

Evaluation of a special education professional development program

Part 2: Success Case studies

An earlier article in *EJA* (Piggot-Irvine 2008) reported on the background, methodology and overall results for an evaluation study of a special education teacher professional development project that involved action research (AR) or action learning (AL). The 'Success Case study' component that constituted the third phase of the evaluation is reported here. The Success Case studies confirmed the most significant outcome of the previous survey (Phase 1) and focus group (Phase 2), that is, an overwhelming willingness of staff and supporters to see students with special education needs excel. Additional distinctive elements emerged that were common to all Success Case schools and the most significant included that: projects were at a small-scale, manageable, level; the classic stages of AR and AL were followed, even though schools may not have been aware of these stages; data/evidence was used to examine both the current situation and outcomes; and 'best practice' and/or a relevant literature underpinned this examination.

Introduction

This article initially refers briefly to the background to the evaluation contract for the national Ministry of Education (Ministry) funded professional development program conducted for special education teachers over 14 months in New Zealand (NZ). This is followed by discussion of the methodological considerations associated with the Success Case Method (SCM) design, but associated specifically with data collection methods, sampling processes and ethics. The results for each Success Case study school are provided next and finally overall conclusions drawn.

Background

As noted in my previous article (Piggot-Irvine 2008), the development program approach was designed to 'develop teacher knowledge and share ideas on how to support learners who require significant adaptation to the curriculum content' (Ministry of Education 2005a, p. 3). The key area for investigation in the evaluation covered the impact of the development program on student learning, social and cultural outcomes, as noted in the following research brief. The review examined:

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- the focus of learning, social and cultural outcomes for the students
- whether current pedagogy and practices in these settings improve outcomes for these students (with an emphasis on evidence of effectiveness identified in these settings)
- whether current structures in these settings support effective pedagogy for maximising participation of students in question
- specialist supports that contributed to the improved outcomes for the students
- the most effective models of professional learning identified for teachers to optimise the learning and participation of students
- what ongoing supports could maintain and enhance teacher capability to meet the needs of these students (adapted from Ministry of Education 2005b, p. 12).

Both Action Research (AR) (25 schools) and Action Learning (AL) (24 schools) approaches to professional development were engaged in as vehicles for teachers to examine, improve and critique their own practice in a systematic, intentional, way via small-scale projects guided by an external facilitator (for AL) or researcher (for AR). An extensive background and explanation to AR and AL can be found in Piggot-Irvine and Bartlett (2008) but, in brief, both approaches are designed to involve practitioners in iterative, or cyclical, phases of gathering evidence, reflection, action and evaluation of action associated with improvement. In AR there is a stronger emphasis on rigour in data collection and an imperative that the findings are publicly reported in some way. In AL the latter elements are usually accorded less importance than reflection and action.

Methodology for the third component of the evaluation

A predominantly qualitative set of Success Case studies (Brinkerhoff 2003) were employed as an appropriate means to gather the required empirical data to evaluate the impact of the AR and AL approaches to development. Success Case studies are a subset of the more traditional case study method where a single unit of analysis is based on depth that is both holistic and exhaustive (Bassey 2007), but which also retains the meaningful characteristics of realistic events. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Wetherell 2003) and is especially powerful when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 1994)—as is the case with the case studies discussed in this article.

Brinkerhoff (2003) considered that the Success Case Method (SCM) should involve two components. The first is that of locating potential success cases (groups that have been successful in using some change or method): the second part involves determining and documenting the nature of

the success. In this evaluation, part one, the location of potential cases, was established via specific criteria (see Appendix 1) for effectiveness that originated from the Ministry.

In terms of the second part, determining and documenting the nature of success, observation, interviews and documentary analysis were employed as methods of data collection for each case. The key research questions for the evaluation (see Piggot-Irvine 2008) and the specific criteria for effectiveness were used as a guiding protocol for data collection tool development.

Selection: locating success cases

The Success Case criteria (Appendix 1) were issued to all facilitators/researchers and Ministry staff involved in the development program along with a request for nomination of potential success case schools. Two schools had previously been identified in the Phase One questionnaire and the Phase Two focus groups as meeting the criteria. From those eligible, four schools were selected to cover a range school type and AL and AR approaches. Table 1 describes the Success Case school characteristics.

Ethical considerations

Formal consent was obtained from all participants and caregiver consent sourced for any students involved. Information that detailed the Success Case study phase of the research was provided for participants alongside the Success Case criteria. Confidentiality and anonymity of individuals and the school were assured.

Results

In the previous article (Piggot-Irvine 2008) a brief overview of the Success Case study results was provided. The following results expand on that overview. They are presented under the key research questions for each individual school, followed by a summary of the findings.

Success Case School 1

Focus of learning, social and cultural outcomes for students

An initial lack of clarity and momentum for the first six months of the project was seen to be due to high staff turnover, low commitment of a previous acting principal, an external audit, and poor shared understanding of the project goals. A pre-implementation survey led to the focus on development of systems for curriculum adaptation (see Table 1). Project activity logically fell under the classic reconnaissance, implementation and evaluation phases that characterise AR and AL.

Effectiveness of the project and evidence to support this

Clear evidence of effectiveness was revealed in pre- and post-implementation staff surveys (n=30). Shifts occurred in staff adaptation of the curriculum/provision of individual programs (11 per cent to

TABLE 1: SUCCESS CASE SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS AND FOCUS

School code	AR or AL	Focus
1 Mainstream primary	AL	To develop policy, systems and structures to cater for the mainstream students who require significant adaptation to the curriculum. Sub-foci: a enhancing communication between home and school b enhancing the work of the teacher aides c developing systems and procedures to cater for students with special education needs
2 Mainstream secondary	AL	To provide school-based intensive training and coaching to support teachers and maximise the learning and participation of students who need significant adaptation to the curriculum content. Specifically, the school focused on learning and behaviour for three Year 9 classes
3 Mainstream secondary	AR	To reduce the isolation of teachers and disabled students in the Student Support Centre. To undertake a mixed-ability performance of a play, with involvement from the drama, music and Maori (Indigenous NZ) departments
4 Mainstream primary	AR	To improve comprehension for students with special education needs

77 per cent) and the use of peer support in classes (26 per cent to 43 per cent). All staff in the post-implementation survey reported considerable gains in their knowledge, skills, confidence, planning, goal setting and understanding about inclusion planning for instruction. Effectiveness was indicated in the development of a teacher guidebook, clarification of position descriptions for special education staff, and subsequent support provided key staff. The facilitator associated with the project commented that a component of success was connected with key staff reading the literature about this project and being open to change.

Multiple key enablers linked to this site included keeping the project small, starting with those who were interested, a willingness to give it a go among the staff who were involved, and high levels of consultation and collaboration with both parents and students. The latter happened via providing information and seeking input at parent/community meetings. Clear individual education planning (IEP) for students was a feature in the implementation phase of the project and, as noted earlier, students and teacher aides were involved in the planning.

Current structures in this setting that supported effective pedagogy for maximising participation of students

The new principal was sensitive to the need for change, so rather than intervening, showed overt support for the initiative as the following comment from the facilitator underscores:

The project enabled the principal to introduce new ideas that are also part of the vision for the

school. On the other hand, the principal has facilitated the smooth running of the initiative, promoting positive processes and an openness to new ideas with his staff.

More generally, the principal and senior management team were seen to be supportive of students with special education needs in the school (e.g. the staffroom noticeboard had a permanent space for the project and special needs information).

Specialist support

Specialist support was strong—the facilitator visited the school weekly and established a good relationship with both students and staff over the year. The facilitator noted initial marked resistance, even in the leadership team. She considered she was there to ‘listen, open their eyes, and push on regardless’.

Models of professional learning identified for teachers to optimise the learning and participation of students

A quote from a project member at this school summed up their perceptions of the elements of an effective model for learning:

I have learnt that the balance of research (theory), staff views, and best practice are three critical elements that need to be in place when making key decisions.

The facilitator in the school provided another perspective that emphasised the role of persistence, tenacity and dedication on their (or any other facilitator’s) part:

Teachers in the classroom seem to be asked to embrace an endless stream of new innovations and programs. This is just another. But there is a difference. Being in the school on a regular basis has provided the chance for teachers to talk, to think outside the square, to say how they feel. Workshops come and go and often find their way into the bottom drawer. I think the model of this initiative may have introduced a new level of accountability (maybe a threat to some) in that 'she' is still here. 'She' is not going to go away. I think that is a good thing—it says that inclusive practice is serious stuff. It is a supportive model that can address fundamental issues.

Ongoing support and sustainability

An ongoing relationship with the facilitator was seen to be important for sustainability. The principal also commented that in order to be sustainable, 'We need to be prepared to adjust our practice and celebrate success. Our challenge is how to signal our vision to others'.

Other ideas for sustainability included developing a school-wide Special Needs and Abilities committee, alignment of systems and processes to enable transparency and sharing, continuing professional development (a plan is already in place), and further building of internal and external relationships and communication (a portfolio for this has been delegated).

Success Case School 2

Focus of learning, social and cultural outcomes for students

The project in this school was associated with extension of Year 9 work for students with special needs (called Focus Pathway, or FP, students in this school). The focus was on areas of work completion, meeting learning needs, enhancing numeracy and literacy, and offering optional programs leading to the National Certificate of Education Achievement (NCEA) Level 1. As with School 1, although not identified as such, the traditional phases of AR and AL were evident (see Table 2 overleaf).

Effectiveness of the project and evidence to support this

This school conducted a thorough, evidence-based, project using excellent pre- and post-implementation surveys. Multiple outcomes were noted, including a reduction in suspensions and detentions, increased FP student requests to attend additional courses, achievement of NCEA credits, increased FP student concentration and basic work habit skills, improved student behaviour, significant gains in teacher confidence and knowledge in relation to providing for children with moderate to high learning needs, and enhanced sharing (resources, expectations, guidelines and skills) between teachers. Documentary analysis supported that assessment methods associated with FP classes were

flexible (assessment could be verbal, written, peer assessment or self-assessment) and that assessment was ongoing.

Adaptation of the curriculum was also evident in subjects that were opened up to FP students and teachers were provided with professional development on teaching techniques concerned with expectations and outcomes (especially noise control and use of the whiteboard).

Student participation and feedback was strong in this project. The evaluation phase student survey showed that, as a result of involvement in the project, 75 per cent of students felt positive about issues associated with self-efficacy, emotional status and perceptions of progress. In response to the question, *What kind of student are you this year compared with last year?*, one student stated:

I have learned more. I'm not rude to the teachers this year as much as I was last year.

Celebration of success was important and reported to have occurred via students gaining bouquets and certificates of achievement at assemblies.

Enablers in the project were seen to be: a clear alignment between the project focus and the school's strategic planning, provision of time for differentiation of the curriculum, and parent participation (attendance greatly increased between an initial and subsequent meeting to discuss FP classes). The following parent comment reflects the shift experienced:

I believe the teaching style has changed. My daughter says she understands more. There is an open door policy and I feel welcome to visit my son's class if I want to.

Current structures in this setting that support effective pedagogy for maximising participation of students

The school Board (the Governors) demonstrated commitment to the program by utilising external and internal funding for participation, and active support from the senior management team was evident (and reinforced by the Ministry facilitator).

Specialist support

The Ministry facilitator provided research information to support the changes and teaching strategies, and provided staff with ideas concerning how to gather valuable data. Internal support staff were also seen to be both effective and supportive (for example, teacher aides assisting with students on a one-to-one basis).

Models of professional learning identified for teachers to optimise the learning and participation of students

Perceptions of the most effective models for development included fostering collegiality and formal collaborative teaming, professional dialogue about practice issues, and practical examples of strategies that have been shared, tried and reviewed.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF SUCCESS CASE STUDY RESULTS

Case	Focus	Evidence of effectiveness	Current support structures	Specialist support	Most effective models of professional learning	Maintaining and enhancing teacher capability
Case 1	Initial lack of focus. Once focus identified, strong process followed	Pre- and post-implementation surveys showed: increased staff adaptation of curriculum (11–77%); increased peer support in classes (26–43%); increased staff knowledge and confidence; and development of clear documentation	Poor support from uncommitted principal: strong support from new committed principal and senior team Good liaison with parents	Strong external (facilitator) and internal (SENCO) support	Clear phases of reconnaissance, implementation and evaluation Good planning a feature of project Data-based decision-making Started small with committed teachers Strong teamwork and collaboration Dedicated and persistent facilitator	Continuing support from external facilitator and professional development Bringing other teachers on board Developing special needs committee Aligning systems and processes Continuing good external and internal relationships
Case 2	Strong focus	Comprehensive student and staff data collected on pre- and post-implementation of student work skills, confidence, self-efficacy and staff confidence and knowledge Documentary analysis of achievement and assessment data Increasing liaison with parents Positive self-report of staff and student outcomes Increased celebration of success	Active support from senior management Systems (assessment, meetings, staffing, etc.) showed support for curriculum adaptation	Obvious support from facilitator in process, data gathering and professional development	Clear phases of reconnaissance, implementation and evaluation Planning at departmental and school-wide strategic level Data-based decision-making and informed by literature Strong teamwork and collaboration Sharing of ideas and practice Strong professional development on adaptation	Continuing support and collaboration at all levels of school, including professional development Induction of new teachers Prioritised goals in strategic planning Increased funding for internal support staff

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF SUCCESS CASE STUDY RESULTS CONTINUED

Case	Focus	Evidence of effectiveness	Current support structures	Specialist support	Most effective models of professional learning	Maintaining and enhancing teacher capability
Case 3	Practical focus to reduce isolation of special needs staff and students	<p>Student and staff qualitative and quantitative data collected pre- and post-implementation. Results showed: increase in students with special needs confidence, enjoyment and some achievement; enhanced mainstream/ students with special education needs interaction and support; increased teacher understanding of students; and varied ways that environment was adapted for students with special education needs</p> <p>Success celebrated in multiple ways</p>	<p>Policies and procedures outline support for special needs, but academic achievement is a key focus in the school</p> <p>Little senior management involvement in project</p>	<p>Strong support from external researcher (an AR project)</p> <p>Dedicated and driven internal special needs staff</p>	<p>Phases of action research engaged in with guidance from external researcher. In the reconnaissance phase data collected on the existing situation linked to SSC student integration and participation via a survey to teachers and students. Staff noted need for inclusion and collaboration. The production of a play occurred in the implementation phase. Evaluation phase—further data collection on the impact of the production</p>	<p>Wider school support, valuing and understanding of students with special education needs and the unit</p> <p>Collaboration and teamwork needed for continuation of project</p>
Case 4	Clear focus to improve comprehension for students with special education needs	<p>Good student baseline data collected prior to implementation</p> <p>Staff and student evaluation data collected indicated improvement outcomes</p> <p>Students involved in own goal setting and monitoring</p> <p>Student success celebrated</p>	<p>Clear senior management support and involvement</p>	<p>Strong process and development support provided by external researcher</p>	<p>AR phases followed throughout. Good use of data in decision-making and referenced previous research, etc. Planning evident both in project and for students. Small-scale pilot conducted with just two committed teachers who collaborated extensively. Sharing and collaboration with other teachers is now occurring</p> <p>Collaboration and support from researcher important</p>	<p>Extending involvement to other teachers with project teachers acting as developers—especially those teachers that students are moving onto</p> <p>Continuing support from leadership team</p>

Ongoing support and sustainability

Teachers believed that sustainability would be assured if the FP team leader ensured that new teachers of FP classes could observe another teacher working with the students. Continuing management and Board support was also considered important, as was student success building on success.

Success Case School 3

Focus of learning, social and cultural outcomes for students

Special needs students in this school were recognised to have few friends in mainstream classes where they were often stigmatised, called names and bullied. The project group focused on reducing the isolation by producing a mixed-ability performance of a play, with involvement from the Drama, Music and English departments. The actual production was essentially organised by the Student Support Centre (SSC) teacher and the project team met weekly. Similar to the two previous Success Case schools, although none of the respondents distinguished phases in their project, it was possible to discern discrete activity that occurred at the classic phases of action research (see Table 2). In the initial phase (a type of reconnaissance), data were collected on the existing situation linked to SSC student integration and participation via a survey of teachers and students. This was followed by the production of a play in the implementation phase and then further data collection on the impact of the production in the evaluation phase.

Effectiveness of the project and evidence to support this

Results from a pre-implementation survey conducted with SSC and mainstream teachers, as well as SSC and mainstream students, indicated reduced opportunities for participation for students with special education needs (despite the school rhetoric of having inclusive policies and culture) and the need to improve inclusive practice. Subsequent to the production, evidence of effectiveness of the project was provided via:

- verbal feedback from parents and teachers indicating that students had increased confidence and increased pride in their achievements
- student interviews suggesting success
- observations in the playground demonstrating that mainstream students involved in the production were interacting more with SSC students
- students mixing more naturally and easily
- real and genuine relationship formation between students rather than helping and sympathy from mainstream students
- mainstream teachers and students having greater understanding that everyone has strengths and weaknesses

- SSC students being included in a peer support scheme subsequent to the production
- SSC students achieving NCEA unit standards for English
- SSC students frequently asking when and what the next production would be
- enhanced curriculum adaptation during the play itself and subsequent to it
- increased use of learning approaches suited to the students (e.g. the use of an interactive Smartboard, and introducing smaller size classes)
- providing opportunities for able students to attend mainstream classes.

The SSC students mean ratings increased between the pre- and post-implementation surveys for their enjoyment of lessons, feeling that they were respected, and willingness to ask teachers for assistance. Mainstream student ratings also increased for the issues of willingness to help SSC students, wanting to spend more time with SSC students, and knowing what the SSC did. However, despite the fact that mainstream students stated that they did not interact extensively with the SSC students outside rehearsals, they commented on the overall effectiveness of the project. The following quote from a student interviewed illustrates their perception:

Before the production, I'd see them around but took no notice. I didn't know they'd be able to do anything. Some were better than the mainstream drama students. I was probably scared of them before. I would do it again. Now, I come into the centre to say hello. I was always going to be a teacher; now I want to do special ed (Student A).

Celebration was a feature of this Success Case school. SSC students participated in an after-production party and this was seen by several mainstream students as an example and evidence of acceptance, participation and celebration. The production was videotaped, and photos and an article were published in local newspapers and in the national *Education Gazette*. SSC staff also presented at a Ministry conference.

Current structures in this setting that support effective pedagogy for maximising participation of the students

Feedback from mainstream and SSC staff inferred that it was the drive of the SSC staff that ensured 'inclusion' in the school because most mainstream staff were very focused on academic achievement.

Specialist support

Multiple levels of in-school specialist support were provided, including the head of SSC relieving mainstream teachers to allow their involvement, the Maori teacher acting as a cultural advisor, and teacher aides assisting with the production development, implementation, costumes and resources. The project external research facilitator

took a very strong role by conducting an in-depth study of the school profile, proposing the idea to do the play, keeping the project staff on track, and providing videos on alternative dance and movement.

Models of professional learning identified for teachers to optimise the learning and participation of students

The SSC staff noted that having ‘working partnerships’, inclusion and collaboration were important components of a model of effective development.

Ongoing support and sustainability

SSC staff suggested that sustainability would be associated with senior management driving wider school acceptance and understanding of what the SSC had to offer and they believed that it could include such things as SSC featuring more strongly in the school plan, provision of more information on SSC to parents and the community, and achievement being acknowledged and genuinely valued.

Success Case School 4

Focus of learning, social and cultural outcomes for students

This school focused on improving comprehension for students with special needs through providing teachers with additional structures for comprehension and literacy assessment. Once again, although none of the respondents distinguished phases in their project, it is possible to discern discrete activity that occurred at the classic phases of AR and AL.

Effectiveness of the project and evidence to support this

Interviews and classroom observations, plus analysis of student assessment records, revealed multiple levels of evidence of effectiveness. The five students targeted (Year 4—approximately 8–9 years old) were achieving with 90–100 per cent accuracy at the reading level of 5–6 years old at the start of the project implementation. In six months they had improved such that four of the students were reading at or above their chronological age level (running records were sighted). A classroom observation revealed strong clarity of teacher information for students prior to any activity, including a step-by-step lesson plan and detail of expected reading outcomes.

The teachers perceived changes in student learning and behaviour including understanding why they were reading and what information to look for. Subsequently, their reading became more purposeful and meaningful and students were enthusiastic and motivated to read further (they became fully engaged in the task), became responsible for their own learning, and were competing with each other.

As part of a post-implementation evaluation, the facilitator interviewed students at the end of

the project. A sample of two student comments included:

I know more what I'm supposed to be doing. The teacher tells us more now ...

I didn't like reading because it was a bit too difficult. You had to copy all these big words out of books and it took ages to write it. It has changed because I am learning new words so I can understand them and write them down quicker now.

In this school, success was also celebrated via teachers reporting their success stories to the whole school at a staff meeting and students being given certificates at assemblies. One teacher stated that the students' recognition of their own achievement was reward enough.

Learning environment is adapted

Multiple examples of adaptation were noted by teachers. These included drawing up individual plans and support programs, redevelopment of teaching and assessment programs, rearrangement of class groupings, modification of reading games and activities to meet the diverse levels of reading ability, and introducing individual progress charts (graphs) for students to see their own progress—alongside an expanded version of the chart to monitor all students' level of achievement. Overall, a considerable component of the adaptation in this school was linked to student ownership of their learning.

Current structures in this setting that support effective pedagogy for maximising participation of students

The school leaders in this school were supportive and had a commitment to ensuring that learning needs of all students were met. The specific allocation of responsibility to one manager for special needs funding is an example of such commitment, as is timetabling of teacher aides into classes to work one-to-one with students.

Specialist support

The project facilitator supported staff by discussing and modelling strategies for use in the classroom, assisting with development of the IEPs, establishing relationships with the students and staff, and providing professional development for teacher aides on the aims of the project and the strategies being implemented.

Models of professional learning identified for teachers to optimise the learning and participation of students

The teachers believed that the following elements constituted the most effective model of learning: three-way collaboration between the facilitator, teacher, and students; discussion with other teachers; reading about others' research; and taking ideas on board and working with them. One teacher said: ‘I actually *learnt*, which means I am richer in knowledge’.

In this school's presentation for the final symposium for the development program, a particular note was made of the importance of data collection that was rigorous by using triangulation within this project. The use of running records, surveys and interviews reflects the range of data that the school utilised.

Ongoing support and sustainability

Recognition from the leadership team and other teachers was seen to be important for sustainability. The project teachers have already taken on a training role and are sharing ideas in staff and syndicate meetings on a regular basis, as well as observing student behaviour and teacher practice and providing feedback. A smooth transition and liaison was required for students when moving to a new teacher.

Table 2 summarises the results from each of the case studies just described.

Discussion of results

Similarities emerge from the comparative examination of the Success Case schools that distinguish as 'success' features. First, although not consciously articulated as phases, each school project team did follow the classic phases (issue definition, reconnaissance, implementation and evaluation) of AR and AL. All of the schools defined their issue with considerable clarity. Each (particularly Schools 2 and 3) used data/evidence to examine both the current situation and outcomes with their issue, that is, pre- and post-implementation evaluations were conducted. Such use of evidence is considered to be an important feature of effective development (Allen 2005; Lewis 2003; Timperley 2004; Timperley et al. 2007).

Current perceptions of effective professional development also point to the importance of senior management support (Baldwin 2005; OECD 1998; Fletcher 2003). School Board, principal and senior management team support was overt in Schools 1, 2 and 4, but less so in School 3.

Effective development is well planned and alignment between the school's strategic planning goals and the individual or team development goals of staff should be both apparent and resourced (Piggot-Irvine & Cardno 2005). Planning was a particularly strong feature of projects in all schools.

Extensive specialist support was also a feature of all four projects. External facilitators and researchers provided feedback, guidance, resources, and in the case of School 1, considerable tenacity (for example, they persisted in encouraging the project group to continue despite constraints).

Equally, good internal specialist support was also evident from people such as Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), special needs teachers, and teacher aides. In previous writing this author has noted that:

... effective facilitators are well organised, have a high degree of responsiveness, sensitivity, support and empathy, have a strong knowledge base in the field facilitated and the skills to creatively impart that knowledge in a way that engages and ensures learner ownership. What often sets an exceptional facilitator apart, however, is the ability to ensure all of the latter alongside a tenacity associated with holding high expectations of learners—expectations that are linked to rigorous outcomes. (Piggot-Irvine 2006, p. 483)

Each of the researchers/facilitators and internal specialists associated with the Success Case studies demonstrated some, or all, of these characteristics.

All schools started in a small way with their projects. The use of a trial, or a small number of students, a small number of teachers (only two in School 4), or limited classes, are examples of starting small and illustrate the way that the project teams kept their focus manageable. This is in keeping with earlier reference (Piggot-Irvine 2006) to the fact that a key to effective development is associated with the number and depth of initiatives embarked upon. The adoption of a philosophy of 'do a few things well' is encouraged where a cautious and well-planned approach to development is adopted that is in keeping with the notion of 'deep' learning (Biggs 1992; McKay & Kember 1997).

Each school also referred to the examination of 'best practice' or a relevant literature base in their project and in this way were incorporating 'informed' decision-making. They were 'avid seekers of research and best practices that will help themselves and others' (Lewis 2003, p. 2).

Focused professional development was a feature of the implementation phases of the AR and AL in each school. This development, such as facilitating specialist courses on a topic linked to projects, was frequently provided as part of the specialist support from researchers/facilitators of the professional development.

All schools also centred their projects on enthusiastic and committed teachers, a factor that is often associated with effective professional development (Lewis 2003). Although this was probably most evident with Schools 3 and 4, in all four cases there was an element of willingness of these teachers to give it a go. Collaboration (including use of dialogue), teamwork, regular meetings and sharing was high in all project teams and this is also a significant feature noted to be associated with effective professional development (Darling-Hammond 2000; Hill, Hawk & Taylor 2002; Lambert 2003). Collaboration/participation with parents and students was also reported, particularly in the case of Schools 1 and 2 for parents. The full induction of students in the development was most evident in School 4.

Adaptation of the environment for students with special education needs was particularly strong in School 2, but evident in smaller and more specific ways associated with the projects in

the other schools as well. In School 2 class size, room arrangement, curriculum, and assessment opportunities had all been adapted.

In addition, strong and comprehensive reporting of outcomes was evident in all schools. One teacher in School 2 made particular use of reflection and reflective logs. Reflection is a cornerstone of both AR and AL (Zuber-Skerritt 2002) and is increasingly utilised by teachers in formats that do not differ from that by this teacher. Reflective diary entries of improvements and impacts are regularly made by teachers as part of ongoing development.

Multiple outcomes for students were reported across all schools but were particularly obvious in Schools 2, 3 and 4 that had more of a student-focused project. These outcomes included increased confidence and self-efficacy, improved behaviour, enhanced achievement, better concentration and work habits, and increased inclusion by mainstream teachers and students. Celebration of success of students was especially noted by Schools 2, 3 and 4. In all schools, teaching practices were also noted as having improved to enhance learning for students with special education needs.

Fullan and Mascal (2000) highlight the importance of committed staff in helping to drive the sustainability of development. The Success Case study participants point to additional factors, including ongoing external specialist support (for example from facilitators) and internal specialist support, as well as continuing support (financial, inclusion of special needs in planning, celebrating success of students) from the school Board, principal and senior management team. Bringing other staff (wider than the project team) on board with the project focus was also seen as important for sustaining the initiatives and it was suggested that this should include wider collaboration, as well as gaining understanding and acceptance by mainstream teachers. It was considered that project team members might also need to take on a training role with other staff and have a period of transfer of knowledge so that these new teachers become aware of the strategies utilised under the project. The latter might ensure a smoother transition for students.

As noted in the earlier article (2008), the Success Cases all had context-specific projects that showed commitment to long-term, 'deep' development (beyond surface, or quick-fix) that was far from insular or introspective. As encouraged by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1998), there was support from external experts to enable co-construction (Fletcher 2003) yet the teachers maintained their own agenda for their projects, as supported by Hargreaves (1998). Inquiry, defined by Robertson (2005, p. 4) as 'researching practice and seeking information', was a component of each school's practice. In this inquiry, the teachers, as adult learners, were self-directing and utilised their accumulated experience as an integrated part of their learning (Rudman 1999).

Finally, in terms of the effectiveness of the SCM (Brinkerhoff 2003) adopted, in effect the approach

utilised a variation on the classic qualitative SCM. The establishment of a matrix of success criteria guided the identification of the 'success' sites and in-depth data collection of each case was conducted via a mixed methods approach using focus groups, one-to-one interviews, observation and documentary analysis. The variation to the SCM involved selection of just successful cases rather than Brinkerhoff's (2005) recommended inclusion of unsuccessful cases. This approach proved to be strongly beneficial for: entry/gaining access to traditionally resistant sites in the overloaded school sector; recruitment of participants within the sites; respondent willingness to contribute data; the honesty of responses (both positive and negative); generation of extensive findings through the deep analysis of cases; and the highlighting of both exemplary practices and barriers to effective induction across the sectors. The findings suggest that the selection of successful cases alone revealed both positive and negative attributes of effectiveness while still maintaining rigour. The latter is a trend that has recently been revealed in subsequent evaluation research and is the focus of a further paper yet to be published.

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Appendix 1: Success Case criteria

'Success cases' will have identified 'success' and know why they achieved it. They will provide evidence over three domains.

	Presence	Participation	Quality Learning
Effective teaching	The teacher has a 'can do' approach to challenges	There is the expectation that students identify their own learning, social and cultural achievements as well as those of their peers The learning environment is adapted to support students' cultural identities The learning environment is adapted to promote positive social and learning interactions, and maximise participation in learning	Teachers deliberately plan for teaching and learning to address the needs of students who require significant adaptation of the curriculum Teachers ensure that learning intentions and outcomes are clear and shared Student outcomes improve
Quality provider	The school has a 'can-do' approach to challenges	All students, parents, whānau (family) and teachers are welcomed and fully included in the school The 'voices' of the students, parents, whānau and wider community are reflected in the school's definition of success The contributions of parents, whānau and the wider community through their involvement in school activities is acknowledged	There are systems within the school to recognise, value and celebrate effective teaching practices that address diverse learning needs There are systems and processes within the school to recognise, value and celebrate students' learning, social and cultural achievements There are systems and processes within the school to sustain identified effective practices and teachers' learning

The evidence of 'success' in a school will be coherent, that is, whichever one of the three domains is scrutinised, these indicators will be apparent. It is expected that the features that contributed to a 'success case' will be readily transferable to other educational contexts.