Dealing with Cultural Change Forces in Whole School Professional Development

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Introduction

Smith College in metropolitan Perth has been the site of a professional development program designed to change a whole-school professional culture. The instigation of this professional development project, which we will further refer to as the Teaching and Learning (T/L) Project, is closely related to the "inauguration" of a new principal in 1997. His vision and the efforts of an in-house change agent have facilitated the change process. This evaluation study inquires into the extent to which the T/L Project has become embedded in the whole-school culture. It focuses in particular on the role of Helen as the Manager of Professional Practice and on a particular action research group project within the larger PD project. As learning is unfeasible at this stage to evaluate the effect of the T/L Project on the classroom culture we have focused our inquiry on the teachers' perceptions of the change process.

Methodology

This paper reports on an evaluative case study consisting of two stages: stage one is a qualitative approach and stage two is a quantitative approach. This paper focuses on the qualitative part of the study in which we have used an ethnographic lens, to inquire into focusing on the views of the research-participants.

During 2001, Elisabeth (the first author) attended Teaching and Learning Project meetings as a participant observer and conducted thirteen interviews with selected teachers, some of whom had participated in the project while others had not, and with administrative staff. Given the potentially controversial nature of the interviews, every attempt was made to assure anonymity of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured consisting of a very basic set of questions, thus leaving open the possibility for asking further in-depth questions where appropriate. The interviews were analysed using QSR NudistVivo, version 1.1, in order to identify themes. The data generated from the interviews were used to develop a survey in order to extend the evaluation process to the staff of the whole school. We based the study on principles of Fourth Generation Evaluation and have created an audit trail to enable data to be tracked to their source, thus ensuring the confirmability of the analysis.

Although Elisabeth endeavoured to implement a hermeneutic dialectic approach, it proved to be unfeasible for two reasons: 1) a number of interviewees refused to name a potential "antithesis" to their own viewpoint, and 2) given the evaluation project's limited financial scope and timeframe it was necessary to limit the number of interviews. Member-checks were performed by providing each interviewee with a draft of this paper and a request to respond.

We were aware that representing the views of thirteen people is potentially subject to a 'crisis of representation'. We have therefore kept the interpretative aspect of the analysis to a minimum and presented the interviewee's original quotes wherever possible. This sits well with the concept of polyvocality which is proclaimed by as a guiding principle of the Seventh Moment of Qualitative Research. Interwoven with the participants' voices is Elisabeth's narrator-voice which serves primarily as the connective tissue between interview quotes.

The school

Smith College is a private K-12 school with over 100 staff members. The school is structured into three parts: the preparatory Kinder-House, the Middle School comprising Years 5-8 and the Senior School comprising Years 9-12.
The Teaching and Learning Project

The Beginning of the Project

Prior to the appointment of the current principal of Smith College in 1997 and his initiation of a major professional development (PD) project, there was little PD available, or as Helen puts it, "...there was little contact with the outside world and little professional reading (McGann, 1999)". The principal found a school that was characterised by a lot of uncertainty in the school community about where the school was going and what it was doing. Decisions were needed. He points out the three issues that gave rise to the PD project that was to induce change in the whole school:

1. there was an authority-centred and teacher-directed approach to teaching that was characteristic of the whole school,
2. in 1997 the decision was made to become a single-sex school from Year 5-12,
3. everyone was aware of the latest research and writings on issues to do with whole-brain learning

This was the platform upon which the decision was made to identify core-values and beliefs of the College, and allowed for aims and objectives to be re-written. The College Council adopted a policy describing how to see students in the school as "negotiators and participators", valuing the diversity of learning-styles and of aspirations the students would bring.

As the new principal, he confronted staff with what he thought were fundamental problems with the school. He realised that if professional development was to be a "top-down" issue, it would soon collapse. He soon spotted certain degrees of resentment. So the principal asked Helen, who was known to him to be passionate about teaching, to coordinate a three-year program.

Mid-year 1997, Helen was summoned to the principal’s office: "I was asked to co-ordinate a "teaching and learning project" for "a few years". There was little discussion about the aims or the shape the project should take. I was asked to submit a proposal....." (McGann, 1999).

The principal describes this situation "slightly" differently, "I said to Helen that I want to start a three year project in three stages and I want you to facilitate that. Stage one will be to encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching. I want it grass roots based. I don’t want any statements about what is good or bad practice to come from high. I want staff to develop their own confidence. The next stage is to invite individual staff to design projects of reflection about what we are doing and right across the culture of the school. Thirdly, we need to decide how we are going to use these projects in achieving enduring change. So that was how we started the project off!"

Helen’s developmental journey as a change agent

When Helen was left with the task of setting up a professional development program for the whole school in 1997, she was "...at no danger of approaching the project as an "expert"!" She soon discovered that she needed to revitalise her own professional learning in order to find out what issues were discussed and what current research was saying. The "professional development as gardening" metaphor seemed so apt for what she was doing. So she became a "PD junkie" ready to "spread the manure" after each PD session, yet it became diverted by the day-to-day chaos of school life. So she approached individuals who she thought might be interested, spoke at staff-meetings, wrote proposals, all of which was
filled with conflicting emotions – excitement, missionary zeal, despair and panic (McGann, 1999).

Timothy shared an office with Helen during this time and witnessed first hand some of her frustrations. He informs us that, "...I detected that perhaps she was not happy about doing certain things but felt obliged because of her role .... Later she became more comfortable with the concepts she was playing around with and how that could actually translate into face to face contact with twenty-five 14 year olds."

In 1998, when the core of the PD project was identified as "creating a community of learners", Helen adopted a "learning as growth" metaphor, "I realised that the project needed to support teachers not just as learners but to support their growth from learner to gardener. The Teaching and Learning Project gave an opportunity to water and mulch regularly."

Helen identifies several milestones that were of importance for her own development as a change agent:

- the school structure was changed with an emphasis on K-12 with a departmental structure also K-12 which prompted whole school meetings thus leading to increased contact between the sub-schools,
- Helen began to experiment in her own classroom, in isolation at first. Her own growth was stunted until she encountered several milestones for her own development:
- she persuaded the Head of Department to help her rewrite the Year 8 course incorporating technology.
- she found a "critical friend" who "held my hand through the implementation of collaborative strategies in my classrooms..... encouraged (me to take) small steps and helped me see and celebrate the little successes."
- Helen experienced the importance of collaboration and reflecting on Fullan’s description of change as "dynamically complex"....where chance meetings turn into significant partnerships and casual conversations become important growth points.
- she began to connect with a wider environment and invited "outsiders" in to support the staff at Smith College in their learning (McGann, 1999).

She continued to read about school change and was particularly concerned about the transfer of learning to the classroom. Through this she envisaged her role as "....encouraging and supporting teachers in taking risks, and to examine and re-examine practice" (McGann, 1999). In 2001, when the project had substance and stability, the principal appointed Helen to Manager of Professional Practice and dramatically reduced her workload to half the teaching load (I-X, 2001). Helen confirms that "...it wasn’t a role set up like when the project started, like the role...has kind of grown. (I-VII, 2001).

Helen’s task is now to provide resources and organise professional development for the whole school from K-12 and she will be central next year in the administration/teacher appraisals (I-X, 2001).

The project now

As a result of the efforts of several change agents throughout the school, especially the principal and Helen, the project now works on several levels and fronts.

Professional development now occurs at a whole-school level, and at department and sub-school levels. In order to provide opportunities for staff to work together toward common goals and to counteract tendencies toward being isolationist, insular and ‘cliquey’, especially
within the Senior School, Helen initiated an action research project, the Teaching and Learning Project Group, facilitated by John and Peter, two university lecturers [2nd and 3rd authors]. She believes that, through this group, the teachers at Smith College learn the language of critical reflection and the habits of experimentation (McGann, 1999).

Within this group, individual teachers explore areas of interest: in 1999, 20 staff members participated in these projects, followed by 15 in 2000. The project group meets regularly twice a term for breakfast sessions, "...It is time for reflection, planning, reporting and discussion." Helen describes the teachers' learning journey: "In the beginning the groups are not used to these processes but by term 3 the discussions tend to be more reflective and questioning. Helen feels very encouraged when she sees her colleagues learn, "The projects encourage staff to take risks in a supported way.... I now understand what professional development is about – learning while doing and learning from doing!" (McGann, 1999)

Helen now - as Manager of Professional Practice

"I guess I see myself as a support person...offering enthusiasm and the links with staff to encourage them to do things. ...the encourager if you like. Making suggestions of things they might do....teachers tend to be very task-oriented – allowing them time, the time is the big issue, the time so that they can feel they can spend some time on their own professional development and that it is a legitimate thing to do (I-VII, 2001)."

Helen sees one of her tasks as "...trying to get them to say it is okay to leave their classes. Their class isn’t going to suffer drastically. It will still be there tomorrow when they return and the students won’t suffer because they happen to miss a couple of lessons." So she tries to convince them that it is something important for them to do, and that it is important for the kids that they are actually doing it so that their classes can be enriched because of their own learning (I-VII, 2001). Convincing the teachers that it's okay to have morning meetings where they spend two hours, maybe just talking, having breakfast and talking (I-VII, 2001) is a difficult task.

Jonathan confirms Helen’s suspicions about teachers’ worries, "You want to make sure...that this is taught and it’s taught well and therefore I can't afford to let somebody come in and do relief unless I’m genuinely ill. It’s that sort of point....can the kids afford to miss you right now – one class of maths or two? ." Helen is aware that, "...they feel guilty (I-VII, 2001)."

The support Helen provides is partly financial, in that she offers relief and any resources the teachers might need, or expertise they want brought in. "You know I have got a budget to support those (I-VII, 2001)." Having tried out change in her own classroom she also knows what she is talking about when she tries to support the teachers emotionally, "...learning is uncomfortable and will be stressful 'cause you are trying to be reflective and perhaps change.....therefore you’re going back to the beginning and may be feeling like a beginner before you reach that level of expertise again. So it’s support through all those sort of emotional things, the changes, I guess (I-VII, 2001)." She keeps the teachers informed about what the administration is providing, "... sometimes,...it might be to get them off the relief-timetable so that they can meet with the people they are working with...It’s just being proactive about all the support and trying to anticipate the support people might need (I-VII, 2001)."

Keeping the links alive between the facilitators at the university (i.e., John and Peter) and the projects, is another issue she has to face (I-VII, 2001).
In the school's political arena, Helen had to be upfront also about making sure that professional development is seen as being as equally important as sport or other activities, "...if they can count that as extra-curricular commitments, then that’s okay. I am hoping to do a fair bit of lobbying with the management about support for that (I-VII, 2001)." This lobbying seems to be of great importance, especially as Helen sees that one of the difficulties of the project is that, "...it hasn’t been taken on by the middle management.....I am working now to get heads of department to model it and take core values from that on board and to make it part of their conversations (I-VII, 2001)" but, "...It is not happening in every department. It’s happening in some but not all.....within my own ‘cause I’m a member of the department they’ve been quite upfront and blunt because of the relationship I have with them anyway. They question or give me a hard time about it (I-VII, 2001)."

To Helen, the biggest thing is to allow teachers to feel empowered as change agents, and she realises that some departments allow that more than others. That’s why, for her, middle management is a key area of focus. In the end, the value is in the individual teacher’s learning.

How do others see Helen’s role and her efforts?

Her efforts

Paul is convinced that Helen is "the" driving force, or as Margaret puts it, "Helen is the person who keeps the reels going." Jonathan complements Helen on her efforts, "I think it’s selling short for Helen to be the catalyst. Without Helen's drive and enthusiasm it wouldn’t have taken off."

Paul thinks that, "...You cannot doubt her efforts. Helen has put in an amount of time that most people don’t have a clue about." He reckons that because people are so busy teaching, they cannot see the amount of work she does.

Helen does such things as visiting Curtin University, attending meetings, being involved with the administration of the school, speaking to the principal, to the heads of schools, etc. Margaret points out that, "...she is the one that’s got it up and running and kind of kept it together. She has encouraged people to participate. She supports in anyway she can. She has been very enthusiastic about it. She certainly has a positive role.

Ruben agrees that Helen has been "the" key person, "...she has done a great job. She knows all the weaknesses of it and she knows how the rest of staff think about it." Christian admits that he does not know about all that Helen does because she and he "operate in different worlds basically" (I-VI, 2001). Nathalie presumes that Helen does a lot more at the senior level but down at the Kinder House people all know who she is, "...we hear it at the lower school meetings." Kerstin, of the Middle School, reckons that Helen is very good at what she does and she understands that if she wants teachers to do it [the project], "...she has to make it easy for us with not too much input on our part.....if we had to read beforehand it wouldn’t happen."

Organisation

Margaret appreciates that "Helen was there to organise support if we needed it, in terms of resources....like someone to take our class....so that we could meet. That was really helpful." Ruben supports this, "If I wanted two periods off during the week I could probably get it just by talking to Helen." Helen provided research resources from the library and let people know what was available in the library that was relevant to their project. She also supported participants with her own material, copied research papers and passed them on." She
organised that people could actually get together and say "this is where we are at and this is where we are going.... " with regard to marketing the project Ruben reckons that "...she speaks about it [the project] a lot, she tries to recruit people." Helen has a great deal of energy, so she’s quite good at keeping the energy level and enthusiasm up.....

Hannah describes that Helen organises PD for the whole school and that there is always PD available for everyone. She is always willing to help people even if they are not in the project. She can organise someone to help you with computers for example. Hannah thinks that, "...organising all that, that’s a big thing. Last year she would organise someone to come in and speak to us about learning styles." Nathalie supports this statement, "She organises lecturers. Kerstin appreciates how Helen has put in place quite a solid thinking about learning course. "She was great and she set it up so we could just read it and didn’t need to reinvent the wheel."

In addition to providing practical support, Helen is also encouraging people to go to conferences. "She has raised the profile of it [PD] far more than it ever was; that is important because most teachers are around 50 – it’s changing. I think it would be important for the older teachers too – they have got the experience and can add that to it – training is very different these days from when I went through 30 years ago," says Kerstin.

**Helen’s personality and style**

Nathalie probably summarises what many teachers at Smith College think, "... when Helen gets going she is straight as a bullet until she reaches her goal and um, she is working hard." Or as Paul puts it, "She is the one who pops up and says...we’ve got this and we’ve got that, she is constantly push, push, pushing! I think if you are busy yourself, you need someone to push, push, push! ."

Ruben on the other hand reckons that, "... The energy has generally been positive [though] some people have felt pushed a bit too hard, bit too hard...get there too fast" He also cautions that, "...a significant number of people in the college don’t like her style. They find she is like a bull at the gate, she will push things through without really listening." He adds, "She pushed and prodded and poke at people to get them involved – yeah so she facilitated the process." Timothy, on the other hand, hopes that "...Helen has been less forceful this year and perhaps she could ease off the pressure in 2002." Ruben points out that for people in the project Helen’s energy has been well directed and usually she has enabled people to make a bit of time to leave their class while for people outside the project her energy is sometimes annoying because if a person is going to the T/L project that means that this person is not available for another job. He regards Helen’s management style as similar to the principal’s although he experiences Helen’s as much more benign, "...If someone is really digging their heels in, Helen’s force becomes a force to be opposed ." The principal is aware of this too, "Helen is very passionate and I know occasionally her passion got the better of her and you know a couple of staff stepped back and said, "Chill out, Helen! (I-X, 2001). Kerstin thinks that Helen has a wonderful personality to push it, "You do need to be quite assertive and she is good like that ."

Helen not only seems to be assertive and energetic but also seems to be able to take in criticism, "You can speak to her and make criticisms of the project to her and she would take them on board better than most other people would." The principal supposes that she was certainly confronted with expressions of cynicism. He thinks that Helen on more than one occasion was quite hurt and upset because she was getting this reaction from staff, from staff who have been there for many years and who said, "We are pretty comfortable, thank you. Teaching page 22 and page 22 every April and why do I get all this high level stuff? What we are doing is perfectly acceptable (I-X, 2001)!" "I think everybody who is saying her
job is an easy job doesn’t understand that there has to be a single cut, clear focus if you are going to maintain a culture of teaching amongst over 100 staff which values reflection, ongoing appraisal systems and which values students as learners as distinct from teachers as teachers."

Unpopular role

Paul regards her role as essential yet unpopular, "...people think, what does she do? She doesn’t teach much?" Eva suggests that, "...it could be argued that that is something that could be done on top of something else but I think if you are going to do it well and you’re going to cater for K-12, a whole range of disciplines…. if you have got someone who is particularly focused on that as a role, it is liable to be done a lot better (l-IX, 2001)." Timothy suspects that, "...there are these people who are cynical towards the project and I think about Helen’s role - there has been a lot of mumbling in beards, let’s put it that way."

Ruben thinks he has an explanation for these resentments: the project is seen as imposed by the principal and this resentment is projected onto the whole project, but, "....there is resentment against Helen as well because of her management style." He adds, "The position was virtually created for her. Before that she was just a teacher and then all of a sudden this position became available and was given to her....everyone knew she was going to get it because she was the only one pushing along those lines " but he also acknowledges that she is always trying to find ways to make the critics less cynical. Yet Ruben feels that, "...in the end it is only the quality of the projects that will change this." In his opinion Helen was given this role and she even made it her own and it developed a momentum through her energy but there was a great deal of resistance because of the association with its origins.

Eva, on the other hand, rejects unfounded criticism about Helen, "...without knowing exactly the parameters of the position I think it is hard to pass judgment like that. I think she is doing some very good things (l-IX, 2001).

Another critical issue is that staff know that Helen administers the financial side of the T/L Project and one teacher muses, "Sometimes I wonder what others think about the cost of that. Nowhere has it been made clear to anybody what the researchers [Peter & John as the facilitators of the action research group] are paid and where the money comes from. So another aspect of the lack of transparency in this place."

On the other hand there is also clear support for Helen,"... anybody who was going to resist this wasn’t taking on Helen [herself], and Helen wasn’t alone. Helen had behind her each of the three most senior managers, the heads of schools plus the deputy principal ...... They [the critics] knew they were taking on hierarchy...there was this strong context of support coming from the senior management...(l-X, 2001)."

Other teachers offer suggestions instead of criticism, "I would get people together earlier and listen more to their needs. I think more consensus oriented, I would engage people at a different level, I mean at a theoretical level.....I would have continuing dialogue for all participants ", or " ... I think she’s tried to work more closely with departments and faculty heads to find out what PD they’re specifically interested in. I think that area needs to be developed more (l-X, 2001)."

Asked whether she could imagine taking over Helen’s position Hannah replies, "I would not take on that role – it’s like administration, especially as it gets a lot of flak over it." Nathalie: If I was offered Helen’s job…good God. To have the time, the money and the position...I don’t know, would be luxury."
To what extent has the project become embedded in the whole-school professional culture?

Helen summarises, "The teachers in the senior school will see 100 kids and make a difference to the lives of 100 kids. The teachers in the Kinder House will make a difference to the lives of 30 kids. So for me that's where it's making a difference. It is making a difference in the lives of kids and that's what we are on about. If it happens to make a difference in what's happening in a department to another teacher then well good but that for me is not the core."

Especially with regard to the action research group, she adds, "We have got someone doing a PhD, we have got two or three people doing Master's degrees, we have got people who are presenting at conferences, so like something has emerged ….the people feel empowered and they see themselves as change agents and on the cutting edge of educational reform (I-VIII, 2001)."

Paul recalls that at the end of the first year there wasn't much change but now at the end of three years, there is a noticeable change yet he points out that there is a time factor. "I feel it is making a difference . There has certainly been a change in the culture of the school, no doubts in maths."

The projects [of the action research group] have been one aspect of changing the whole-school culture . Or as Nathalie puts it, "The goldmine is what's being developed within the teachers’ personal development. This is the wealth for the school because as we become more professionally aware and alert we do become better educators because we have opened our mind to something – I see this is where the value is, and that in turn has an effect on the whole school as long as more people become involved and not the same people year after year ."

Kerstin thinks that, "...it [the T/L Project] has awoken a lot of people to the fact that you can't stop professional development. You can't stop learning ."

Asked how many percent of staff have been touched by the project, the principal suggests that, "In terms of understanding that they really have to move on I reckon it would be almost 100%. Those who have perfected the change would be around 65%. ."

Participation

Participation is totally voluntary. People do not have to become involved . The T/L Project has certainly got people across the school on board and of all ages, people of all experiences, at least to reassess the future practices. Not that they necessarily end up changing them but at least being exposed to a range of different alternatives, perhaps reaffirming things, so reaffirming that things are going well . It has put professional development on a pedestal there is no question about that. This is portrayed in all components of the school administration. "If there is any professional development you need, it will be whole-heartedly supported .

Interactions between parts of the school

When the principal took over the school, "There really was a strong perception that all the real learning occurred at the top of the school and all those primary school teachers, you know with finger painting and stuff, well that was on but it wasn’t as senior… that’s changed too. There is a new appreciation amongst the senior school teachers as to what their colleagues are doing ."
Margaret finds that there has been the development of, "...that sort of social dynamic as well as that professional dynamic that has had an overall effect on the cohesiveness of or the promoting the cohesiveness in the school." This has been deliberate move of the principal...so it is now forcing conversations K-12 and now there is action research project between the Kinder House and the Senior School...You can't put value on those sort of things. Margaret supposes that the project has had quite a big impact, "It has heightened the overall staff attitude and awareness of this school’s Teaching and Learning Project. It has promoted an understanding of what is taught at year levels, other than those you are familiar with. So it has developed an awareness and it has helped us to get to know staff in other parts of the school where you don't work."

**Ripple-effect**

Ruben reckons that because everybody involved in the project belongs to departments of one form or another, there is dialogue within the department about the sort of things that are going on, and this is either affirming or disaffirming the projects. Nathalie cautions that despite the fact that the T/L Project has been specifically [beneficial] for those teachers involved in the project she is unsure whether it is spreading further.

**Impact at the classroom level**

Hannah finds that, "It helps my teaching and so it’s more of a personal thing for me – it’s hard to say what other people get out of it." Paul still gets very enthusiastic about the experiences in his classroom, "It was simply so mind blowing and positive and it really empowered me to go further." Ruben suspects that individually people within the project may have improved their teaching.

Helen is convinced that, "It has given them confidence. I guess the empowerment of those teachers involved in the projects [consists of] the feeling that they have got a voice empowering them to have professional conversations and giving them the tools and the data to have those conversations." There is a great consensus amongst those interviewed that all teachers are becoming generally more reflective, "...Last year it was really fabulous to do the project – it really made us look on how the children learn. It made us reflect on that. It made us really ensure that the learning activities we were giving the children were appropriate and relevant and challenging and interesting and that they were accommodating all the children in the class."

It is hard to say what the impact is in terms of outcomes but one of the things that’s happened is that people have become more reflective about their practice. Anybody involved in the project is forced to become reflective by the regular briefing sessions...and the sort of questions that get posed at the sessions. The very nature of the projects is reflective. "As soon as I decided what I was going to do, that made me reflect on what I was doing and what I should be trying in my classroom. ...the inner reflection is the most important thing. As soon as you reflect on your teaching I think you improve it. I think that’s the main positive thing."

**Countervailing anti-change forces**

Asked how many are cynical, Ruben responds, "Over 50 percent of staff. Oh maybe that’s not right, maybe it’s just that the cynical ones make the most noise perhaps."
For Paul, one of the reasons for this is because change, "...is a slow process. I think if people thought all the staff would suddenly say, 'Oh yes, this is wonderful', they were joking!"

The principal is also aware that the pockets of resistance are strong, one faculty in particular, "...which is very, very disappointing but I have come to the conclusion that their unwillingness to get involved or unwillingness to be overtly supporting is because there is a lack of confidence...a feeling of helplessness perhaps...rather than a product of cynicism."

Jonathan summarises, "With some it's been successful, others think it's a waste of time. They think it's just a fad, it will go away." He reckons that there will be a period of transition at Smith College, "...the staff has an average age of 50. Well in ten years time a huge number will have gone.....if the individual is not attracted to that then you have got to have a carrot for all the others to make it attractive."

Difficulties

To my question about whether the T/L Project has influenced the school culture, Christian responds, "...not hugely. I think there has been an influence and there continues to be an influence but there is at least two thirds of the college teaching staff who are untouched by it."

Ruben argues along a similar line, "The idea behind the Teaching and Learning Project is very sound, wanting people to get involved and reflect on their teaching but in practice it hasn't been as successful as he [the principal] would have liked. I have been able now to see some things from the inside [from inside the action research group]...and I think that it really does help those people in the project. I still think it doesn't help the rest of the school.....I really question how much the actual people are getting out of it themselves 'cause I don't even know if it is making them better teachers. Some people get a lot of reflection time which can only help their teaching, but the rest?."

To Christian it is clear that the people in the T/L project this year have very little impact or influence outside of the small group that are involved because he does not know whether or not they are part of the discussions in the staffroom, "I know that a couple of people are doing things but...it doesn't enter common discourse." He adds, "There is some sort of camaraderie of being involved within the sub-group but it's a camaraderie of a minority. You are looking at 17, between 15 and 17 people out of the staff of 120. Now you could say this is 10-12% each year for the last three years but the reality is that at least half of those people are the same people that are doing it because...in some cases they are already involved in research degrees outside and this is just another avenue for having a dialogue about those things."

One point that really seems to impede a more wide-spread participation in the project is that the participation "...means extra work for everybody – the projects have created extra work", or as Nathalie puts it, "Well everybody is aware of it because if [you are] not in the project you are doing relief for somebody who is doing the project which doesn’t go down very well...everybody’s been touched by it."

Discussion

There is no doubt amongst the teachers interviewed in this evaluation study that through the T/L Project professional development at Smith College has grown in importance over the past three years: it has not only become available and is strongly supported by the administration, but is regarded as such a priority that the role of Manager of Professional Practice has been created recently. Through the energy and enthusiasm of this change-agent professional development is now happening at all school levels, form K-12. Teachers
who have participated in the action research group purport that it has empowered them in their teaching.

One of the major outcomes of the action research group is a perception that teachers’ reflexivity and professional awareness have been enhanced. This has led to a ‘ripple-effect’ in which the participants, as members of departments, have carried with them their own learning and have spread it amongst their colleagues. The actual extent of this ripple-effect is difficult to determine as some departments are reported to be more “open” than others. Individual teachers have reportedly improved their teaching yet the question remains – what has been the benefit for the whole school?

A number of those interviewed cast doubt on the claim that the project has been effective throughout the school. Undoubtedly everybody has been touched in one way or the other – if not by participating then (perhaps negatively) through relief teaching for those who do participate. In any case, there seems to have been an increase in workload for most staff. This side-effect, coupled with the constant time-constraints the teaching profession brings with it, may be impeding participation despite the efforts of the administration to support teachers.

Another problem impeding participation in the action research group seems to linger on a meta-level – as Ruben informed us, many teachers see the T/L project as having been imposed by the principal and, because they do not agree with his reportedly “autocratic” management style, they tend to reject the T/L project.

As Ruben suspects, this might be the reason why much of the resentment amongst the critics has been projected onto the action research group and onto Helen as ‘the’ change-agent.

Thus, a dilemma situation exists: on the one hand pressure and energy was needed to set up the whole-school professional development project and get it running, on the other hand this energy seems to have been experienced by some staff-members as "too pushy" and has caused them to withdraw into pockets of resistance against change in general.

Reportedly, there are tensions also between the administration and teachers who do not regard themselves as "critics", especially in relation to the apparent lack of transparency with regard to the financing of the PD-project. This issue potentially renders participation unpalatable for those teachers who have not yet participated.

**Conclusion**

Summarising we can say that teachers have reported a noticeable effect on the professional school-culture, yet for the time being it remains difficult to determine the actual level of (positive) impact on the whole staff of Smith College. We hope that the forthcoming quantitative part of the study, in which we shall administer a survey to all staff, will cast further light on the scope of this problem. We think that the following quote by Paul summarises very well the change process at Smith College, “There’s always a lovely dip-curve where there is change and you’ve got to go through the pain and, hopefully, you end up at the other side, higher than you were before, which is always the big question, isn’t it?”

**References**