# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

## 5.1    What are teachers' perceptions of teacher-led curriculum initiatives in relation to change in practice?

The findings from this research, confirming that teacher-led curriculum initiatives are changing practice, are in line with the literature and serve as a confirmation for the variants that allow for teachers to lead curriculum change for the benefits of teaching and learning. The findings have been presented from the emic perspective of the teachers, and it remains their perceptions of how they have reflected on and changed their practices after participating in the GISCDI. The benefits to student learning are recorded from the teachers' own assessments and evaluations of their classroom practice, linked to student achievements and comments during actual lessons. The teachers are confident that their participation in the GISCDI has developed them professionally and encouraged them to bring about change in their professional roles. The Heads of various schools who reported back to the co-ordinator on the reflection of practice by their teachers and the subsequent changes to classroom teaching serve to confirm the validity of the conversations held with the participants.

The concepts of teacher leader, distributed leadership, trust and collegiality have been examined from the perspective of the participants within the GISCDI programme. These concepts have emerged as vital in the motivation and encouragement for teachers to change practice.

This study has contributed to the knowledge of how to initiate change in schools and affirms the literature and research in these fields of study.

What the research failed to highlight, however, is how greatly the emotional landscape of schools affects these concepts. Underlying messages in the interviews and conversations intimated that teachers faced varying degrees of emotional stress when going back into their schools and classrooms to initiate and implement the changes.

The rate or pace of implementation was affected by the extent to which teachers found themselves hierarchically, professionally and emotionally challenged. People naturally vary in their ability to embrace change, but the concepts of distributed leadership, and trust, were found, in this research, to make implementation and change easier. Trust by leadership aided in relieving teacher stress, but did not make the stress of change disappear, although it did allay fears, as did the concept of collegiality and collaborative planning. The knowledge that respected colleagues were party to the teacher's own change strategies – especially in the independent school context – was affirming. It allowed the teachers to feel more confident and secure when taking new ideas into old environments of varying cultures. Many of the differences in insights and perceptions that teachers gained from the programme could be attributed to needs that teachers face at varying times in their careers. These could include personal or professional, emotional or social needs linked to their own professional development

or to their personal contexts. The research showed that this programme answered different needs in different teachers, depending on what their needs were at the time.

The research presented by David Frost from the University of Cambridge and Alma Harris from the University of Warwick, linking *Teacher Leadership* to change in practice, confirms the findings in this report. The fact that the '*teacher has chosen to act strategically to contribute to school improvement'* (Frost & Durrant, 2002) by exercising informal leadership, sharing expertise and assisting in the improvement of classroom practice, supports the research carried out in the United Kingdom.

In this conclusion it will be important to consider the sub-questions initially presented and to supply brief responses to these, with direct links to actual practice and previous findings from the review of literature.

## 5.2 What evidence is there that teacher-led curriculum initiatives are changing practice?

The evidence that teachers are changing their classroom practice after participating in the GISCDI has been discussed and presented fully in the findings of the research. Teachers reflected honestly on their practice and discussed what changes they made to their teaching after attendance at workshops and meetings of the GISCDI. This reflective

practice has allowed for teachers to indicate significant areas of professional development and lead to action taken in creating further learning opportunities for themselves and leading this development for their colleagues.

The conversations between the co-ordinator of the GISCDI and Heads of certain schools, also serve to confirm the findings presented. The teachers were honest about the changes they had made after reflecting on their practice, and the Heads were delighted with the teachers enthusiasm and motivation to change their teaching.

Although the feedback was positive and affirming of the literature, other factors were found to be in play as school-based learning emerged. The fact of teacher development was more complex than discussed in the actual finding. Schools have their own 'emotional geographies' Hargreaves (2001), and it is the reading and mapping of these that effect the level of participation and implementation.

Evidence showed that practice is changing, but it is vital to consider what teachers feel would promote or inhibit change after participating in the GISCDI. When the findings are compared to the list of factors from the literature of Harris (2002); Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) and Moller (1999) that have been elicited by teachers in other teacher-led programmes, many similarities are evident. The most important concepts that this research has highlighted as essential for promotion of

this programme were those of trust by leadership, for teachers to lead change, continued collegiality and collaborative meetings led by role models.

The reported evidence of the change in practice and subsequent benefits to student learning can be summed up in the table presented in Chapter 4. The table was prepared, not as a cause and effect diagram, but as a description of the variety of changes made, and benefits to student learning, seen from the perspective of the participants in the research.

## 5.3 What factors are contributing to the success of the teacher-led curriculum initiatives?

The factors that have been highlighted as the main contributors to the success of the teacher-led curriculum initiatives include: trust by the schools' leadership for teachers to lead and implement curriculum change in their classrooms; the concept of teacher leaders to grow from distributed leadership within schools and within the region; and the collegiality at curriculum meetings, and sharing of resources and ideas with colleagues from other independent schools,

This highlights teacher leadership, mentioned in Chapter Two, as a process of empowering teachers to initiate and sustain change, amongst colleagues, within and between their classrooms and schools.

The teachers who are co-ordinators of the GISCDI have been empowered to lead the changes and implement necessary professional development that is requested by the participants. They are role models and teachers aspire to do what they do. This becomes a domino effect as the participants in the research stated that they felt empowered to go back to their schools and colleagues and lead change within their own school environment. This empowerment of the teachers is only possible if the schools trust their teachers to implement changes in their classroom practice.

The leaders at these schools must subscribe to the model described as distributed leadership (Hargreaves, 2001). Comments by many participants indicate that it has been the teacher-led aspect of the GISCDI and not a top-down, organisational, structuralist approach (Ball, 1987), that has sustained and led to the success of the process, affirm this model.

In order for the teachers to feel confident in making changes to classroom practice, they need to be trusted by the leadership to take the risks necessary for the implementation of new methodologies and assessment strategies. The participants who felt trusted by their school's leaders, were eager to implement change and were affirmed in their status as teachers to change their classroom practice and grow their schools. This confirms the findings of Sergiovanni (2001) who has found that the more people are entrusted to lead change in schools, the

more new ideas will be initiated and implemented in practice. The trust must also extend to the teachers' being allowed to feed information to their colleagues after participation in workshops organized by the GISCDI. This will allow them to become teacher leaders in their own schools and assist in the professional development of their colleagues. What does emerge from the research and literature is that trust is different across schools. Some see it as bureaucratic compliance others consider it to be emotional support, while most schools involved in the research considered it to be professional collegiality.

But, once again, a significant area of future research that this investigation did not address was the importance of 'emotional practices'. Hargreaves, (2001). According to Hargreaves, 'Teaching and learning are not only concerned with knowledge, cognition and skill. They are also emotional practices.' He defines this as an 'embedded practice that produces for the person, an expected or unexpected emotional alteration in the inner and outer streams of experience.' (p.89) When teachers want to be trusted to change their practice and move schools forward, they are faced with many interactions in which emotions are dynamic factors. Hargreaves' research considers these emotional relationships in terms of sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political emotional geographies. They are a consistent factor that affects the lives and practices of teachers. In terms of the GISCDI, the teachers who take information from meetings back to their schools and into their classrooms experience this. They have to please

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the Head of the school, convince disinterested colleagues of the benefits and move with change, even though they may be criticised by parents and the school community for altering previous practice. This observational data from actual experience with teachers, and in schools, affirms that this is a reality and it is what makes the collegial meetings offered by the GISCDI even more important in the lives of the participating teachers.

Without doubt, the major factor contributing to the success of this initiative is collegiality. Collegial models, discussed in Chapter Two, are fundamental in promoting change and school improvement. Harris and Chapman (2000), Bush (1997), Beane (1998) and Bath (1999) are all clear on the fact that collegiality stimulates commitment to the profession. Fullan (1992) has found that for any change in practice to be implemented and sustained, teachers must interact and support each other as they try out new practices, cope with difficulties and try out new skills. The participants in this research were adamant that the collegiality, collaborative learning and professional development has enabled and empowered them confidently to reflect on previous practice, implement and sustain change in their classrooms. 'Improvement in professional practice entails fundamental professional learning, which relies on collaborative relationships, the social contexts within which knowledge can be created, transferred and transposed' (Hargreaves 1999; Fullan 2001), confirms these findings on the importance of collegiality to create and sustain change in schools.

The GISCDI is a powerful mechanism to support and grow people. It is essential for the teachers to be affirmed that what they are doing is correct and essential to their craft. The GISCDI is small enough, and contained enough, to provide the personal and professional support to teachers that is needed, as well as offer the 'personal touch' of teachers learning from teachers. More importantly, it focuses school improvement strategies back into the classroom, at the site of actual practice.

### 5.4 How have teacher-led curriculum initiatives been a catalyst for teacher development and school improvement?

The teacher-led curriculum initiatives have been a catalyst for teacher development and school improvement, as the collegial meetings have provided safe environments and contexts for teachers to verbalise the recognition of the areas of challenge in their practice. They have identified the need to enhance their skills to meet the demands of a changing curriculum. This concurs with Fullan (1992) who found that implementation occurs when teachers interact with and support each other as they try out new practices.

The GISCDI has developed the formal benchmarking assessment that is a tool primarily for highlighting possible areas requiring professional development and school improvement. The results of the students participating in this assessment are used as a guideline for areas of development in the teaching and learning in the respective learning

areas. The schools are able to compare their achievements to the regional average in each section, and make assumptions about the needs of the school. This allows for teacher development in specific areas of English and Mathematics, which are highlighted as areas requiring professional development. The co-ordinators of the GISCDI plan workshops and develop materials and resources to assist with the development deemed necessary. The professional development planning comes directly from the needs expressed by the teachers, once they have analysed their students' results. This then makes this teacher-led initiative the catalyst for professional development and school improvement.

The participants commented that they had improved their professional images by being involved in the GISCDI's professional development workshops. The improvements they had noted in their students' learning, as well as the feedback given to them by senior schools on the quality of the students' work, were instrumental in building their confidence as professionals, and enhancing their professional image. Andrews and Lewis (2002) describe this experience, and their research confirms the importance of teachers developing a new image of themselves, and their workplace, to build strong learning communities. They also found, through interviews and questionnaires, that the teachers involved in leading change had had positive experiences and also felt that their students had benefited from their own improvements in classroom practice and school pedagogy. The participants'

assuredness that they have been successful in improving quality in their classrooms because of their direct involvement in the GISCDI, highlights the importance of these findings in enabling school effectiveness and school improvement research to refocus on the purveyors of education, and take it back to the classroom.

## 5.5    Summary

This study has contributed to the knowledge of educational communities, by showing that teachers involved in a teacher-led curriculum initiative are reflecting on and changing their practice.

They reflect on what they are doing in classrooms, implement new ideas and make relevant changes to their teaching because they are learning from other teachers; they feel motivated to generate new methodologies and are encouraged at the meetings of the GISCDI to take positive risks. These teachers are choosing to contribute to school improvement and to improve the achievements of their students. Frost and Durrant (2002) have emphasised the capacity of teachers to improve schools if they involve themselves in teacher-led school improvement strategies. This research has confirmed their studies.

Teachers of varying experience in the classroom reported changes they had implemented, and how delighted they were with the results. They enjoyed their teaching, their students benefited, and in many cases, a 'ripple effect' across the school was noted. Colleagues at these schools

wanted to be part of the new initiative, and bought into the programme. Reflecting on practice has created the changes and teachers are excited about this concept.

The schools' management structures, and their subscribing to trust in teachers and distributing leadership, also positively affected the new practices. An encouraging approach to dispersing power definitely contributed to the confidence of the teachers in implementing new ideas and growing their colleagues and students.

The fact that the GISCDI is not a 'top down' initiative, but one where teachers lead school improvement programmes, has ensured that they stay involved. This process of reflection and initiating and sustaining teacher development and school improvement has been focused directly on teachers at their site of practice, namely their classrooms. Sustaining the change in practice depends on the 'values, beliefs and understanding of teachers' Fullan (1993). They will only make the changes if they see the benefits to their teaching and students' learning.

Any programme has a responsibility to 'engage the teachers' hearts and minds to ensure genuine development, and not merely initiation or implementation.' Hargreaves (1999) p 122.

The teachers who have experienced the GISCDI have sustained their commitment to reflecting on and improving practice for the

enhancement of student learning for more than four years - a long-term dedication, because they have a belief that their teaching could be better. Other teachers lead them, and these collegial relationships ensure the impetus of change and transfer of knowledge in classrooms. The participating teachers acknowledge that their experiences and new practices are fundamental for the creation of new learning communities at their schools.