in the following way: Five teachers showed great openness

in their attitudes to change whilst a minority of three teachers indicated that they

found certain aspects of change threatening and difficult. This broadly corresponds

with the principal's observation below:

> I would have always said… without analysing it… just off the top of my head… that about one-third of the teaching staff would resist change, one-third would totally welcome it with open arms and a further third could take it or leave it but in the end will probably do a reasonable or a good job and will prove fairly adaptable to it. On the balance of things you would have more people open to change. A minority however would find any form of change threatening and difficult.

4.3.1 Welcoming Change

The positive attitudes to change were discerned from two teachers by analysing

the value they attached to "getting a break from routine" in the context of their

specific subject areas through the LCAP.

Claire, a female teacher in her mid thirties who has been involved with the LCAP in

the school for five years reveals:

> I welcome change. I would be someone who likes to think that I deal well with change. I feel that being left in your same routine is very dangerous. If you are left too long in your own routine things become stagnant. If you are left with the same course you can run into the danger of reproducing the same notes as last year.
>
> <div align="right">(Claire)</div>

Her palpable sense of openness and eagerness to change appears to have helped

her in responding positively to the reality of teaching Hotel, Catering and

Tourism in the LCAP:

> By getting something new like the Hotel, Catering and Tourism Course in LCA you are kept on your toes. It gives you a new lease of life for your subject and enthusiasm as a teacher. And I think most teachers, deep down, actually do get a kick out of getting into something different, getting slightly away from the norm, a change of course or a change of group...
>
> (Claire)

In reflecting on what that experience has been like for her after five years she admits that it has actually refreshed her outlook on her subject. She feels that it has "brought me back to the foundation of my subject, to what I loved about my subject" Edel, a newly qualified teacher in her early twenties who has only recently got involved with the LCAP shares Claire's enthusiasm in welcoming the LCAP as a challenge:

> LCA is a challenge and challenges are brilliant. Because it keeps me "awake as in more alive to the subject. It makes my job much more interesting and exciting. It's a break with routine and even though there's nothing wrong with routine and it can make you comfortable and everything... it can after a while make you lazy and boring. Too much routine. Now I'm not saying routine is not important but I think a bit of variety is brilliant as well. Because I feel personally I would get lazy.
>
> (Edel)

She explains what this actually means for her in terms of being faced with teaching World Music in the LCAP:

> If it was a case of me teaching J.C. music every single day year in year out... I'm going to get sick of it. Whereas with teaching music in LCA it is all new for me, it is different... I have to do a lot of research for it and often while I'm researching something else worthwhile comes up... I think it makes my job much more interesting.
>
> (Edel)

Aine, early thirties, and involved with the LCAP in the school from the start describes her attitude when confronted with change:

> I'm not afraid of change. Generally when I'm confronted with change I
> would be on for it... (laughs) Just to try it... if you fail, you fail ...you know
> what I mean... I'll give it a go.
>
> (Aine)

Later on in the interview she relates in a more specific way her readiness and

willingness to initiate change in upcoming Visual Art taskwork:

> Right now for example I'm ready to try out something a little bit different for
> next year's task. It's time for a change there... something a little bit more
> challenging.   (Aine)

Notwithstanding the positive attitudes to change in general and in relation to the

LCAP as indicated by Edel and Aine in the above extracts, there is a possibility that

they may have been influenced by the nature of the subjects they were teaching

prior to their engagement with the LCAP. Perhaps their respective subject

backgrounds did not require them to make substantial changes when faced with a

new course in the LCAP. As Aine explains:

> For me in art there wasn't a whole lot of change in terms of teaching
> methods. It is always practical based and hands-on anyway. Teaching art in
> LCA just reinforced for me that if you are going to explain to kids how you
> are going to do something you have to make sure they actually see it and use
> visual aids to help them understand it.
>
> (Aine)

Edel's experience is similar:

> I haven't made that many changes in teaching the LCAP... not as many as I
> thought. Probably because of my subjects. My subjects would be Music and
> Religion. They are generally more relaxed, more group activity based, more
> interactive classes which is similar to classes in the LCAP. So because of that
> I think I developed a good insight into LCA and it started me off the right
> way...   (Edel)

The principal's perception in the extract below also strongly indicates an

awareness on his behalf that some teachers in LCA may not have a whole lot of

changes to make in terms of their own teaching

> Maybe they are doing a fair amount of it already in their normal teaching... it depends on what they are doing. If project work is there already as part of their normal teaching then obviously that aspect in the LCAP wouldn't be a major change for them.

Two teachers admitted that their positive attitude to change and their

perspectives on the LCAP were determined by previous experiences in other

schools:

> Because I was involved for nine years in my previous school with piloting LCA, CSPE, SPHE... all those new programmes... I suppose it became ingrained in me not just to expect change but to embrace it and to use it to the best of my ability.   (Robert)

> I did a stint in a grammar school and I thought there was no buzz in it. I love doing what I'm doing now. I just love the challenge of teaching where I can see a little gain or change that comes from working with students for whom learning doesn't come easily.
>   (Kathleen)

It is not difficult to see why teachers who have developed a particular expertise

regarding the change process or have worked in conditions supportive of change

prior to their current engagement with the LCAP in the school under study are more

confident in embracing the changes inherent in the LCAP.

A highly relevant question in the above context and worth exploring further in

chapter five is: Can the insights of LCA teachers who have experienced a more

ideal combination of relevance, readiness and resources in previous school contexts

help the current implementers of the LCAP in the school under study in identifying

meaningful levers of change?

4.3.2 Resisting Change

Feelings of resistance, apprehension, inadequacy, caution... highlighted by Robert Evans as legitimate human responses to change filtered through in the responses from three LCA teachers who weren't as positive in their attitudes to change in general and to the LCAP in particular as those with a similar profile in terms of age, gender and length of involvement with the LCAP referred to earlier.

One teacher's observation as to how she perceived her colleagues respond initially to the news that they are going to have LCA on their timetable is particularly illuminating in this context:

> An awful lot of teachers when they hear initially they have LCA... are afraid. They are thinking extra work, a new course, new ways of thinking, more preparation...There is a fear of change. There is a kind of a feeling "change does mean extra work." This leads to a kind of resistance in wanting to take it on...   (Claire)

A sense of that reluctance can be detected in the responses from Mary and Elaine below. Both of them indicate how a more hesitant and cautious approach has been their preferred way of coming to terms with the change process in general but also with the LCAP more specifically. As Mary admits:

> I don't like change I suppose. I would have been negative at the start I suppose. But I would say that I do change and that I would take change on board. Sometimes I think it could be... a bit of laziness. We are all a bit lazy in ourselves. It is easier to follow the old path... but I have had to cope with a huge array of changes in my teaching and I have come through them all adequately. Education is a dynamic thing and we have to change. In the back of my head there is that realisation but when you're asked to change... it is difficult.   (Mary)

In describing her experience of being faced with changes in her work as an LCA

teacher she acknowledges:

> I have found teaching LCA difficult as well because often it is students who
> are difficult in the school environment that we get in. Therefore they are
> coming with a lot of baggage, with a lot of problems and you know… that
> has to be dealt with by you as a teacher. And that certainly is and can be
> difficult. And… that has pulled on areas of my teaching which I mightn't be
> used to… and in the beginning I would have found that a bit arduous or
> testing on me.   (Mary)

Elaine provides her own reasons and motives for treading carefully when being

confronted with changes in her teaching:

> I would have to say… through my own fault…I would be very routine in
> terms of my teaching. I feel that has worked well for me so I would be
> reluctant, weary to change from that line of teaching.
>   (Elaine)

However when given LCA on her timetable, a course she had never taught before…

after four years of teaching she realised she would have to change but went about it

in a cautious manner:

> I've had to stop and think: what do I do now? That was daunting at the
> beginning and I maybe didn't embrace the LCAP as much as I should
> have…but I think you have to be cautious, very cautious and careful when
> you are embracing change. So that you are not just trying too hard to keep up
> with society. That you keep your own morals and your own values and
> attitudes towards your teaching, your class, your school. Be it LCA, be it
> mainstream…   (Elaine)

Vanessa, an experienced teacher in her late thirties, who has only been involved in

teaching the LCAP this year, conveys a palpable sense of apprehension when

reflecting on her own attitude to change in general and in LCA:

> I do get apprehensive about change. I will say that. I find it tough to change
> approach, to get out of the mode… "this is the way I did it…this is the way I
> was taught…this is the way I always taught…"

> And not just with the LCAP. I'd like to change. The problem is that you
> cannot just do it immediately and in the transition you are going to have years
> of torture. So yes, I do get apprehensive in relation to change in the sense of
> "I mightn't have done enough changes in myself or in my methodology of
> teaching in the one year that I have available to prepare LCA students for
> their Irish exam.   (Vanessa)

Not only does her response reveal a sense of urgency in trying to accomplish the

change within one year but it also exposes the enormous pressure she perceives

to be under in trying to change herself and her teaching methodologies.

This raises an important issue requiring further reflection: In the light of the

complex tasks of transition Vanessa is asked to accomplish what is the nature

and the quality of support she is currently receiving?

4.4   Teachers and Professional Collaboration

4.4.1 Curriculum Integration

One of the key features in the LCAP – curriculum integration – provided the

participants in this study with an initial point of departure from where they could

embark upon an articulation of their perceptions in relation to the wider issue of

professional collaboration. A gap between the intention and practice of the LCAP in

this case in the specific context of cross-curricular integration emerged in the data

of this study for the second time. In addition, participants acknowledged the

importance of a team approach in realising cross-curricular integration but were not

always sure of what the concept actually entailed. In the light of participants'

emerging perceptions surrounding curriculum integration

a prevailing culture of isolation in the school under study filtered through in the data

for the first time.

4.4.1.1   Curriculum Integration: Ideal and Practice

One of the key features of the LCAP's structure and of the participants' learning experience is the establishment of cross-curricular integration. Chapter two indicated how the linking together of learning that takes place in the different courses within the LCAP is primarily achieved through specific student tasks. The pivotal role of the student task was also acknowledged by inspectors when they observed in their "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied" that "apart from the student task, cross-curricular integration remains an elusive goal." (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.49)

The majority of teachers who were interviewed in the school under study wondered whether cross-curricular integration as a principle had been realised in practice. The views of Vanessa and Aine represent their voices adequately:

> I think it's there in name… the cross-curricular integration… but it doesn't actually happen   (Aine)

> I would say cross-curricular integration is there in theory but it does not happen in reality to be honest…   (Vanessa)

When asked whether there was evidence in his view that cross-curricular integration within the LCAP was currently being realised in the school the principal admitted:

> I don't honestly know… it's there as an ideal objective but to what extent it is there deliberately and emphasised consciously as distinct from just taking place incidentally I do not know.

This is an illuminating comment as the principal is on the one hand displaying an awareness of the fact that cross-curricular integration is supposed to be a central

element in the LCAP but on the other hand is also indicating that he is unaware of any planned, sustained efforts to achieve it at present.

Even when probed to share their own experiences of being involved or having observed task-work – the primary vehicle through which cross-curricular integration is to be achieved and through which the knowledge and skills students have acquired in different curriculum areas is to be integrated – Kathleen and Claire expressed reservations as to the naturalness of such a process:

> I watched students doing a task this session and I don't know if there really was integration across that. I suppose I feel it was artificial. I didn't see it as integrated. If I'm honest what I witnessed with this particular task…it wasn't cross-curricular integration.
>
> (Kathleen)

> I think we're trying to integrate courses by pushing them into the task…
> I think we're trying to force links, to make links where links aren't particularly relevant at times. We're really doing it just for the sake of it… to try and get more marks for the task.
>
> (Claire)

Due to time constraints the researcher was not in a position to pursue any further to what extent LCA teachers actually understood the concept of cross-curricular integration as distinct from how they interpreted it at present. Teachers by and large remained open to the idea of cross-curricular integration but were not always sure of how to go about it. As Edel, a newly qualified teacher in her early twenties, admits:

> Cross-curricular integration is a brilliant idea… if it is done in the right way. But I'm not so sure how you could actually achieve it …
>
> (Edel)

Whilst Claire involved with LCA for nearly five years feels that cross-curricular integration is a time-consuming process and doesn't happen overnight:

> Cross-curricular integration is possible... but the degree of cross-curricular integration varies and it is only with time that you as a teacher learn how to increase it.   (Claire)

In expressing a desire for more cross-curricular integration some teachers went

as far as offering practical suggestions during their interviews.

4.4.1.2   *Curriculum Integration and the Need for a Team Approach*

The "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied" in

2000 noted that cross-curricular integration requires teachers of different courses

in the LCAP to develop a team approach and stated in no uncertain terms:

> Excellent teamwork by the LCA teaching team ensures cross-curricular integration of the student tasks.
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2000, p.51)

Whilst the need for a team approach was widely acknowledged by the LCA teachers

in this study the particular meanings individual teachers attached to it, did not

necessarily facilitate the realisation of cross-curricular integration in the LCAP.

Edel expresses her wish for more team-work as follows:

> I'd love to be able to sit down with all of the other teachers in the LCA team with our different course areas. I'd love to be able to say in front of them... this is what I'll be doing at a particular stage... so maybe when you are covering sixteenth century history, I could be doing sixteenth century music and we could be on a similar topic at the same time.
>
> (Edel)

Whilst Vanessa openly regrets the fact that she knows so little about other

course areas:

> I don't know anything for example about the English and Communications course and they don't know what I'm doing in Irish. It would be nice to be able to sit down and talk... well, I have to cover these things... do they

correspond with yours or when do you have to cover those things… So that I know what the English and Communications teacher is doing and what might link in with my course area. And they would know what's happening in my course area and how it might link up with theirs.

(Vanessa)

Being on similar topics at similar times or knowing what other teachers are actually doing in various course areas may contribute towards creating the conditions in which cross-curricular integration is likely to flourish but it doesn't by any means guarantee its occurrence in reality. Unless LCA teachers are provided with a meaningful starting point where they can meet and in a planned and coherent way link the learning from different areas in the LCAP, cross-curricular integration will remain an elusive goal. As Claire suggests:

We are not aware a lot of the time what our colleagues are teaching. The LCA students are but we are not. Maybe if we started discussing… what I am going to do this term, what you are doing and what kind of links there are or might be possible. (Claire)

Whilst at surface level curriculum integration may have presented itself as a fairly simple and straightforward feature of the LCAP, the data emerging from the previous four pages in relation to the intention and practice of curriculum integration and the need for team work to realise it reveal a much more ambiguous, complex and multi-dimensional reality. In the light of the data presented here, chapter five will attempt to recapture that reality and reflect upon it indicating areas for further research.

4.4.2 <u>Time for Collaboration in the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme</u>

The scarcity of time and opportunities to meet will be highlighted in the data from teachers and management below. Whilst the absence of the aforementioned resources offers some explanations as to why cross-curricular integration hasn't been realised to the extent it was intended as a key feature of the LCAP, it is by no means the sole explanation.

4.4.2.1 Perspectives from Teachers

All teachers in this study conveyed a sense of rush and intensity when describing their day-to-day work. In particular a lack of time to meet, plan or prepare was frequently highlighted as a major contributing factor to explain why cross-curricular integration hadn't been realised to any significant extent in the school up until now. Phrases such as:

"Time is sparse with everybody." "People are so busy" "We have so little time to chat as teachers." "There never seems to be time…" "I think the time isn't there to allow us to share" capture the above in a very real way.

However, while teachers were very articulate in expressing their overall need for more time in general and in the context of the LCAP, they were a lot less comprehensive in describing how more formal meeting or planning time could in practice enhance team-work with LCA colleagues or facilitate collaboration on matters of teaching and learning in LCA. Chapter five will identify this as a potential area for further exploration.

A number of teachers used the interview as a medium to express their

dissatisfaction regarding the custom of after school LCA team meetings and were of

the view that arrangements should be made to ensure that such meetings in future

occur within the existing school day. They went as far as identifying the limitations

in holding *after school LCA team-meetings*. Vanessa for example says:

> I cannot see the point why at some stage LCA team meetings cannot be scheduled or if not scheduled… at least half-in half-out. You would have a lot more willingness of people to come together and share views rather than looking at the watch all of the time.
>
> (Vanessa)

Claire agrees that it is difficult to create a relaxed atmosphere for sharing when

you start eating into people's personal time:

> I think when it is after school… people sometimes almost see it as a punishment. Not only are we working hard all day, somehow because we are teaching this course with a different syllabus… people would feel that… see it… I am not saying that I feel that personally but if you see it as an extra job and then on top of it you are also given an after school meeting… it seems like a double punishment… that you didn't really volunteer for… and now you are staying on after school… and contributions are kept to a minimum to keep the meeting time down. It's not constructive.
>
> (Claire)

Robert who taught for nine years in another school prior to his current position

shares his previous experience of an alternative approach where time to meet

and plan in LCA was facilitated:

> In my previous school, some of us involved in LCA were given a slightly reduced timetable to facilitate planning and evaluation of the programme. That conveyed a very clear message: "It's important to collaborate.
>
> (Robert)

Robert interprets the failure to provide timetabled LCA meetings as a direct

indicator of the value management attaches to the course:

> I can't recall any time that we were given time to meet and plan. It will be given to L.C. or J.C. subjects but not to LCA. The priority shouldn't be L.C., J.C. and then LCA. They should be on an equal level. As far as I am concerned a school is not just judged by its results.
>
> (Robert)

The picture painted in this study suggests that if management was to facilitate an occasional timetabled LCA team meeting this would be interpreted as a nice gesture by LCA teachers, an acknowledgement of their work and most importantly it would be used constructively. As Paula indicates:

> It would be nice to be given the occasional timetabled meeting. I feel the odd allocated period of time would be good. I don't mean that you meet up for the sake of meeting just because it's scheduled… or that you end up meeting because you should. But I do think it is important to meet to keep LCA teachers up to date and up to speed and to share general helping matters otherwise people seem to work in isolation…
>
> (Paula)

What is interesting in Paula's response is that her conception of such a meeting is unique in comparison to other participants because it includes a potential forum for sharing general helping matters. However this requires serious professional interaction on behalf of teachers and as chapter two has indicated this is unlikely to occur unless relationships between members of an LCA teaching team are characterised by trust, support, openness and help.

4.4.2.2   *Perspectives from Management*

The principal stressed the "whole issue of time" as the scarcest resource of all throughout his interview. He viewed it as the number one obstacle at school level that hinders team work among LCA teachers. Whilst he did acknowledge that teacher resistance can also play a part, by and large he felt that "If the time was there I think teachers would collaborate." This is an illuminating comment

considering the principal's earlier admission that he wasn't sure whether or not

cross-curricular integration was being realised "deliberately or consciously" in any

significant way in the school. The principal's assumption that if teachers were given

the time, they are likely to collaborate could be interpreted in two different ways. It

either reflects his underlying belief that the overall cultural climate in the school is

open to and supportive of a team approach and that the organisational orientation in

the school will have to be adapted accordingly in order to facilitate it. Or the

statement suggests that the principal is perhaps unaware of the prevailing culture of

isolation in the school and underestimates the organisational structures that keep it

in place.

In spite of the above observation, the reality in the school under study seems to

suggest that administratively regulated LCA team meetings, fixed in time and space

are unlikely to occur in the immediate future. The principal outlines some of the

obstacles preventing this from happening comprehensively:

> Every subject department needs time to meet and plan. Every teacher does as
> well. Not just the LCA team...

> How and where would I fit this into the ordinary school day? I know some
> schools have scheduled meetings at the start or at the end of the day but that
> doesn't work in our situation with buses etc... It would be lovely if it did but
> it doesn't.

> And even if... there is, let's say, an afternoon for LCA teachers to plan and
> meet... what do I do with the other teachers... the remaining 60% of staff?

In spite of the aforementioned obstacles the principal repeatedly endorsed the

importance of time as a resource for meeting and planning and acknowledged the

need for and the scarcity of time within the current school context. When asked if

the school could do anything at present to alleviate the problem he replied:

> It's very, very difficult…
> I'd extend the school year for two weeks or reduce it by two weeks…
> Until the Department does that… they still expect principals to be magicians
> and to provide it within school time.

Nevertheless when invited to consider the possibility of creating time at the start

of the school year by delaying the return of LCA students with one or two days

in August to facilitate planning and meeting he responded positively:

> I can't see a problem with that. There's time there… time we probably don't
> use… That is needed this year… and it should be done on a subject
> departmental and a school based level as well.

The data emerging from the principal's response reveal the extreme difficulties he

faces in trying to have and find time within the existing school structure. One can

understand, given the circumstances outlined earlier, how and why, in struggling to

deal with the above reality, the principal continues to rely on the goodwill and

flexibility of teachers. After all he admits that from where he stands "It's much

easier to find time outside school…" Perhaps there is an implicit assumption in his

admission worth exploring in chapter five. Is finding time outside school easier for

the principal than trying to adapt the existing organisational structure of the school

in order to create more time and meeting opportunities for LCA teachers?

4.4.3 Culture of Isolation

The data presented in the previous pages indicated how lack of time and/or the

absence of regular timetabled meetings for members of the LCA teaching team

impacted negatively on the potential realisation of professional collaboration in

general and on cross-curricular integration in particular. However, a strong emergence in the data of a prevailing culture of isolation both within the LCAP itself and at the wider school level heightened the researcher's awareness of the possibility that simply providing LCA teachers with extra time and opportunities to meet – in itself – might not necessarily bring about professional collaboration in the school under study. This researcher had not anticipated the forcefulness with which participants singled out the culture of isolation and the depth of insight they displayed when describing it as a major obstacle in realising a team approach, as distinct from a lack of time and a scarcity of opportunities to meet within the existing school day.

4.4.3.1.   *Teacher Isolation Within the LCAP*

There were two specific contexts in which the theme "a culture of isolation" within the LCAP itself emerged in the data. Six LCA teachers referred to it when describing the frequency and nature of their interactions with colleagues whilst three LCA teachers highlighted the theme in the particular context of team teaching. Phrases such as "I haven't got much interaction with anyone in the LCA team" or "I don't talk much to other LCA teachers" were employed by half of the LCA teachers who participated in this study. Some of them admitted to working through most of their breaks to get things done, others cited timetabling constraints, supervision duties or lack of time in general as preventing them from sitting down with another colleague in their course area, whereas two teachers mentioned being the sole providers of a specific course area in LCA and thus having no one directly to collaborate with. When invited to describe the kind of interactions they have with

LCA colleagues an overall picture is painted of professionals comfortable with telling stories or swapping incidents directly related to events that took place within their own LCA class or course. These range from giving positive feedback about a nicely presented key assignment, a learning outcome that went well to expressing frustration regarding discipline, attendance, late-coming or work ethic in LCA. However, such interactions were more likely to occur among teachers who were friendly or comfortable with one another. As Paula admits:

> It's probably a natural thing that when there is a friendship ... I'm more
> likely to discuss things in an open way.
>
> (Paula)

The primacy of convivial relationships between teachers as distinct from professional relationships was evident in the data. Some teachers openly regretted the lack of interactions they had with LCA colleagues in the same course area. Claire provides a concrete example to illustrate the above:

> I would have benefited from talking to my colleague. Because I often would
> feel that when we get together it's very much practicalities, but that's across
> the board. You know... who's in this room... who's in that room... But in
> terms of discussing matters of teaching and learning in LCA. No. There's
> very little discussion... There's basically zero... uh... co-operation between
> us which is a total shame.
>
> (Claire)

Only two teachers referred to interactions with their LCA colleagues that involved scanning for ideas or resources. When asked specifically if they would feel comfortable giving advice or seeking assistance they felt this wouldn't be "forthcoming" and that "you were more likely to get confirmation of what you are already experiencing in class rather than any constructive tips" and that discussing with another colleague "how can I help you or how you can help me" rarely

occurred in practice. Even very experienced teachers who had been involved from the start with the programme and had built up considerable expertise and resources in their specific course area conveyed a mixed message when probed as to how they felt about being approached for help. Mary captures their sentiments well in the extract below:

> I suppose I don't mind helping in the beginning when someone is starting out in the same course area as me with notes and having a lot of interaction with them… But it's another adult… like… another teacher… and I suppose I do feel comfortable and at the same time I don't. That type of a thing…
>
> (Mary)

Apart from a limited amount of team teaching within the LCAP no examples of joint work – a particular strong form of collaboration – were presented by participants in this study. The topic of team teaching whilst still in its infancy in the school under study offered an insight into a possible lever for change. One of the teachers who recently joined the LCA team has offered to engage in some team teaching with LCA colleagues to support a number of LCA students with special educational needs. She explains:

> I have attempted… uh… discussed team teaching and again in theory… it sounds wonderful… But for someone to allow you over that threshold… it's extremely difficult.   (Kathleen)

Whilst Kathleen can empathise why LCA teachers might feel that way she still believes that "team teaching would be valuable and could be an aid to teachers in LCA."Aine who has recently experimented with some team teaching in visual art in order to be able to make individual masks for all of the LCA students, subscribes to the value of team teaching but does admit:

> I was definitely scared. It was a bit embarrassing as well. I suppose I was scared having to do the talking in front of another teacher. However, now that I have it over me... I'd have to say... It was very good and I'd love more team teaching. It's just getting over the fear that there's somebody else with you... We are so used to being on our own. It's basically our own self-consciousness...   (Aine)

When asked if she felt that other LCA teachers would be willing to embark on a team teaching experience Aine's perception reveals that the element of readiness has not been addressed adequately to date...

> No. I'd say teachers would not be willing. Their issue would probably be... trusting another colleague... openly talking in front of them... you know. They're probably thinking... that someone else is checking their methods. Actually... they're not.   (Aine)

Paula too acknowledges that some teachers would dismiss the idea straight away:

> Some people wouldn't see the need. Also some people would see you as a fool. "Why would you want to do that? Why would you bother? Or... Don't worry about that..." That idea of dismissing things when overall it is much more helpful to do it that way than working on your own.
> (Paula)

These comments indicate that if team teaching was used as a further leverage for promoting teacher collaboration within the LCAP the outstanding matter of readiness for individual change is not to be underestimated by those initiating the change.

4.4.3.2   Teacher Isolation Within the Wider School Context

From the wider school level perspective teacher isolation arose out of the comments made by two participants: one in the context of a recent subject inspection and the other one in the context of a participant's teaching experience abroad. In reflecting

on the outcome of a recent subject inspection in her department Mary who has been

involved in the LCAP from the start acknowledges that:

> One of the things for me that stands out... reading the report is a lack of collaboration between teachers, a lack of linkages, a lack of meetings, a lack of... every single one of us had our own plan for the year but the plans didn't link up with each other. I feel that is huge... And having been talking to other teachers in the school in other departments, I would find a similar problem.
>
> (Mary)

Paula echoes Mary's view and compares her prior teaching experience in

England with her current one in Ireland as follows:

> My experience of teaching in the UK would have been very much working as part of a team, close liaison with people... It was expected that you worked in a team... and that you played your part.
>
> (Paula)

She still loves teamwork and very much views it as the way forward. However,

in outlining her current experience a stark contrast becomes evident:

> I find it difficult to come from a whole team approach to very much a singular approach here. I find it a massive change... I can't tell you the difference... I find that... I just think that no one really liases with anyone else. I feel no one meets up and knows what the other person is doing. There's no sharing of materials at all. Or ideas...
>
> (Paula)

Both of these teachers convey a genuine sense of teachers working in isolation

rather than engaging in teamwork but strongly acknowledge the relevance of a

collaborative approach. Whilst their concerns originated as a result of

very different circumstances they offer valuable insights to curriculum leaders in

the school under study as to where they might proceed from here.

4.4.3.3   Teachers' Perspectives on the Potential Reasons Sustaining a Culture of Isolation

An in-depth analysis of the specific reasons, which sustain a culture of isolation in the school under study, was beyond the immediate scope of this study and was hindered by time constraints. Nevertheless teachers – in trying the make sense of this prevailing culture of isolation – referred to a particular stage in the career cycle, history and tradition, fear and apprehension and even to the way the timetable may be constructed any given school year. The first three will be commented upon briefly in the space below.

Two teachers described how hard it is in their view for older teachers to subscribe to the principle and the practice of teacher collaboration. As Mary indicates:

> Older teachers are not used to collaborating...they're used to dealing on their own. They are afraid that they'll be seen as weaker or will be exposed as not being able to answer questions when they are operating in a group of teachers.   (Mary)

Claire too feels that especially with older teachers:

> There's pride there. Perhaps they don't feel confident if the other teacher who is already teaching the course is younger than them. Maybe they somehow feel... if I go with questions it's like I can't manage. So that's a problem.
> (Claire)

When asked what has contributed in her view to a situation where teachers prefer to work in isolation rather than as members of a team Paula says:

> I think tradition and history. You know. The history of teaching, it seems to me, seems to be here... you work on your own... uh I'm speaking off the cuff here... but it seems to me that if you ask someone else's opinion on something or how they might teach or approach something, that it is a reflection of your weakness, of your personality, of a weakness in your teaching of the subject...   (Paula)

Four teachers highlighted an element of fear in their responses. Comments such as

"we're afraid to acknowledge in public that something doesn't work for us" or

"we're afraid sometimes to ask colleagues how do you do it" or "we're terrified that

we will be seen as not coping" explain how things continue to be kept inside and are

not discussed with anyone else.

The above perspectives were echoed by the principal who acknowledged that:

> Teachers can be afraid of the whole thing of collaboration. That's there.
> There's also a fear of teachers in relation to sharing good practice or standing
> up in front of other teachers and saying. "This is what I am doing ..." Maybe
> it's there more in Irish people than elsewhere... It's very much a cultural
> thing...

The human side of both individual and school change featured prominently in

the above responses and as mentioned earlier, if underestimated, can exert huge

influence upon the potential success or failure of key elements in a curricular

change such as the LCAP.

4.5   Changes in the Student-Teacher Relationship and in Pedagogy

Chapter two indicated that most of the LCA teachers, due to their long involvement

with subject-based academically oriented programmes such as the established L.C.

and J.C. which are strongly driven by summative assessment, interpret their role in

a traditional way. It was suggested that this is a teacher's role characterised by:

"transmitting information, producing exam results, providing a controlled, quiet and

orderly learning environment, relying heavily on textbooks..."

Whilst not denying that this is still the role of most teachers when engaged with

traditional programmes, the data in this study indicate a willingness on behalf of the

teachers who participated in the interviews to engage in the new pedagogy as

advocated in the LCAP's rationale and to alter their relationship with students accordingly.

4.5.1 Exploring the student-teacher relationship in LCA

The opportunity to develop greater relationships with their students and the enhanced quality of those relationships was a recurrent theme in this research. All of the LCA teachers who participated in this study used phrases such as "more casual", "freer", "more relaxed", "more intimate", "closer", "informal", "one-to-one" when articulating their relationship with LCA students.

Edel, a newly qualified teacher in her twenties, puts it as follows:

> "Because they are an intimate group – they are together all of the time – you get to know them more than you would other mainstream classes. And even though you have to draw the line between the teacher and the student relationship… there is a fine chance of building a good relationship…not in the least because of the type of work you'll often do.
> (Edel)

In reflecting on the specific nature of her role as a teacher in LCA Paula is aware of a very different approach that contrasts sharply with her role in non-LCA classes:

> My role… I know it sounds terrible… is almost "motherly" at times. I feel "minding" in a way. Some of them… not all of them. And that certainly isn't my role in a big class of thirty students.
> (Paula)

Robert shares Paula's perception and provides a concrete example illustrating how the relationship with LCA students may differ from those with mainstream students.

> There seems to be less of a gap between teacher and student. They feel they can talk to you. I would have experienced LCA students coming to me and talking to me "as a big brother" nearly...
>
> (Robert)

And Aine who has helped a number of individual LCA students with personal problems can see how this leads to an extension of the teacher role:

> Your role as a teacher from a pastoral point of view widens considerably. Once you've had one or two LCA students approach you with issues... you can't turn away... Well I can't anyway... I would get involved and as a result you get to know students a lot more. And that makes for a closer relationship.
>
> (Aine)

It is interesting to note that none of the teachers in this study experienced this extended role as problematic within the context of the LCAP. This observation will be revisited in chapter five.

The way LCA teachers perceived their role and described their relationship with LCA students matched the principal's perception:

> The relationship should be automatically on a one-to-one, more personal basis with a good rapport between teacher and students. In fact, LCA teachers should find it much easier to establish a good group rapport with students...

The latter part of the principal's statement raises an important issue: Are there features in the structure and content of the LCAP that make it easier for LCA teachers to establish a good rapport with their students?

A lot of teachers referred to class size as an important contributing factor. Vanessa indicated that the relationship is different in the sense that "it's a small class" and acknowledged "size as a big thing". Robert highlighted that you can give LCA students so much more attention than you can give large groups in traditional

L.C. Whilst Elaine admits that: "when it's a small group and they're appreciative of you treating them as adults you do find in general a different relationship."

The more 'interactive' curriculum on offer in the LCAP also facilitates the development of a closer relationship between students and teachers. Mary would say that as a direct result of having engaged in this type of curriculum:

> My interaction with students, my concept of who they are, where they're at and where they're going has improved immensely.
> (Mary)

And Edel explains how in LCA classes you are relying a lot more on feedback, on opinions, on questions… from the students themselves as opposed to merely covering facts:

> It's all about encouraging interaction… it's all about developing teamwork… not some of the time… but all of the time… And you do learn much more about students that way. You get to know them… much better and that's great. (Edel)

The vast majority of LCA teachers also shared a perception that the type and range of methodologies they employed in LCA lent themselves more easily to establishing a relaxed atmosphere in class. However, this will be explored in greater detail under a subsequent heading.

Two specific features of the LCAP in particular were selected by all LCA teachers as facilitating and offering huge scope for enhancing the student and teacher relationship. They form a stark contrast with the features of more established programmes.

The emphasis on examinations and the pressures that arise from them is less of a feature in the LCAP than it is in traditional programmes. As Paula indicates:

The standard L.C. is so exam-oriented. In my mind anyway... You are gearing them for an exam and the bottom line is they want points... so you have to try and achieve that for them or with them. The LCA, because the exam is not the be-all and end-all... they don't have to be scared by the exam. It's part of the whole process and that allows you to be a bit more flexible and definitely develop a more softly, softly approach.

(Paula)

Robert confirms that the presence of exam pressure still dominates traditional

programmes such as the L.C. and points out how this can impact negatively on

the relationship with students:

With L.C. we're so focussed on exams... passing exams... results... rather than teaching them how to appreciate literature or how to converse in English. In French e.g. we prepare them for H.L. orals so they pass but I wonder if you threw students in the middle of Paris, how many of them would actually survive? We're dictated by the exams and the syllabus. We're dictated by results... and all of that leaves very little scope for developing the student-teacher relationship.   (Robert)

The freedom from the rigidity of prescribed courses in more traditional

programmes was also referred to indirectly by a number of LCA teachers as an

enabling factor in establishing a freer approach. As Vanessa acknowledges:

With LCA students you are in a position to give them to a certain extent a bit more freedom because you are not preparing them for a traditional L.C. exam where they have to take down notes and follow instructions carefully, where they must cover a certain amount by a certain date and revise accordingly... and where, let's face it, you aren't in a position to give them that freedom.

(Vanessa)

Elaine agrees that there isn't as much need to lecture students in LCA and to

recite the rules to them because:

The nature of the course is different. I've got more time to cover the material, roughly three weeks for each K.A. I can provide LCA students with the time and the resources to do their own research. I'm not expecting homework from them every day. I'm not giving tests all the time. So they don't have as much to keep up with maybe as another L.C. group might have...

(Elaine)

Finally, the reason why in essence a "freer approach" is not so easily achieved in

mainstream programmes is perhaps best articulated briefly but *succinctly* by Edel:

> In the general system, so much goes against you: time is against you, content
> is against you...
>
> (Edel)

Her response not only highlights how much influence time and content exert on the

pupil-teacher relationship in traditional programmes but also exposes the constraints

a "tight structure" places on such a relationship.

4.5.2   Exploring Changes in Pedagogy

The identification, description and realisation of a rich variety of teaching and

learning processes formed a striking feature in the data gathered from LCA

teachers. The researcher was surprised by the apparent ease and skill with which

teachers seemed to have adapted to some of the pedagogical changes as advocated

in the LCAP but will reflect upon this finding critically in chapter five. A picture

emerged in this chapter of teachers who, instead of showing reluctance in

relinquishing familiar pedagogical routines, displayed flexibility and willingness in

adopting alternative ones in the context of the LCAP. However, the latter calls for a

prudent analysis of factors that may have contributed to the above perception.

All LCA teachers in this study shared the teaching approaches they had used or

were currently using in order to address the student learning outcomes in their

course. They ranged from more practical/hands-on/activity based approaches to

observation, investigation, guest-speakers, out-of-school visits, work experience,

role-play, pair and team/ work, visualisation, collage, project work, report writing,

use of ICT, mini-company, interactive feedback, brainstorm, use of video or

DVD...

In the extract below Elaine refers to a particular approach she employs in

Mathematical Applications for example:

> I would use a lot more practical examples in LCA... with a topic like area
> and volume... I would have a little box with the shapes in my press that I
> would take out... I feel it helps students see what that part of maths is about
> rather than you know just giving them theory...
>
> (Elaine)

Many LCA teachers were convinced of the absolute necessity of employing such

approaches in a course such as the LCAP and stated so in a matter of fact style.

Perhaps their practice of such approaches was facilitated by the actual design of the

LCAP. Perhaps their belief in employing such approaches was strengthened by a

sound theoretical awareness of the reasons for introducing the programme into the

school and of its unique character as illustrated earlier. Edel's response captures this

belief well:

> If you're in a room on your own with an LCA class and you're going to teach
> them like you teach the regular leaving cert you are basically going to hit a
> brick wall. You learn very quickly from that.
>
> (Edel)

Kathleen too can relate to Edel's experience but goes further with this explicit

warning:

> If you don't move away from the traditional methods of teaching and
> continue to use them in the LCAP then these methods eventually will become
> barriers to the students you teach in LCA.
>
> (Kathleen)

Throughout their interviews LCA teachers emphasised the importance of making

learning as attractive as possible in order to promote the interest of their pupils and

maintain their motivation. They admitted to boosting students' self confidence,

rewarding effort, providing encouragement and doing "nice things" with LCA

students in order to make learning more enjoyable for them. Again the description

of such practices by teachers reflects a good theoretical grasp of the underlying

principles in the LCAP.

Aine explains how she goes about creating a nice learning environment in a hands-

on course like Visual Art:

> I introduced music with LCA which I don't have with my traditional leaving
> cert students. I also give them a break half way through a double class. I
> always try and get sweets, biscuits or minerals for them… just to break it up
> and I suppose also to get them more motivated. I think their attention span is
> a little bit different as well. I feel that they are ready to start again after that
> and that it keeps their interest levels up as well…
>
> (Aine)

All participants in this study were also very conscious of making the learning

opportunities for their students as varied as possible. Many of them did not hesitate

in providing concrete examples to illustrate this. Robert indicates why a varied

approach in LCA is so crucial:

> Because you are working with weaker students and some of them have poor
> concentration skills anyway you've got to keep it varied and you've got to
> make it relevant for them. So … you do lots of different things within the one
> class.   (Robert)

Mary subscribes to the same principle but places it in sharp contrast with the

approach in traditional leaving certificate classes:

> You use an awful lot more of methodologies in your 40 minutes in LCA than
> with a traditional L.C. class. Instead of just text and chalk in an ordinary L.C.
> class, you will use a whole array of approaches and changes…
>
> (Mary)

Finally, seven LCA teachers in this study stressed how "thorough preparation" was an essential requirement in teaching LCA students effectively and referred to the fact that this requires a considerable amount of research on their part. Comments such as:

> I feel you have to do an awful lot more of preparation.... an awful lot more of providing resources yourself because you are all the time changing and adapting to the specific needs of a low ability group.
>
> (Paula)

indicate that teaching LCA is not "an easy option" or any "less demanding" than teaching for example a L.C. honours class. One teacher involved in teaching both admits:

> The preparation for me in terms of a LCA class requires more time than it does for a traditional L.C. group of students.
>
> (Elaine)

Six participants outlined their rationale for having to go through a huge amount of preparation in LCA. Three of them, such as the one below, referred to the absence of a textbook in their course:

> I need a lot more preparation time because there is no book. So I rely a lot on what I can pick up myself from books, radio, T.V., internet... but that means that I am constantly on the look out to see what I can find...
>
> (Edel)

Others mentioned the unsuitability of materials and the consequences of this for them:

> I would have done a huge amount of work in getting my resources together to make my course interesting because I find my book extremely weak in that regard.   (Mary)

But even teachers who make a conscious effort in accessing materials themselves in order to address the broad learning outcomes in their course admit that this is not without its difficulties. As Kathleen explains:

> When I did come across a couple of books myself that helped me in translating my module descriptor for students in LCA, I had to consider the language in those books which wasn't entirely suitable to LCA students. So I had to break it down myself to make it meaningful to them.
>
> (Kathleen)

It did not surprise the researcher that in the light of the above comments the issue of time re-emerged strongly in the data. As has been illustrated earlier time to meet, time to plan and time to prepare remains one of the scarcest resources for teachers engaged in the LCAP in the school under study. Whilst the data presented earlier tend to suggest that LCA teachers have engaged successfully with some of the pedagogical changes inherent in the LCAP in the school under study, the conditions under which they did so appear to have been far from ideal.

Summary

This chapter has presented the research findings focussing on four significant themes that emerged in the interview data. Teachers' perspectives regarding the intention and practice of the LCAP were explored, revealing a considerable gap between intention and practice, indicating that a programme's rationale does not mandate what matters. The chapter that follows will address the challenge this finding poses to the implementers of the LCAP.

The second theme in this chapter analysed the attitudes of participants towards change in general and towards the LCAP in particular exposing a direct relationship between the two. Multiple change perspectives among LCA teachers emerged from the data. They ranged from very positive, welcoming or open attitudes towards change to more conservative or negative attitudes characterised by reluctance, resistance, apprehension or inadequacy. An ability to interpret, understand and respond to the above range of change perspectives among teachers is an important skill for those entrusted with the implementation of the LCAP in the school under study.

The complexity inherent in realising a culture of professional collaboration was the focus of the third theme in this chapter. Whilst the data illustrated that scarcity of time and opportunities to meet impacted negatively on its potential realisation, the prevailing culture of isolation in the school under study formed its greatest obstacle and emerged strongly in the data. Overcoming this obstacle will constitute one of the school's biggest challenges for the future and will be discussed further in chapter five.

The data presented under the final theme of chapter four indicated how LCA teachers, through their encounter with the distinct purpose, design and orientation of the LCAP, displayed a willingness to engage in the new pedagogy, to highlight its merits and to alter their relationship with LCA students in the light of the above. As to the actual practice of such pedagogy within the LCA classroom more enquiry is needed. However, some of the factors that may have contributed towards teachers' willingness to engage in the above will be analysed in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5   Reflections on the Research Findings in the Light of the Literature

5.1   The Complexity of Curriculum Change: Intention and Practice of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme

Although the intricacies of a curricular change such as the LCAP are complex, unpredictable and multi-dimensional the data in the previous chapter provide some key insights and ideas enabling us to comprehend them better and correspondingly develop a mindset to take more effective action.

Whilst teachers displayed a sound theoretical awareness of the ideals and core beliefs as espoused in the LCAP's rationale, their actual experiences of trying to realise them in the school under study, revealed some of the complexities inherent in curricular change. In particular the gap between the intention of the LCAP as distinct from its actual practice was exposed in the data.

The intentions behind a curricular change such as the LCAP provide meaningful guidance for practice and the participants in this study clearly developed a shared understanding of those intentions. In spite of this they still found the actual process of implementing them into the day-to-day practices of their school challenging. The particular approach that was taken in introducing the LCAP in the school under study did not help in this regard. Chapter one suggested how the short time span between initiation and implementation may have impacted negatively on the gathering of evidence about relevance, readiness and availability of resources in

relation to the programme, indicating that the change process embarked upon was perhaps underestimated, rushed and supported insufficiently.

However, if one conceives of implementation ideally as:

> An ongoing construction of a shared reality among participants through their interactions with one another within the programme. Ideally this includes as a minimum a shared understanding among participants concerning the implied presuppositions, values and assumptions which underlie a programme, for if participants understand these, then they have a basis for rejecting, accepting or modifying the programme in terms of their own school, community and class situation.
>
> (Werner cited in Fullan, 1997, p.132)

then the presence in the data as they emerged in chapter four of a shared understanding among participants regarding the LCAP's rationale and underlying principles, regarding the reasons for introducing the programme into the school and regarding the distinct character of the LCAP is important as it constitutes a minimum basis from where future endeavours to achieve an ongoing construction of a shared reality as indicated in the above extract can be developed further. In addition, the emergence in the data of a shared understanding among LCA teachers concerning the gap they perceive to exist between the intention of the programme and its actual practice on the ground, provides them with a further basis from where they can begin to modify the programme accordingly. In trying to make sense of this existing gap participants highlighted a number of determining factors that are worth reconsidering here. They included: the pivotal role of the LCA teacher, the efficiency with which teaching and learning resources in the local community are identified and the extent to which the intentions of the LCAP's rationale and its

unique character alter the existing system of schooling in which the programme is adopted.

Curriculum leaders eager to close the gap between the intention and practice of the LCAP in the school under study need to reflect upon the aforementioned factors when making future recommendations. In particular they should consider a number of pertinent questions:

- Can the role and identity of the LCA teacher be strengthened further by ensuring that they have ongoing access to meaningful professional development and by providing them with incentives in order to encourage their continuous engagement with the programme in the school under study?

- Can the potential links in the local community be pursued more vigorously and can suitable teaching and learning resources be identified in tandem with the vocational specialisms selected in the school under study?

- Can the intentions behind the introduction and the continuation of the LCAP and its unique character be revisited giving particular attention to the way the school under study now conceives of teaching and learning and is willing to adapt some of its structures accordingly?

What matters now and will be of major significance in future is how the school under study will respond to these questions and whether the manner in which they are approached strengthens and develops the ongoing construction of a shared reality among LCA teachers in the three areas they cover.

In addition to the three aforementioned areas, the responses from LCA teachers highlighted a fourth area requiring urgent attention in the school under study: the

prevailing culture of isolation. They referred to this culture in the specific application contexts of cross-curricular integration, professional interactions and team teaching.

Addressing the challenge inherent in moving from a culture of isolation to professional collaboration demands a renewed commitment on behalf of the school not just to the curricular intentions of the LCAP but more importantly to the reality of the structures and teacher culture in the school in which these intentions are to be realised. This will require a leader's response that doesn't tackle curriculum change in isolation of teacher and school development but addresses them in conjunction. The quality of that response, as indicated in chapter one, will lie in the leader's capacity to effect concomitant developments in teacher, curriculum and school development.

5.2   The Complexity of Curriculum Change: Attitudes to Change

One of the main purposes of the process of implementation as outlined in chapter two is clarification: allowing teachers to work out their own meaning of what the curricular change entails for them and to enable them to make it their own. The interviews provided teachers who were directly affected by the LCAP as a curricular change with a platform from where they could verbalise what this curricular change of considerable proportions actually meant to them "the implementers of the LCAP on the ground." Fullan has long advocated that "change is a highly personal experience" and that a key factor in change is what it means to those who must implement it. (Fullan, 1991, p.127) By listening to the voices of

LCA teachers articulating their attitudes to change in general and in the specific context of the LCAP, the researcher was able to uncover the meanings they attached to change and to deepen her own understanding of the subjective world of the LCA teacher.

The majority of teachers in the school under study welcomed change and had a positive attitude towards it. Their perspectives appeared to have influenced their attitudes to the LCAP significantly. Factors on which their openness to change depended included: previous teaching or life experience, area of subject expertise, personality or a specific course requirement in the LCAP.

A striking feature that emerged in the data was the overriding sense of enthusiasm with which five teachers described the LCAP as a "welcoming change", as a "break from routine", as a "brilliant challenge" and as providing them with "a new lease of life".

Whilst Eisner has described how legitimate, comfortable and acceptable traditional patterns of doing things are great sources of security for teachers, the data from interviewing the above five teachers suggest that allegiance to such practices over many years can become so ingrained in teachers that they actually turn into sources of boredom, monotony or even laziness (Eisner, 1998)

The latter offers an illuminating insight into a potential reason as to why those five teachers may have displayed a particularly positive attitude towards change in the context of the LCAP. Notwithstanding the above, this study acknowledges that such an enthusiastic response was greatly enhanced by the distinct purpose, design and orientation of the LCAP itself, presenting teachers with a very different set of

practices and structures than those in more traditional programmes. In addition, the study takes cognisance of other possible contributing factors that may have led the five teachers in the sample of this research study to engage so willingly with the pedagogical changes inherent in the LCAP. They are connected to the nature of their particular subject areas which perhaps lent themselves easily to absorbing the pedagogical changes as advocated in the LCAP and to previous positive experiences of engaging with the LCAP in other schools supportive of curriculum change. The researcher is also conscious of the fact that when confronted with shifts other than pedagogical ones such as for example in team teaching or in the way professional collegial interactions among members of the LCA team are constructed a less enthusiastic response emerged from participants.

She acknowledges that one third of the teachers who participated in this study revealed a more reluctant, resistant or apprehensive attitude to change, all of which have been identified by Evans in the literature review as valid responses to change, especially in circumstances where the change is conceived and imposed on teachers by others. (Evans, 1996, p.92) Two of the teachers mentioned above discovered LCA on their timetable as distinct from being approached and invited to take it on prior to the start of the school year. It is also worth noting that one teacher's response to "getting LCA" included explicit feelings of inadequacy. According to Callan such feelings can arise when a teacher is confronted with something different that brings him or her in a world of uncertainty. He describes this world as one where:

> Teachers are uncertain about whether they will be able to cope with the new knowledge and new ways of working and relating to students
> (Callan, 1997, p.27)

Hence the importance of providing teachers with support throughout the period in which they are asked to accomplish complex tasks of transition. The data in chapter four hinted – implicitly – that there is an insufficient level of understanding on the part of the school and the Department of Education as to the nature and duration of support LCA teachers require. Some teachers went as far as stating that there was a huge lack in helping them out or in supporting them from the top down during times of curriculum change. Mary captures their sentiments succinctly:

> I find the preparation for change by the Department of Education not at all satisfactory. Take the LCAP as an example. I had to change in relation to that and I did that willingly actually. I volunteered and wanted to be involved with the programme. But I felt that after one or maybe two in-services that I was kind of dropped into the deep blue sea and it was up to me to either swim or sink...   (Mary)

The majority of LCA teachers who participated in this study were happy with the initial quality of in-service training but felt that it diminished and disappeared rapidly once the programme was up and running in the school.

Hence the need for follow-up teacher support emerged strongly in some of the data. Aine expresses this as follows:

> I would love an update on in-service after being involved for five years with the LCAP or at least a cluster meeting with a group of Visual Art teachers.
> (Aine)

Other teachers such as Elaine in the extract below identified a specific need they would like to see addressed in subsequent in-service:

> I only had in-service once at the start and it was fine. But I would like to get brushed up on it again. I'd love to be able to voice my own concerns, concerns that have come directly from my own classroom. For example I'd like to find out if I can have sample questions on the research topic.
>
> (Elaine)

Responding to Elaine's question requires a form of teacher support that addresses professional – technical issues. Some teachers exposed the importance of a type of in-service training that deals with issues of teacher fear or uncertainty in addition to professional – technical ones:

> I feel personally that everyone taking on a course in LCA should be sent on an in-service course by the LCA Support Service. Because there is an awful fear of the unknown in teachers… You know this fear as a teacher that you won't meet the right standards or the expectations that are laid out. At least when you go to an in-service they can address that initial fear and provide you with some reassurance.
>
> (Claire)

If those entrusted with the provision of LCA teacher support ignore the aforementioned needs they seriously underestimate the complexities in the programme's realisation. After all the LCAP constitutes a curricular change of considerable proportion requiring both changes in the teacher culture and in the organisational orientation of the school in which it is to be implemented.

The implications of denying LCA teachers adequate support is evident in Fullan's frequently quoted observation that pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation and has contributed to at least one teacher's high levels of uncertainty and anxiety regarding her engagement with the LCAP in the school under study.

(Fullan, 1992)

5.3   The Complexity of Curriculum Change: Towards a Culture of

Professional Collaboration?

Chapter four provided strong evidence in the data of a prevailing culture of isolation in the experiences of LCA teachers in the school under study. This was made most explicit in teachers' and the principal's perceptions of cross-curricular integration, in their descriptions of collegial interactions and in their attitudes to the practice of team teaching.

In spite of being identified as one of the key features of the LCAP's structure and of the participants' learning experience, the view of the LCA teachers who took part in this study suggests that cross-curricular integration remains an elusive goal. They perceived a schism between the intentions behind the principle of curriculum integration and its actual realisation on the ground. In addition, they expressed doubts over the use of the task as a primary vehicle to achieve cross-curricular integration. Whilst some teachers provided a number of practical suggestions as to how cross-curricular integration could be achieved in a more meaningful way, others admitted to being uncertain as to how to approach it. The "Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied" as referred to in chapters two and four confirmed that the picture painted above is by no means confined to the particular school in this research study alone.

In the light of the above finding, two areas in this study require further research: the actual meanings teachers attach to the concept of cross-curricular integration and the extent to which their current understanding of team work in relation to it actually facilitates or impedes the realisation of curriculum integration.

The nature and frequency of the interactions among LCA teachers as described by participants in this study, were marked by congeniality or being pleasant to each other rather than by collegiality or serious professional interaction. In spite of Barth's acknowledgement that the benefits of collegiality are "obvious, logical and compelling" (Barth, 1990, p.229) and that many LCA teachers underlined its importance in their responses, it still appears to be a very rare form of relationship among the adults in the school under study.

Three teachers in this study made reference to a 'limited' practice of team teaching and whilst only in its infancy in the school, they nevertheless exposed the difficulties inherent in promoting it and the mixed reactions as to teachers' readiness for embracing it, in addition to communicating its advantages in their responses.

The significance of cross-curricular integration, of professional interactions among LCA colleagues and of the practice of team-teaching for this study lies in their unique potential to act as levers of change in overcoming the culture of isolation and in bringing about a particular strong form of collaboration. Little has referred to this type of collaboration as "joint work" and in her view it constitutes the following:

> Teachers engage in frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice. Teachers are frequently observed and provided with useful critiques of their teaching. Teachers plan, design, research, evaluate and prepare teaching material together. Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching.
>
> (Little, 1981, p.331)

Little's finding that joint work at the level of classroom practice was a comparative rarity has been confirmed by the data in this research study and appears to mirror a more widespread reality in Irish schools in general. Barron's observation in 2000 that:

> It is still not easy for teachers to expose themselves to their colleagues and it is not common practice of school culture to share methods, problems or even successes with colleagues, at least in any formal or structured way.
> (Barron, 2000, p.19)

was echoed by many of the LCA teachers who participated in this study. Changing the above reality in order to ensure that the curricular orientations of the LCAP are put into practice will be a challenge of considerable proportion for those entrusted with the continuing implementation and institutionalisation of the programme in the school under study and will not be possible if the existing structures and cultures of teaching continue to remain intact in the school under study. This brings us in the realm of restructuring and re-culturing and provides us with a proper focus to address the challenges inherent in moving teachers from their current context of isolation towards professional collaboration.

Michael Fullan stressed the importance of planning extensively prior to the adoption of such a major shift. In particular he argued that sufficient attention should be paid to the gathering of evidence about matters of relevance, readiness and resources. His observations as noted in chapter two raise a number of pertinent questions that should be carefully considered by the initiators of curriculum change in the school under study:

- How ready or willing are LCA teachers in the school to embark upon a process of initiation moving them from their current context of isolation towards professional collaboration?

- Do they understand what professional collaboration has to offer their students and themselves?

- Are they personally convinced that developing a collaborative approach constitutes a meaningful response to an identified need?

- Do they feel confident and reassured that they will be provided with the necessary supports during the time of transition?

Participants in this study were adamant in expressing their need for a more collaborative approach in a variety of contexts but they did not articulate clearly what this actually might consist of and how it might benefit teachers and students in the LCAP. This suggests again that those keen to promote professional collaboration in the school under study will have to put considerable efforts into ensuring that the LCA teachers know and understand the what, why and how of professional collaboration and into linking it with the specific application contexts in which teachers are most likely to see the need for a collaborative approach emerge namely cross-curricular integration, team teaching or collegial interactions about teaching and learning in LCA.

The latter were identified as possible levers of change in promoting teacher collaboration within the LCAP in Chapter four and are referred to in the following comments.

In relation to team teaching Aine and Kathleen have this to say:

> I would love more team teaching.   (Aine)

> Team teaching would be valuable and could be an aid to teachers in LCA.
> (Kathleen)

Vanessa can see the potential benefit of cross-curricular integration when admitting

that:

> It would be nice to know what teachers in other course areas are doing with a
> view of linking up with them.
> (Vanessa)

Whilst Elaine remains convinced of the intrinsic value in holding LCA team

meetings:

> I know getting to meet other LCA teachers formally is not straightforward
> because it's only being done outside school. But it's so important that we
> meet as a team to discuss our teaching approaches, to consolidate a concern
> we may have about a student or simply to share frustrations with colleagues
> and perhaps realising that we're not the only ones getting worked up...
> (Elaine)

Statements such as the ones outlined above provide an initial yet valuable basis

from where implementers of a curricular change such as the LCAP can explore the

potential for further leverage in their own school.

The scarcity of one resource in particular - and a constraining factor in trying to

realise a more collaborative approach - namely time, emerged strongly in the data.

The creation of time for teachers to meet, plan and prepare as members of an LCA

team in the current organisational structure of the school under study presented

itself as problematic. As Kathleen confirms:

> The time for planning and meeting for teachers within the LCAP isn't there at
> all.
> (Kathleen)

This raises questions as to how the school's additional staffing allocation for the LCAP is currently being used and as to why it hasn't been used to date to provide occasionally timetabled team meetings for LCA teachers.

Vanessa fails to see:

> Why at some stage LCA team meetings cannot be scheduled or if not scheduled at least half-in half-out.   (Vanessa)

Whilst not minimising the importance of time as an essential contributing factor in facilitating the collaboration of LCA teachers in matters of teaching and learning within the programme, the emergence in the data of a prevailing culture of isolation alerted the researcher to the potential danger of attributing too much power to this resource alone and led her to the belief that priority should also be given to teacher support in the accumulation and provision of resources.

If the potential of cross-curricular integration or team teaching to act as levers of change is ever to be realised in the school under study, each individual LCA teacher's readiness in relation to it will have to be established first. Teachers will then have to be provided with opportunities to work out any questions they might have and be afforded the necessary time to adapt to the new ways of working and interacting with colleagues. In particular, they need to be consulted as to who they would like to collaborate with. As Huberman has highlighted and also noted in chapter two:

> Most teachers are likely to be able to work productively at a level of classroom practice only if they have broadly compatible educational beliefs and similar approaches to their teaching.

> (Huberman cited in Hargreaves, 1994, p.205)

It is better to acknowledge the above than to persist with collaborative efforts that will never flourish due to the incompatibility of the individuals involved. Bringing about successful change in the areas outlined above will also require sensitivity on the part of initiators towards the subjective reality of the LCA teachers expected to implement it and an ongoing awareness of the importance in promoting trust and openness in the relationships among members of an LCA teaching team.

In addition to an individual's readiness there is the school's readiness to consider when preparing for the adoption of collaborative practices such as team teaching or cross-curricular integration. In the light of the data presented in this study of a prevailing culture of isolation both within the context of the LCAP and within the wider school context a number of adaptations to the current organisational capacity of the school are worth considering:

- Altering or reducing the timetable in order to ensure that LCA teachers of various course areas are available at similar times on at least some occasions in the week to meet and plan.

  Robert described earlier in chapter four what is implicitly conveyed in the making of such a gesture:

  > In my previous school, some of us involved in LCA were given a slightly reduced timetable to facilitate planning and evaluation of the programme. That conveyed a very clear message: "it's important to collaborate."   (Robert)

- Allocating different rooms to a number of LCA teachers in order to ensure that they are in closer proximity of colleagues they need to liase with.

Mary views this as important because:

> The school is so big. I'm in one end and you may be up at the other end
> of the building quite a distance away. This means that sometimes ...
> some days... even you and me would hardly meet at all
>
> (Mary)

- Providing a common LCA base room where teachers of individual course

  areas can exhibit their key assignments or task work and through this can

  make potential links between various course elements more natural and

  transparent. The benefits of having such a room are clearly outlined by Claire

  in the extract below:

  > I'd love the idea of an LCA room, a room of theirs alone, that could be
  > used for ongoing events e.g. a coffee morning, task interviews,
  > speakers, the serving of a meal but also for storing projects and
  > displaying key assignments. I wouldn't even care if it was a prefab...
  > whatever as long as there would be a base for LCA. I think that would
  > be a great asset.
  >
  > (Claire)

Finally and in the light of the data that emerged from chapter four indicating that

LCA teachers would welcome the facilitation of an occasional timetabled LCA

team meeting by management and would interpret this as an acknowledgement of

their work, perhaps the following should also be considered:

- Making a conscious effort to create some time within the forthcoming school

  year for LCA teachers to meet, plan and prepare team teaching or cross-

  curricular links and in return hold them accountable in relation to it.

- Acknowledging the attendance of individual LCA teachers at out-of-school

  meetings throughout the school year in a positive way.

5.4 The Complexity of Curriculum Change: Changes in Pedagogy and Teacher Role

The intentions outlined in the LCAP's rationale provide teachers with meaningful guidance for practice and challenge them to re-examine their role and familiar pedagogical routines. Keeping in mind teachers' perspectives regarding the existence of a gap between the intention and practice of the LCAP as outlined earlier and appreciating the fact that very few shifts were discernable in the data describing teachers' confrontations with changes in practices other than pedagogical ones, the researcher was cautious in interpreting the eagerness and apparent ease with which LCA teachers seemed to embrace the changes in pedagogy and role as advocated in the LCAP's rationale.

She questioned whether there was a contradiction inherent in LCA teachers willing to make a shift in their own role and pedagogical classroom practices and accepting those without difficulty on the one hand and yet on the other hand demonstrating little readiness to bring about shifts in other areas of their practices such as team teaching, cross-curricular integration or professional interactions with LCA colleagues.

This led her to analyse the underlying factors that may have contributed to the formation of the aforementioned contradiction more critically.

She first dealt with the issue of data collection procedure, reconsidering the source of her data, namely interviews with LCA colleagues in the context of a short, largely non-observational study. She was conscious of the fact that interviews cannot tell everything. She realised that some of the rich descriptions LCA teachers

reluctance and resistance when confronted with changes in their role and pedagogy within the context of the LCAP.

Notwithstanding all of the above considerations, the data presented from interviews under the final theme of chapter four are characterised by an overall commitment and strong determination on the part of LCA teachers towards the ongoing implementation of the changes in pedagogy and teacher role as advocated in the programme's rationale.

Perhaps the teachers in this study attributed such importance to these particular changes in the implementation process because they are directly linked to the daily teaching and learning processes in their LCA classroom.

Perhaps unforeseen consequences may emerge from a prolonged engagement with them e.g. prompting teachers to begin sharing their pedagogical expertise in the context of their interactions with LCA colleagues, e.g. prompting managers to alter some of the conditions under which teachers currently carry out changes in their role and pedagogy within the programme.

Perhaps the benefits of adopting changes in their pedagogy and in the teacher/student relationship will eventually outweigh the costs of extra preparation and additional research on the part of LCA teachers.

Perhaps it is the single most suitable means for the LCA teachers in the school under study to make a difference in the lives of their LCA students...

Conclusion

What we know from the literature and what this study has also revealed is that the

implementation of the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme in a school – effectively

constituting a curricular change of huge proportions – is a complex undertaking.

In conducting this study the researcher sought to comprehend the intricacies of

curriculum change better and correspondingly to develop the mindset to take more

effective action in supporting LCA teachers in implementing and facilitating a radically

different programme within the constraints of an existing teacher culture and

organisational structure in their own school.

The experience of the study has developed in the author a deeper understanding of these

constraints, a heightened sensitivity to the realities of LCA teachers and a subtle

awareness of the need to listen to their interpretation of those realities.

Engaging in the aforementioned process has also led her to appreciate the role of the

LCAP co-ordinator more comprehensively and this will hopefully strengthen the

emergence of her identity as a teacher-leader in future.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

<u>Category of Inquiry: Change Complexity</u>

1.   Why was the LCAP introduced in the school?
      What was/were the reason(s)?
      What do you think of these reasons?
      Are they valid, justified, relevant...?

2.   It is said that the LCA programme is radically different in comparison to
      the other mainstream programs.
      What would you say in relation to this?

3.   More specifically would you identify the changes that you and your LCA
      colleagues are expected to make in your teaching of the programme.
      In what way does this form a contrast with for example your teaching in
      the traditional L.C. programme?

4.   What has it been like for you engaging in and implementing the change in
      teaching approaches for the LCAP?
      Was it easy/difficult? Why?

5.   Would you identify the changes that the LCA programme requires from
      the school so that it is given a chance for reasonable implementation?

<u>Category of Inquiry: Teacher Collaboration</u>

6.   It is said that the Student Task is an excellent vehicle to allow cross-
      curricular integration to take place. What do you think?
      Can you see other ways of achieving meaningful cross-curricular
      integration? Examples?

7.   Would you describe the kinds of interactions you have with LCA
      colleagues?
           What do you focus on?
           What matters are addressed?
           How frequently would you interact on LCA matters?
           When these interactions occur, would you describe them as useful or
           otherwise? In what ways?
           What are the obstacles that stand in the way of such teacher-teacher
           exchanges?

8. Can you identify some things that could encourage LCA teachers to interact on matters of teaching and learning in LCA?

9. Would you indicate things at school level that could help promote such exchanges between teacher colleagues?

Category of Inquiry: Pedagogy

10. In what way(s) has your traditional role as a subject teacher been challenged by your involvement in LCA?

11. Would you identify some new teaching approaches you have used or currently are using in LCA in order to address its student learning outcomes?

12. If you have not used any new approaches or not to the extent you had hoped for, would you like to indicate why this might be the case?

13. How would you describe your own reactions/feelings/views when faced with changes in your work, in your role in the classroom or in your teaching approaches?

14. Do you feel that the time and opportunities provided to you to work out for yourself what is involved in accomplishing the tasks of an LCA teacher were sufficient? Why? Why not?
    How might this be addressed at an individual or school level?

Appendix B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRINCIPALS

<u>Category of Inquiry: Change Complexity</u>

1. It is said that the LCAP is radically different from other mainstream programmes. What would you say in relation to this?

2. When introducing the LCAP in the school in 1999 what, if any, concerns or misgivings did you have? How did you address these at the time?

3. Looking back now, and considering the early phase what would you do differently? Challenges, pitfalls, lessons learned?

4. Why was the LCAP introduced in this school?

5. What changes in their teaching would you expect teachers who engage in the LCAP to make?
   Does this form a contrast with their teaching in for example more traditional L.C. programmes?

6. Could you identify any changes that the LCAP demanded and continues to demand from the school (its resources, priorities...) so that it is given a chance to realise its full potential?

<u>Category of Inquiry: Teacher Collaboration</u>

7. Would you describe the kinds of interactions among LCA teachers as distinct from other teachers in the school? Reasons?

8. It is said that cross-curricular integration and inter-disciplinary approaches are key features of the LCAP.
   Is there evidence in your view that the above features are currently being realised in the school? Examples? How?

9. Would you indicate what the obstacles are at the school's organisational level hindering the above exchanges between LCA teachers?

10. Is there anything you as a school leader could do to encourage LCA teachers to interact about matters of teaching and learning in LCA?

Category of Inquiry: Pedagogy

11. In what ways would you describe the classroom role of an LCA teacher as opposed to a non-LCA teacher?

12. What do you think are the teaching approaches LCA teachers in your school are currently employing to address the learning outcomes in their course?

13. What enables teachers to use those approaches and what hinders their engagement with certain approaches?

Category of Inquiry: Teacher Supports

14. What kinds of supports do you feel are provided to LCA teachers from
    a. the LCA regional support team
    b. within the school?

15. In what areas would LCA teachers benefit from support?
    (teachers' understanding of course, what is involved in teaching it)

16. In the light of your experience over the years how do you feel teachers respond to new programmes that challenge them to alter their teaching practices in the classroom?