

***Investigating the inclusion of teachers, parents and students in
curriculum leadership: some emerging issues***

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on some pilot work emerging from a recently-completed ARC collaborative research project which theorised curriculum leadership for effective teaching and learning. The pilot work is enlarging the focus of stakeholders in curriculum leadership to include parents and students as well as teachers. The pilot work is being undertaken in a small number of primary and secondary schools in both country and metropolitan areas in Queensland. Reference is made to two of these schools in this paper. The work is situated within a conceptual framework which seeks to celebrate a participatory view of curriculum decision-making which includes teachers, parents and students. The pilot work has proceeded within a methodological approach characterised as Action Research which is critical, collaborative and reconstructive. The emerging issues which are being identified come from the use of lifeworld perspectives of teachers, parents and students. These perspectives are being elicited as narratives and elaborated (as well as analysed) in a series of ongoing conversations with individual participants, groups of participants within and across schools. The emerging issues which are presented in a tentative form will become a basis for ongoing theorising about the inclusion of teachers, parents and students in curriculum leadership.*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on pilot work emerging from a recently-completed Australian Research Council collaborative research project which theorised curriculum decision-making as curriculum leadership for effective teaching and learning (See Macpherson, 1998; Macpherson, Aspland, Brooker & Elliott, 1999; Macpherson, Brooker, Aspland & Elliott, 1999). The pilot work enlarges the focus of stakeholders in curriculum leadership to include parents and students as well as teachers. The pilot work has been situated in a small number of primary and secondary schools in both country and metropolitan areas in Queensland, Australia; within a conceptual framework which celebrates a participatory view of curriculum decision-making as curriculum leadership which includes teachers, parents and students; and within a methodological approach characterised as Action Research which is critical, collaborative and reconstructive (See Macpherson, Brooker, Aspland & Elliott, 1999). Emerging issues, identified as the lifeworld perspectives (See Habermas, 1987) of teachers, parents and students have been elicited and are currently being analysed and interpreted. These perspectives were elicited as narratives and elaborated (as well as analysed and interpreted) in a series of ongoing conversations with individual research participants and groups of research participants within schools. It is intended to broaden the analysis with early next year with the inclusion of both research participants across schools and administrative personnel at school, district and systemic levels. The outcomes of this broadened analysis will provide a platform for ongoing thinking and action at local, district and systemic levels. Emerging issues from this platform will also be used by us (in association with an international critical friend network) as a basis ongoing theorising about the inclusion of teachers, parents and students in curriculum leadership.

The purpose, then, of this paper is to open our work in progress to the wider critique which an AARE paper presentation affords. The paper, therefore, reports:

- ***our theorising about the inclusion of teachers, parents and students in curriculum leadership emanating from this pilot work; and***
- ***our reflections on the methodological approach and strategies used.***

The pilot research will conclude in the first half of next year. This paper is, then, a documentation of work in progress which is seeking to create worthwhile professional knowledge for the twenty-first century relative to the inclusion of teachers, along with parents and students in curriculum decision-making (conceived as curriculum leadership).

THE PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Curriculum decision-making (conceptualised as curriculum leadership) is viewed as any initiative that teachers in the multi-faceted contexts of teaching /learning sites undertake to encourage more effective learning and teaching. It is about leading learning and seizing opportunities that appear to have the potential to enhance learning and teaching experiences and outcomes (See Macpherson et al, 1999 references above). This view of curriculum leadership is framed by a position which sees teachers as curriculum makers and places them centrally in curriculum decision-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Brubaker, 1993; Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995; Moller & Katzenmeyer, 1996; and Macpherson, Aspland, Elliott, Proudford, Shaw & Thurlow, 1996).

This view of curriculum leadership provides a framework of contextual and personal factors for constructing the perceptions of stakeholders as lifeworld perspectives (See Habermas,

1987). Contextual factors include the images of curriculum held by people, the organisational arrangements and the social relationships among people at teaching/learning sites; while the personal factors include, for example, a person's sense of enthusiasm and commitment to engage in curriculum leadership.

People are considered central in curriculum leadership and their perceptions (presented as lifeworld perspectives) of how they are positioned in curriculum leadership provide an insight to how we might better support and sustain them in having both a place and a readiness to engage (or space) in curriculum leadership. Such investigation is timely, given the current policy documentation in a range of cultural contexts which highlights the engagement of significant stakeholders (such as teachers, parents and students) as partners in educational activities (Education Queensland, 1997, 1997a; Blunkett, 1997; Education Department, Hong Kong, 1997; Stokes, 1997; Finkelstein, 1997).

The theoretical framework underpinning this pilot work takes curriculum leadership beyond teachers to include other stakeholders, namely parents and students. Thus, a view of curriculum decision-making/curriculum leadership as a collaborative undertaking involving teachers, parents and students becomes an important emphasis in our theoretical thinking. In theorising the place of these people in curriculum decision-making, we are taking the view that these stakeholders are not working in a competitive manner. Rather, we are working towards a view where they work as an alliance in which the complementarity of perspectives and roles is valued.

Data associated with their lifeworld perspectives seek to present a picture of the human complexities through which contextual and systemic pressures, priorities and policies are mediated or filtered in the minds and actions of these stakeholders as they position and reposition themselves at the levels of school and classroom practice. Considerations of these data are designed to make dynamic links among theory, policy and professional practice. Such data seek to capture the perceptions of these significant stakeholders in curriculum leadership and to define (and provide) both place and space for their lifeworld perspectives to be valued, heard and included. The valuing and hearing of their lifeworld perspectives, it is contended, emphasises an approach to supporting and sustaining their authentic and meaningful engagement in curriculum leadership in ways which take account of the lived world of stakeholders and their perceptions of how they might discover place and readiness (or space) to engage in curriculum leadership. This is a counter-hegemonic view of curriculum change where the vision of the organisation and its needs are much more paramount (See Lieberman & Hargreaves, 1998). Such a view is one "from the edge" and seeks to draw those who are presently marginalised much more towards centre stage.

The literature on voice (See Keedy and Drmacich, 1991; Rosaen, 1993; Brown, Perry & McIntire, 1994; Covalleskie, 1994; Hargreaves, 1996; Brooker & Macdonald, 1999) is also contributing to our theorising the place of teachers, parents and students in curriculum decision-making/curriculum leadership. It is the communication of these stakeholders' perceptions through their voices which becomes the basis for the methodological framework.

THE PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT – METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Within the theoretical background outlined above, this pilot research is being conducted within an action research framework. The project is seeking to theorise the place and space of teachers, parents and students as they position themselves in curriculum leadership. To do this, initially narratives and conversations were used to generate case study accounts of curriculum leadership perceived by these groups in each of the schools. From these, propositions about meanings and interpretations of curriculum leadership actions, intentions and outcomes are emerging. These propositions are resulting from iterative hermeneutic

spirals of recording, analysis and interpretation. Propositional statements will be the outcomes of these processes. The use of a hermeneutic spiral (itself being developed in greater detail as the work proceeds) is informing the ways in which data are analysed, interpreted and documented critically, collaboratively and reconstructively.

Action Research has always been an iterative process and has been characterised often as a spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis, 1994). Our work, using action research, emphasises the critical and the collaborative aspects - critical in the sense of having theorised positions about curriculum leadership for effective learning and teaching and about teachers' (and now other significant stakeholders') place and readiness (space) to engage in curriculum leadership; and collaborative (in that we work with teachers and not on teachers) in collecting, analysing and interpreting data contained in initial narratives and in transcripts/ summaries of ongoing conversations (See Aspland, Macpherson, Proudford & Whitmore, 1996; Aspland et al, 1998; Macpherson et al, 1998; Macpherson, 1998).

This research is seeking to elaborate on that iterative process, by articulating a place for a network of critical friend groups which seek to take the narratives and the ensuing conversations (which are about analysing, interpreting and theorising data) beyond the locally descriptive to the more globally interpretive and applied. A significant part of this elaboration is to define critical friend networks (Chapman, 1996); and to establish ethical principles and protocols for inviting colleagues to be members of these networks and for facilitating and maintaining the networks as a hermeneutic spiral which will highlight the analysis and interpretation of the descriptive data as well as their implications for action. (The details of this process will be provided in the paper itself and will include, for example, an elaboration of the composition of critical friend networks.)

Sources of data include the initial narrative accounts elicited from small selections of teachers, parents and students at the schools; the presenters' initial analysis of these accounts; the record of ongoing conversations with teachers, parents and students as the accounts are analysed and interpreted critically, collaboratively and reconstructively at individual schools and across the schools; the record of the mini-conference; and a record of the ongoing interactions with critical friend groups. (This paper does not report on the last two of these).

There have been three schools involved and at each school three small groups of approximately 6 per group (that is 6 teachers, 6 parents and 6 students per school) were involved in writing narratives and engaging in the ensuing conversations and actions.

Preliminary analysis of the narrative data has already been completed and it is providing a platform for ongoing theorising of the inclusion of parents, students and teachers in curriculum decision-making in the conversations, local actions and the mini-conference. Thus far, it is apparent that for parents and students, along with teachers, to have an authentic inclusion in curriculum decision-making, they need to be supported and sustained in developing a confidence and competence. It is also apparent that within each group of stakeholders within and across schools, there is a diversity of lifeworld perspectives which has implications for the ways in which they might be supported and sustained.

The remaining sections of this paper seek to capture the initial reporting and analysis of the data. It is important to stress again that what is presented in the remainder of this paper is an incomplete report of work in progress.

STORIES FROM TWO OF THE LOCAL SITES IN THE PILOT RESEARCH PROJECT

Part A: What the stories contain at each site?

Lifeworld perspectives were obtained in the form of structured narratives from small groups of teachers, parents and students at each site. The narratives were generated on an individual basis. It was from these individual narratives that a group story was collated for each group in each school. All members within each group were given a copy of the group story for their respective group and asked to read it and to confirm its accuracy and fairness as a record for ongoing use. A much shorter version of each collated story was used to generate a framework for conversations with each group at each site. These conversations then formed the basis for a conversation with the administration team at each site. The focus in all of these conversations was on an exploration of what were the main ideas which group members wanted to talk about and what were the possibilities for action in terms of supporting and sustaining stakeholder's involvement in curriculum leadership. What follows is a summary of the emerging ideas and possible actions which emerged in the conversations.

The stories, then, chronicle the stakeholder's perspectives about their engagement in curriculum leadership now, the role they could play in curriculum leadership and the ways in which their engagement could be supported and sustained.

It is outside the scope of this paper to present the detail of the individual narratives and the collated group stories. What is important to note, however, is that the context of each site is unique, as is the mix of ideas, people and possibilities for ongoing action. It is, therefore, necessary to point out that the summaries which follow are indicative of what people's lifeworld perspectives are of curriculum leadership both now and in the future.

Part B: What are we making of the stories from the conversations within groups at each site?

At National State School (a primary school in a small country town in south east Queensland)

Emerging Ideas	Possible Actions
<p><i>From Teachers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might a greater clarity develop re the sorts of curriculum frameworks within which planning, teaching / learning and assessment/evaluation develop • What impediments which affect our involvement in curriculum leadership need to be identified and addressed? (eg time pressures, the number of committees, professional development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an overarching committee which steers curriculum decision-making • Learning to prioritise and to feel professionally prepared to take on new initiatives (such as negotiating curriculum with students at the school and classroom levels – extending the class meeting concept,

- How can we learn to work smarter?
- How can we show an appreciation for and maintain a supportive Administration team (this school is VERY democratically run)?

From Parents

- Do parents have sufficient background information and knowledge to be able to contribute to curriculum decision-making?
- Is it desirable for parents to be involved and who would be the most desirable parents to have involved?
- How do parents build on the openness in this school for parents to become involved and in what ways should they become involved?
- How can parents support teachers in their very busy working lives and how can parents work with parents to encourage this sort of support?
- In what ways can parents offer perspectives that might contribute to curriculum decision-making, eg with the allocation of monies to resources?
- In what ways can communication keep parents informed about what opportunities exist for an involvement in curriculum decision-making?

From Students

- How can our Student Council move beyond an emphasis on fundraising to a greater emphasis on matters relating to what and how we learn (including how monies raised are to be spent)?
- How can we strengthen the class meetings as a place to talk about what we choose to learn about and how we learn in our classrooms?
- What place is there for us to have a say about things like the responsible thinking classroom, assessment and reporting, enrichment classes, etc?

for example)

- Providing training opportunities and locating funding sources
- Continuing the climate of collaboration and collegial respect
- Providing ways whereby parents are increasingly informed as a basis for a more meaningful involvement
- Encouraging a wider base of parental involvement in the life of the school
- Learning how to have a meaningful involvement through appropriate training programs
- As above
- Establishing and maintaining lines of communication as a basis for consultation in curriculum decision-making
- As above
- Widening the working of the Student Council and our attendance at other school meeting such as staff meetings)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there room for us at parent/teacher interviews? • In what ways could we interact more with the Administration team in talking about the above, because the opportunity is there? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding opportunities for negotiating the curriculum • Clarifying the agenda for student participation in curriculum decision-making • Providing opportunities for students to be a part of talking about their own learning • Developing skills associated with putting our perspective on a range of issues associated with their learning
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A Perspective from the Administration Team

The members of the Administration Team at National State School include the Principal and the Deputy Principal. Together, they reflected on the curriculum decision-making opportunities for teachers, parents and students. They felt that the school had a very strong structure for teachers' involvement in curriculum decision-making at both the school-wide and classroom-specific levels. There is an openness to the inclusion of parents in this structure. There was a recognition of the communication that took place which seeks to keep parents informed and of the ongoing need to think about training parents to have a meaningful involvement. Time was noted as a factor militating against parental involvement and as a factor which also affected teachers' involvement. Positive mention was made of a parent who undertook the role of a parent liaison officer for a period. It was recognised that the involvement of students was limited, although mention was made of some teachers working in the area of negotiated curriculum. While specific examples were mentioned where people had had some involvement (eg bullying, sequential HRE, responsible reasoning), both members of the Administration Team expressed a genuine willingness to have teachers, parents and students more involved in curriculum decision-making. Areas which were identified as possible ways for moving ahead included:

- Reviewing the existing committee structure to make it more efficient and inclusive;
- Training stakeholders in order for them to be more authentically involved;
- Addressing factors such as time, information-sharing and communication so that they become enabling factors rather than inhibiting factors; and
- Understanding the complementary roles which the various stakeholders can play in curriculum decision-making.

At National State High School (a secondary school in the same town)

Emerging Ideas	Possible Actions
<p><i>From Teachers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is considered ideal for teachers in terms of their involvement in curriculum decision-making? • What sorts of support are desirable for teachers to have a real involvement (one that is not superficial) in curriculum decision-making? • Where do parents and students fit in to our involvement in curriculum decision-making? <p><i>From Parents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we become involved in curriculum decision-making when the reality of time militates against us? • How can we become better-informed about what is going on (the school does a great job through the newsletter and Parent/Teacher Nights, but what about the P & C and the School Council)? • How can we overcome feelings of inadequacy and become confident about an involvement in curriculum decision-making? • What are the most appropriate ways for us to become involved? <p><i>From Students</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the areas in which we might have an input in making curriculum decisions (classroom, school-wide)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the realities within which teachers work and the range of frameworks (from structured to flexible) from which work programs develop • Allocating time (including ways of finding time) and money with reference to timetabling and to difficulties in finding replacement teachers in a country location; becoming aware of and identifying what professional development opportunities there are • Clarifying the complementary inputs which parents and students might have in curriculum decision-making • Identifying the most appropriate ways to communicate between school and home • Thinking about establishing forums which involve all stakeholder groups • Finding ways to increase our confidence • Identifying areas where we can support teachers in our students' learning without "interfering" • Identifying possibilities within individual subjects and across subjects (determining choice within a subject about topics and approaches, and becoming involved as student representatives on the

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills do we need to have a responsible and worthwhile involvement in curriculum decision-making? 	<p>Studies Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming involved with teachers in subject area meetings and Studies Committee meetings on the basis of relevant training and preparation.
<p>A Perspective from the Administration Team</p>	
<p>The members of the Administration Team included the two Deputy Principals. A range of current opportunities for teachers to be involved in curriculum decision-making was outlined. Specific examples cited were the Middle Years curriculum initiative, the Studies Committee and the Middle management Group at the school-wide level. Teachers had the usual range of decision-making opportunities and responsibilities at the subject-area and classroom levels. It was noted that time and financial support were important considerations in sustaining teachers' involvement along with those opportunities for planting seeds about future possibilities. Professional development, therefore, was seen to be a priority which needed continual "upping" in the priority order. The involvement which parents have was talked about very positively. It was concluded that they have an awareness of relevant information, but to this point, they do not really have an authentic involvement in curriculum decision-making. It was stressed that from a school perspective, there was a keen desire to have parents involved, although it was recognised that this would mean a culture change. Some examples of parental involvement were noted (eg internal quality review of vocational education subjects, subject selections, School Council). Student involvement in curriculum decision-making, it was conceded, is at the the early stages, although there are increasing opportunities for students to give feedback at the classroom and subject levels. Areas which were identified as possible ways for moving ahead included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing committee structures and memberships; • Enhancing subject coordination/middle management policies and processes; • Broadening communication and consultation; • Encouraging/supporting curriculum initiatives through addressing time constraints, ensuring follow-up support, providing ongoing educational leadership (planting seeds); releasing stakeholders for appropriate professional development/training; and • Leading/facilitating culture change as well as curriculum review and reform 	

Part C: What are we making of the stories across groups at each site?

The summaries outlined above were provided to each school site as a basis for checking with each group for accuracy and fairness of representation and for an ongoing conversation across the groups at each site. The emphasis in these conversations was upon possibilities

and planning for appropriate action to support and sustain people's involvement in curriculum decision-making. A brief summary for each site appears below.

A Summary of the conversation at National State School

Three teachers, one member of the Administration Team, three students and one parent participated in the conversation. Involvement became a major underlying theme in the conversation. The climate for consolidating and expanding the support for stakeholders in curriculum decision-making was recognised. The similarity of ideas and possible actions across the four groups was also noted. Things to focus on included:

- Refining committee structures in the school in order to make participation greater and more effective for all stakeholders
- Looking for ways to communicate even more effectively and to invite parents to participate from a point of strength (expertise) rather than stress (eg being called to the school to help work out a problem with a student)
- Identifying people's interest and expertise and creating a register which documents these (particularly for parents and community persons)
- Addressing the time factor by a consideration of its many facets
- Preparing stakeholders for an increasing participation (with an emphasis on transferring skills from other involvements to a participation in curriculum decision-making and with the goal of developing both confidence and competence)
- Maintaining a climate which is open to and supportive of various stakeholders' involvement (eg involving students in parent/teacher interviews, training to help stakeholders to participate in meetings)
- Clarifying the complementary role which the various stakeholders can play in curriculum decision-making (for example, teachers have a professional role, parent a supportive role and students a feedback role)
- Keeping in mind the broader picture of what factors create a framework within which schools and teachers work

There was a recognition that the conversation was useful in creating a platform for thinking about and planning for appropriate actions to support and sustain the various stakeholders' involvement in curriculum decision-making.

A Summary of the conversation at National State High School

Two teachers, one student, one member of the Administration Team and one parent participated in the conversation. While there was a degree of similarity of ideas and possible actions across the four groups, it was noted that there were perhaps some barriers to overcome. For example, the perceptions of teachers about parents being in classrooms and of students being at the Studies Committee meetings were something that could be talked about further across the groups. A greater complexity of factors appeared to be operating in this secondary school than at the primary school. Things like communication with parents (and involvement of parents in the secondary curriculum) and management of time (class periods/timetable structure and breaks during the day) make it difficult to find times for discussion. However, it was agreed that there was an already existing climate of goodwill which makes for a strong platform for ongoing thinking and action to support the various stakeholders' involvement in curriculum decision-making. Things to focus on in this ongoing

thinking and action included:

- Reviewing committee structures within the school to facilitate a more effective involvement of all stakeholders
- Endeavouring to broaden the ways in which communication occurs to the various stakeholder groups, especially parents and community persons
- Deepening the information base for stakeholders to have a more authentic input to curriculum decision-making
- Investigating the perceptions of students, teachers and parents about parental involvement
- Recognising and valuing the complementary roles of each stakeholder group in curriculum decision-making
- Exploring the possibilities of enabling frameworks for negotiated curriculum practices
- Identifying areas where a focus of learning (such as the middle years concept) might create a basis for stakeholders to work together in curriculum decision-making

There was agreement that the conversation had reflected the summaries from the previous group conversations and that the conversation was a basis for moving ahead with planning actions to support and sustain stakeholders' involvement in curriculum decision-making.

Part D: What are we making of the stories across groups and across sites?

The purpose of thinking about the above summaries across sites is not so much for the purpose of further reducing or generalising the data as to create avenues for sharing ideas, being generative and looking for ways whereby supportive networks might develop as the research moves more into the action and critical review of action phases. The purposes, then, of widening the audience of the accounts at each of the sites to include an international critical friend network relates to the notion of an hermeneutic spiral as described in the methodological section earlier in the paper.

At this stage, however, interactions (the broader analysis alluded to in the introduction) across these wider audiences has not occurred. Rather, each site has been asked to think about and plan for actions that will support and sustain stakeholders' involvement in curriculum decision-making.

Each site, then, has been sent summaries of the conversations that were held across the four groups at each site (as above). Each site has been asked to provide us with some detail about the following:

- i. What actions have you specifically identified as areas to work on in supporting and sustaining stakeholders' involvement in curriculum decision-making?
- ii. Why did you identify these areas and not others?
- iii. How do you intend to work on these areas?
- iv. When would be appropriate times in the first half of 2000 for us to make contact with you about the actions you will be working on?
- v. Who might be appropriate others who could become involved in a wider forum to share your work towards the end of the first half of 2000?

We have also intimated to people at each site that we are sharing the summaries with our own critical friend networks.

It is this wider involvement of participants and appropriate others which focuses both on the action and the hermeneutic spiral components of our methodological framework.

EMERGING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

From the reporting of work in progress in the previous section, we capture some of the emerging ideas and themes about the inclusion of teachers, parents and students in curriculum leadership (or curriculum decision-making):

RE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- *The contextual and personal factors as mentioned on page 4 constitute a useful navigational tool for a site to map and understand the local and unique milieu within which curriculum decision-making occurs.*
- *The perspectives of stakeholder groups may appear similar to one another; but on closer examination, there is value in groups talking together in order to understand the unique ways in which groups perceive what their particular contributions might be in curriculum decision-making.*
- *The roles of the various stakeholder groups may well be unique; and it is worthwhile recognising and valuing the complementarity of these roles in curriculum decision-making.*
- *Characteristics like uniqueness and complementarity suggest an ongoing need for groups within and across sites to communicate and collaborate with one another in areas of analysis and action (see section on methodological framework).*
- *Narratives which focus on the descriptive and the particular form a basis for looking "from the edge" and then facilitating "crowd scenes" where conversations value diversity and search for ways of working together to support and sustain all stakeholders in their involvement in curriculum decision-making.*
- *A platform for ongoing thinking and action about supporting and sustaining stakeholders' involvement in curriculum decision-making is a unique picture of a site based on the above and focussing upon a search for unique ways to make stakeholders feel confident and competent about an authentic engagement in curriculum decision-making at that site.*

RE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

- *The methodological framework, by its iterative and interpretive nature, is providing a way to focus on the local in a way that builds up a picture of each site which is critical, collaborative and corroborative.*
- *The framework allows for an emphasis on both individual and groups perspectives through the narratives and the ongoing conversations. Ongoing checking within and across groups is a natural part of the ongoing conversations.*
- *The opportunities for sharing across groups within and across sites has the potential for generating ongoing support and cooperation at the grass roots level.*
- *Sharing in wider forums has the potential for introducing elements of critique, reconstruction and advocacy. (The possibilities for local work to have an impact on shaping policy and practice at more global levels will hopefully be demonstrated as the project proceeds).*

These ideas and themes are, of course, incomplete. It is expected that they will be reshaped as we proceed with the remaining stages of the project and as we begin to interact with critical friend networks

CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It is argued, then, that teachers, along with parents and students, are central in curriculum decision-making/curriculum leadership; but that the ways in which they might be supported and sustained should be sensitive to uniquely individual and local factors/conditions. In developing this argument, we are drawing from both the theoretical and the methodological frameworks outlined above to elaborate the detail of what it means for these stakeholders to work confidently, competently and collaboratively in a curriculum decision-making/curriculum leadership alliance which values complementarity rather than competition. It is also argued that the methodological framework as outlined above is one way of building critical friend networks and of taking the insights from local cases into wider arenas. In this way, we argue that the data have the potential to move beyond the largely descriptive at the local level to the more interpretive and applied at the more global levels.

Reporting this pilot research addresses the main theme of this conference and relates to several of the sub-themes. We see that a major benefit of this sort of research relates to the critical, collaborative and reconstructive way in which the stakeholders' (teachers, parents and students) perceptions are elicited and conceived as lifeworld perspectives; and then analysed and interpreted for their ongoing implications for relevant policy and practice in supporting and sustaining stakeholders' place and engagement (or space) in curriculum leadership at the levels of classrooms, schools and systems. These ongoing implications obviously become the essence of a research focus for a larger-scale study.

We believe that such research is innovative because, at the levels of analysis and interpretation, it uses a series of critical friend groups (especially from the levels of policy and practice within systemic contexts and from other cultural contexts). It is significant in that it builds a new area of ongoing and more detailed research investigation. This area is particularly pertinent within current policy contexts which emphasise partnerships in curriculum decision-making and school-based management initiatives. An investigation into the place of and space for these three stakeholder groups in curriculum leadership is, therefore, considered timely, relevant and appropriate.

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