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A comparative case study of teacher professional learning in Alberta and England

by

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Abstract

In many jurisdictions, policies aimed at improving educational processes and outcomes have focused on teacher professional learning. Yet, there is a gap in research concerning teachers' understandings of their own professional learning as it is influenced by school improvement policies. Using an interpretivist approach, this case study of two schools in Alberta and England explored teachers' understandings of their professional learning and the ways in which policy context interacted with these understandings.

The findings suggested there is significant variability in the ways that teachers construct: 1) the notion of collaboration in working with others; 2) conceptualizations of teacher knowledge; and 3) the relationship of student learning to teacher professional learning. Additionally, findings indicated that teachers actively meditated their understandings of policy in their teaching practice, suggesting that policy context is one factor needing consideration in teacher professional learning research and policy development.

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Chapter One: The Problem

Teacher professional learning is well represented among school improvement efforts among many OECD countries. Within the current discourse of educational accountability and reform, scholars have suggested that the key mechanism for school improvement is the professional learning of teachers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005; Teddlie, Stringfield, & Burdett, 2003; Wilson and Berne, 1999). Consequently, theoretical models for teacher professional development abound. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) indicated that frequent government-led initiatives commonly experienced by teachers were very influential in their learning, meaning that educational policy developments at the government level have real impacts on teachers' professional lives. However, in literature regarding teacher learning, Borko (2004) maintained the inadequacy of conventional professional development is a "serious unsolved problem" (p.3) for educational research.

Given its prevalent role in school improvement discourse and the diverse ways it is conceptualized in various contexts, it is important that educational leaders understand the complexity of professional learning in organizations. To do this, it is important to consider the perspective of the teachers who participate in planned professional learning, to consider how teachers' conceptualize their professional learning and what role educational policy and context plays in these conceptualizations.

Background of the Problem

Quality schooling has become a priority among OECD countries as governments intervene with policies intent on driving up standards in schools (Day & Leitch, 2007; Rowe, 2007) through increased managerialism and "standards-based accountability" (Day & Leitch, 2007). Inevitably, the drive for increased standards in student learning has resulted in demands for higher standards of teacher quality by closely coupling student

achievement to teacher performance. There is consensus among policy makers that quality education is derived from skilled teachers (Day & Leitch, 2007; Wood, 2007; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Teacher effectiveness has, therefore, been identified as the key to school improvement. In this manner, teacher professional learning enhancing teacher performance is seen as "the ticket to reform" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 173). Many argue that the politicization of teacher professional learning has made it even more complex in the context of schools as professional learning structures in schools are influenced by national and global forces (Day & Leitch, 2007; Sugrue, 2004). It is imperative that we problematize the quality of professional development targeting teacher learning (Rowe, 2007).

The Researcher

I have spent several years teaching in different contexts, in Canadian schools, in English schools, and in British International schools. In my journey as an elementary teacher and senior management leader in these various contexts, I have been challenged to rapidly become familiar with the policies that guide and shape the learning context for students, and with the school improvement plans that I both enacted as a teacher and planned as a member of the school senior management team. In developing policy within my school to address school improvement, teacher professional learning became a key item for consideration. We had teachers from two different educational contexts working in our school, English trained teachers and Canadian trained teachers. In working to address a multitude of professional learning needs, I experienced tension as I wrestled with an uncertainty as to how policy plays a role in shaping how teachers understand their own professional learning as we worked toward achieving particular school improvement goals. I sensed differences in the ways that the Canadian trained and English trained teachers talked about their own professional learning. In working

together, there were often times when ideas of what was needed differed between the teachers at the school. In working with the teachers, I began to question how it is that the policy context shapes our own understanding of what professional learning is and the role it plays in the context of our dialogue focused on school improvement.

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers experience professional learning in two policy contexts and in what ways policy influences their understandings of professional learning. To do this, I selected a school in each of the England and Canada to study the difference between conceptions of teacher professional learning in the Canadian and the England contexts. This study examined how teacher professional learning is informed by the macro-level of the context governing policy to identify how context shapes school improvement discourse, and the micro-level of teacher perceptions of the factors influencing the implementation of this policy. This study involved a thorough examination of the policy contexts for professional learning in each setting to identify what similarities and differences exist in conceptions of teacher professional learning and the ways that educational policy influences these conceptualizations. To understand how teachers experience their learning in each context, it was necessary to research policy contexts as expressed in policy documents and also to engage in dialogue with teachers about their learning through qualitative methodologies and case study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to clarify the purpose and to guide the study:

1) How is teacher professional learning conceptualized in school improvement policies in both the English and Albertan context?

2) What are teachers' conceptualizations and understandings of their own professional learning in each school?

3) How might the policy context in which teachers practice shape their understandings of their own professional learning?

Significance of the Problem

Since many government-led initiatives have placed teacher professional learning as a key factor in school improvement processes (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005), understanding the influence of policy contexts on teacher professional learning is significant for policy development. A review of the literature indicates a gap in understanding the interplay between policy contexts and teachers' conceptualizations of their own learning (Borko, 2004; Day & Leitch, 2007; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005; Rowe, 2007). Understanding how policy contexts influence teachers' understandings of their learning has implications for how policy should be developed and, more importantly, implemented in schools. With the increased focus on teacher development (Day & Leitch, 2007; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005; Wood, 2007), it is critical that policy makers and educational leaders understand how policy contexts impact teachers' understandings of their learning so that policies might be experienced as they are intended to be experienced.

Definition of Terms

The literature review in subsequent chapters will provide an in-depth analysis of the key terms in this thesis. However, it will be useful to define some key terms at this stage.

Teacher professional learning: the informal and formal processes by which teachers engage to enhance their professional practice, knowledge and skills. It is often referred to as continuing professional development (CPD) in England or professional

development (PD) in Alberta. For the purposes of this study, teacher professional learning will be used to represent these processes in a general sense. In specific contexts, terminology associated with each policy context shall be used.

Collaborative Learning: includes learning in a social context where teachers engage in conversation, discussion, and observation as they inquire into what others do (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005).

School Improvement: places the emphasis on the process; "a broad description of all the variables that play a role in a school development project" (Smink, 1991, p.3)

School Effectiveness: is concerned with results; identifies school success in measurable terms within the context in which that school operates rather than on an externally pre-determined set of factors (Townsend, 2007; Smink, 1991).

Government bodies: In both England and Alberta, there are governing bodies responsible for education. In England, the governing body has recently changed names, so that when referring to particular document, it will be cited as both the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DfCFS). In Alberta, the governing body will be referred to as Alberta Education.

Policy Context: refers to the contextual field of policies that interact with the field of school improvement and teacher professional learning whereby there exists a "dialogical space within which there are possibilities for change" (Joshee & Johson, 2005). These may include policy documents at government, school jurisdiction and school level.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations of the Study

It is also important at this state to identify assumptions related to this study. First, I assume that teacher professional learning occurs to enhance teacher practice. As participants in their learning, it is assumed that teachers have the capacity to reflect on

their own professional learning. Also, comparative analysis of these two contexts can be successfully conducted using qualitative research is assumed in this study. No prior inquiry was made to evaluate the quality of professional learning at each school. Rather the schools were chosen by convenience sampling, assuming that the professional learning of teachers is situated within the policy context of school improvement in each school. The major assumption that will be made is that teachers involved in these processes in each school setting can engage critically with their own learning.

This study is delimited to one school in each context. Rather than a broad based study, this research examined teacher conceptualizations of professional learning within each school. Conducting comparative research on this scale allowed me to recognize comparisons between two individual schools by analyzing emerging issues between those two schools.

I recognize that there are many contextual factors that may influence the ways that teachers engage with their professional learning, such as policy, teacher disposition, school culture, for example. For the purposes of this study, the ways in teacher professional learning is situated within school improvement policies, at the government, school jurisdiction and school level, was considered. Additionally, the ways that this policy context may influence teacher professional learning will be examined. This means that the ways in which other contextual factors may play a role in teachers' understandings of professional learning will not be considered.

Additionally, this study did not address teacher or principal leadership in professional learning in schools. Nor did the study examine the role of professional organizations committed to professional learning in their interactions with government and school jurisdiction, such as teacher professional associations.

The limitations of case study and qualitative research are inherent within this study. The findings are dependent on each of the contexts since they emerge from a

descriptive study. It will be left up to the reader and to future research to draw conclusions about the generalizability of the findings. No study into the validity of teacher perceptions of barriers and supports was conducted. In addition, the behaviour of the participants may have been affected by the presence of the researcher and the perspective of the researcher might have influenced the interpretation of participant behaviours. These limitations are further discussed in Chapter Three.

Organization of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I will provide an extensive literature review detailing research pertaining to school improvement, teacher professional learning and the study of policy. Chapter Three will detail the research, including a description of the methodology and research design. In Chapters Four and Five, I will provide the findings from the data collection, detailing how teacher professional learning is conceptualized within policies and by teachers at each school in the study. Chapter Six will be a detailed comparative analysis of the data, whereby I will provide a discussion comparing how teacher professional learning was understood by teachers in each school and reconceptualize the notion of professional learning through the data collected in this study. Additionally, I will discuss the ways that policy may play a role in teachers' understandings of professional learning. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I will summarize the findings of the research, make suggestions for teacher practice and policy, and recommend future research considerations. I will end the thesis by providing final reflections on the research study and the process of learning to become a researcher.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

This literature review will examine research and literature regarding school improvement and teacher professional learning. I will begin with a brief overview of how teacher professional learning is situated within the political context of school improvement policy. Then, I will address the study of policy, considering design, implementation and research. Next, I will examine the literature of school reform by exploring the literature of school effectiveness and school improvement. Subsequently, I will examine the conceptual framework of teacher professional learning in the educational field and provide an overview of research in teacher professional learning, highlighting common and recurring themes. Finally, I will provide a conceptual frame for understanding how teacher professional learning is understood in the literature.

Teacher Professional Learning in the Context of School Improvement Policy

The quality of schooling has become a priority among OECD countries as governments intervene with policies intent on driving up standards in schools (Day & Leicht, 2007). With increased governance addressing educational economic accountability and improved student attainment, educational reform has focused on managerialism and "standards-based accountability" (Day & Leitch, 2007). Inevitably, the drive for increased standards in student learning has resulted in demands for higher standards of teacher quality. Proposed changes to student performance required changes in teaching. In this manner, teacher professional learning has been seen as "the ticket to reform" (Wilson & Berne, p. 173).

Educational policy aimed at school reform has been structured to indicate that quality education is derived from skilled teachers (Day & Leitch, 2007; Rowe, 2007; Wood, 2007; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). However, in literature regarding teacher learning, Borko (2004) maintained that the inadequacy of conventional professional

development is a "serious unsolved problem" for educational research. In the pursuit of quality teachers, it is imperative that we problematize the quality of professional development targeting teacher learning (Rowe, 2007). To understand how educational research has addressed professional learning, it is important to first realize how it is understood within the context of school improvement policies.

The Study of Policy

The study of policy through qualitative research methodologies is an area requiring development (Rist, 2000). Policy is used to advance "fundamental and complex changes" (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002, p. 387) in educational reform. However, little qualitative educational research exists to understand how policy influences and is taken up by those whose professional lives are affected by it. "Qualitative studies of how different tools are understood and responded to by target populations is of immense importance" (Rist, 2000, p. 1006). The connection between policy formation and the experience of its implementation is little studied in educational contexts. Policies "are subject to an infinite variety of contingencies, and they contain worlds of possible practical applications. What is in them depends on what is in us, and vice-versa" (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978, p. 113). Schneider and Ingram (1990) propose that comparative research of policies is required in "understanding why target populations react as they do to policy initiatives" (p. 525). Given the ways in which people influence and are influenced by policy, qualitative studies are instrumental in understanding the complexity of policy in educational contexts.

The notion of policy is often constructed around processes of development and implementation. "A policy can be thought of as a set of instructions from policy makers to policy implementers that spell out both goals and the means for achieving those goals" (Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980, p. 31). However, policy is also related to theoretical

understandings of what should be practiced and how that practice should be developed. "Policies imply theories. Whether stated implicitly or not, policies point to a chain of causation between initial conditions and future consequences" (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, p. xxii). In this means, policy-making is a deliberative process (Rist, 2000). Policy development occurs as a process between a legitimate, authoritative body of policy makers and a diverse group of interested individuals from outside arenas "who press their demands on these formal leaders" (Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980, p. 32). Implementation then is "the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired results" (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984, p. xxii).

The causal relationship between development and implementation implies a linear policy process between state structures and individual agents. However, other scholars visualized a more complex process. Majone and Wildavsky (1978) argued that implementation of policies is evolutional; that is, policy evolves as it is implemented. Ball (1993) suggested a re-thinking of the simplicities of the structure/agency dichotomy in the study of policy, as agency and structure are implicit in each other rather than being dichotomous opposites. "We live and think structures rather than simply being oppressed or limited by them." (p. 11). In this way, Ball recognized a complexity in the interconnection between policy and individuals, structures and agents.

Joshee and Johnson (2005) visualized the structure/agency complexity as a *policy web*, defined as "a discursive and dialogical space within which there are possibilities for change….The web approach acknowledges that policy process is complex and it involves actors from within and outside of the state" (p. 55). The visual representation of the web is demarcated by rings which represent the levels of policy formation and cross-cutting policy threads "that while connected are not linear thus representing policies at different levels that address similar issues. . . .The points at which the threads cross the rings represent discrete policy contexts" (p. 55). Similarly, Goldberg (2006) theorized a

discursive relationship among a multiplicity of actors within the complexity of a policy

web.

> It highlights that at any given time there are multiple discourses
> circulating. The discourses circulate in different circles such as
> governments, professional organizations, regulators, policy researchers,
> academics, policy think tanks, advocates, community organizations, and
> individuals themselves who participate in disseminating and creating
> discourses. Under this metaphor, policy is defined as an ensemble of
> multiple discourses that interact in a complex web of relationships that
> enable or constrain social relations. (Goldberg, 2006, p. 2)

In this understanding, policy is characterized as fluid and "emerging out of the

struggle between multiple discourses from the multiplicity of voices in a given context"

(p. 2), troubling the notion of state as sole relevant actor in the study of policy but rather

recognizing there are multiple actors in policy processes.

Joshee and Johnson (2005) drew attention to the open spaces between the threads

in the policy web. "It is in these spaces that individuals have some freedom to act in ways

that support, extend, or undermine stated policy objectives and to introduce new ideas

that may influence the policy discourse" (p. 55). In a similar way, Bourdieu (1991)

theorized social contexts existing as *fields*, spaces within which tensions exist over access

to cultural and political resources. Each field has its defining boundaries that serve to

bind the logic and assumed structure as both product and producer of the *habitus*, the

structured and structuring dispositions that produce practices in the social world (Jenkins,

1992). "A field, therefore, is a structured system of social positions – occupied either by

individual or institutions – the nature of which defines the situation for their occupants"

(Jenkins, p. 85). The notion of policy spaces in a web or field allows an understanding

that policy structure is more complex than the linear model suggested by other theorists.

The policy web validates an understanding of fluidity and interconnectedness between

policy development and implementation, recognizing that actors are both situated within

a complex context of policy and are implicitly embedded within the spaces of the web as they both experience and influence the construct of policy.

Public choice scholars also have examined policy tools, identifying that the emphasis on policy tools is often on incentive structures and "the recognition that perverse incentives in institutional arrangements will produce dysfunctional results" (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, p. 512). Policy prescriptions such as privatization, contracting, local control, quasi-market arrangements within the public sector, vouchers are "intended to create institutions in which individuals will be able to produce collectively optimal results" (p. 512). Schneider and Ingram asserted that "not all decisions and behaviour are driven by objective or tangible payoffs, and that there is a need to specify and organize the variety of behaviour assumptions underlying alternative policy instruments" (p. 512).

Schneider and Ingram (1990) identified five categories of tools based on their behaviour assumptions: authority, incentive, capacity, symbolic/hortatory, and learning tools. *Authority tools* are used in granting permission, prohibiting or requiring action to guide behaviour of officials and other target populations in the achievement of government and other legitimate authority policy aims. *Incentive tools* rely on tangible payoffs, positive or negative, to induce compliance or encourage policy utilization. These policy tools assume that individuals require incentives for motivation for action, and sometimes include sanctions for compliance. *Capacity Tools* "provide information, training, education, and resources to enable individuals, groups or agencies to make decisions or carry out activities" (p. 517). Capacity tools assume that incentives are not necessary but rather address barriers due to lack of information or skills needed to take action toward policy goal implementation. As tools, these policies are based on the assumption that people will make the correct choice if properly informed. Additionally, capacity tools are used to encourage implementation of innovative programs. *Symbolic*

and hortatory tools assume an internal motivation on the behalf of policy actors on the

basis of their belief and values. "Individuals bring into decision situations cultural notions

of right, wrong, justice, individualism, equality, obligation and so forth" (p. 519).

Symbolic and hortatory tools seek to convince people by connecting policy to people's

beliefs and values. In this way, these tools are not concerned with tangible rewards or

incentives but rather "alter perceptions of the policy-preferred activities" (p. 521).

Learning tools are used when a problem is identified but there is uncertainty to how to

address the problem. In particular, they are used when there is uncertainty about how a

target population will address the problem or view themselves as active agents in

problem solving. Learning tools "assume agencies and target populations can learn about

behaviour, and select from the other tools those that will be effective" (p. 521). The

purposes and objectives of the learning tools may be open-ended, leaving the choice of

tools to the lower-level agents. Purposed and objectives are narrowed and specified

through time in the policy implementation phase when reasonable achievements can be

ascertained.

Schneider and Ingram (1990) asserted that policy tools reflect political culture,

but tools may also create their own culture. Additionally, Schneider and Ingram

addressed the role of the individual in policy processes by envisioning an interaction

between policy processes and individual decision-making.

> *A framework for describing policy tools that emphasizes behavioural characteristics must proceed from a theory of individual decision and action but must focus on those aspects of decisions and action that have policy 'handles'. Thus the theory must emphasize variables that are causally related to decisions and actions but that can be manipulated or influenced by policy. (p. 514)*

Ball (1993) suggested an urgent importance for studies that address structural

analysis of educational policies and micro-level investigations of people's perceptions

and experiences of such policy. More studies into the way that teachers experience policy

is needed to understand the spaces they occupy as agents in policy construction. The ways that teachers experience and understand policy is important in realizing how these structures affect their professional lives.

In the development of a cognitive framework for understanding teacher sense-making in policy implementation processes, Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) argue that "policy texts represent ideas about reforming practice and that we can analyze policy to see if it was understood as it intended" (p. 420). They maintained that policy interpretation by implementing agents is complex: policy can be interpreted in multiple ways; a singular version of one policy proposal can represent different policy messages; and those differences may represent multiple intentions of one policy. In this discussion, Spillane, Reiser and Reimer championed the importance of local understandings of policy as either compatible or incompatible with the policy intentions. That is, policy analysts must identify misinterpretations of policy on the part of implementing agents. Future study is needed to "unpack how and why policy evolves as it does" (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002, p. 419).

Background to School Improvement

Educational reform has involved input from both school effectiveness and school improvement research (Creemers, Stoll, Reezigt, & the ESI Team, 2007; Sackney, 2007). In the current context of school reform, the fields of school effectiveness and school improvement are beginning to merge (Townsend, 2007). However, this convergence of two historically different research paradigms is not without contest and tension from researchers and practitioners. "The effective schools research seems to have had the underlying purpose of developing practical means for school improvement, but there are some important distinctions and relationships between school effectiveness and school improvement that can be identified" (Townsend, 2007, p. 3). School effectiveness has a

history of quantitative, measurable outcomes of what works in schools, based heavily on theory researched and developed by academics (Fidler, 2001). School improvement, on the other hand, has historically been more involved at the practitioner level to develop qualitative measures of school change that enhance student learning (Fidler, 2001). Smink (1991) stated,

> School effectiveness is concerned with results. Researchers try to describe certain variables for school success in measurable terms. On the other hand, school improvement places the accent on the process; here one finds a broad description of all the variables that play a role in a school development project. Both approaches need the other to successfully modernize the system. (p. 3)

While there are calls to merge the two fields into SESI (school effectiveness - school improvement), acknowledging their separate bodies of knowledge provides an historical understanding of their differing research perspectives.

School Effectiveness Research

In the early 1970's, there was consensus amongst most educational researchers that school-based characteristics had no effect on student learning outcomes (Sackney, 2007; Rowe, 2007). Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that "schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context" (p. 325). In challenging the common conception that socio-economic factors were the strongest determinant of student academic achievement, school effectiveness research began with a history of quantitative methodology to disprove the notion of the insignificant influence of schools on educational outcomes. Researchers concerned with school effectiveness were critical of results from studies such as those conducted by Coleman et al. because "inherent hierarchical structure of the data had not been taken into account (ie. students within classes, classes within schools, etc.; or repeated measures nested within students within classes, etc.)" (Rowe, 2007, p. 769). Consequently, sudies into the possible connections between school factors and student achievement emerged.

Studies of school effectiveness began by identifying schools where students performed well compared to their counterparts with similar socio-economic backgrounds in other schools. In particular, research addressing equity for children of all socio-economic backgrounds emerged. In criticism of the work of Coleman et al. (1966), Edmonds (1979) stated that "all children are eminently educable and . . . the behaviour of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education" (p. 20). His research into effective schools investigated the question: "Are there schools that are instructionally effective for poor children?" (p. 20). Through a comparison of 20 different American schools in the Detroit Model Cities Neighbourhood, two schools were matched as sharing 11 different social indicators. However, the two schools demonstrated variable differences in student achievement. In matching American students from schools deemed effective and ineffective to compare their family background, Edmonds stated that his research results "infer the importance of school behaviour in making pupil performance independent of family background. The overriding point here is that, in and of itself, pupil background neither causes nor precludes elementary school instructional effectiveness" (p. 21). Edmonds became the first to publish a "five factor model" of school effectiveness indicating that effective schools demonstrate "purposeful educational leadership, challenging teaching and high expectations of students' achievements, involvement of and consistency among teachers, a positive and orderly climate, and frequent evaluation of student progress" (as cited in Rowe, 2007). Other models developed, listing several series of features of effective schools, all placing school related factors as prime determinants of student academic achievement.

Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, Ouston, and Smith (1979) conducted quantitative studies to identify the contextual features of effective schools to conclude that "schooling *does* make a difference" (p. 1). Their study, conducted in London, followed the progress of over 2000 students' schooling before beginning secondary school until their first

public examinations. Their research identified four measures of outcome: attendance, behaviour, delinquency and academic attainment. After adjustments were made to compensate for variations in intake, school processes appeared to have significant effect on student outcomes.

In review studies into school effectiveness (Brookover, Beady, Flood, & Schweitzer, 1979), Rowe (2007) summarized that the results of these studies indicated that effective schools were characterized by

> *an 'ethos' or 'culture' toward learning, expressed in terms of high standards of achievement and expectations of students, an emphasis on basic skills, a high level of involvement in decision-making and professionalism among teachers, cohesiveness, clear policies on matters such as homework and student behaviour and so on. (p. 769)*

However, these studies into the effects of school on education were not without criticism. Murphy (1985) criticized the research of Rutter et al. (1979) for its insignificant contribution to the field of school effectiveness. In their attempts to contradict Coleman et al. (1966), Rutter et al. simply produced different findings, indicating that school-to-school difference was not as significant as within school difference. In essence, Murphy maintained that the researchers have come to the same conclusion. Additionally, Hargreaves (1980) criticized the incompleteness of the methods of research, judging that the four measurable variables were narrowly accounted for and therefore limit the research validity. For example, Hargreaves questioned the use of non-school background variables: parental occupation and immigration/citizenship status of the parents. Hargreaves theorized that these two variables present an inadequate view of background variables that can affect a child's response to school. Furthermore, the over-reliance on quantitative methodology limits the knowledge learned about school effectiveness. Hargreaves was firm in his admonition that qualitative techniques should play a significant role in educational research.

While criticized, the school effectiveness research has left a legacy on school practice and policy. Murphy (1991) maintained that the school effectiveness research has developed a solid knowledge base for what we know about schools that work. Murphy states that, firstly, all children can learn, given the appropriate and necessary learning processes. Secondly, school effectiveness rejects the notion of identifying good and bad schools, rather seeking student outcomes in terms of the value added by school factors. Thirdly, the practice of blaming the child or the parents for the school's inadequate ability to meet the learning needs of the child was strongly refuted. Lastly, school effectiveness research clearly indicates that effective schools are more tightly linked in their structural, symbolic and cultural networks, meaning that school are influenced by a multitude of factors. This knowledge base contributes significantly to the current policy frameworks in modern education in countries such as Canada, England and the US.

Current school effectiveness research has utilized and refined the effectiveness indicators to theorize that quality teachers have a significant influence on student learning. In a meta-analysis of research conducted into school effectiveness, Hattie (2003) indicated that teachers' influence on student achievement and outcomes was at least six times stronger than whole school factors. Similarly, in review of the Victorian Quality Schools Project in Australia, Rowe (1993) stated, "effective schools are only effective to the extent that they have effective teachers" (p. 15). Rowe's emphasis on quality teaching places teacher professional learning as highly influential in achieving effective schools.

School effectiveness research is concerned with analytical and descriptive data focusing on measurable outcomes of student achievement and is highly connected to quality of teaching and learning based on research knowledge (Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll, 1993). By the late 1980's and early 1990's, school effectiveness research was being considered in terms of its potential toward effecting school change (Sackney, 2007), to

which critics of school effectiveness had been indicating was lacking in the field. Governments, concerned with international comparisons and economic competition, began to look toward improving quality education in their political contexts.

School Improvement Research

Mortimer defines school improvement as the process of "improving the way the school organizes, promotes and supports learning . . . . It includes changing aims, expectations, organizations (sometimes people), ways of learning, methods of teaching and organizational culture" (as cited in Gray, 2001). Stoll and Fink (1996) stated that the main aim of school improvement is to "enhance pupil progress, achievement, and development" (p. 43).

The academic study of school improvement has evolved through differing periods of research from 1960 to the present. Several researchers (Reynolds, 2001; Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993) have documented these changes providing a historical review of school improvement in the Western context of OECD countries. In the 1960's and 1970's, school improvement emphasized changes to curriculum and school organization, targeting quantitative "top-down" (Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993, p. 41) change based on knowledge produced outside of the school organization. Strategic planning for curriculum reform, consideration for managerial structures, and training through course-based programs dominated the school improvement efforts. The training opportunities for new curricula were rudimentary and basic. In this context, teachers identified what they thought would work among the new curricular materials and applied it their teaching (Reynolds, 2001). Most school improvement techniques were aimed at the school level change rather than at individual teachers or practitioners. Consequently, Reynolds asserted that this model of school improvement received poor acceptance by

the school population, likely explained by the lack of involvement of teachers in developing change innovations, as Reynolds referred to as "teacher 'ownership'" (p. 41).

Reynolds, Hopkins and Stoll (1993) theorized that the failure of the previous decades' attempt at school improvement led to a new paradigm of research in the mid-1980's. This new paradigm focused on a "bottom-up" (p. 41) approach to school improvement which attempted to place teachers as owners of their change, although sometimes in consultation with experts in either school-based or external positions. This focus "celebrate[d] the 'folk-lore' or practical knowledge of practitioners rather than the knowledge base of researchers" (p. 41). Effective schools research began to influence the structure of school improvement efforts, resulting in large-scale school improvement projects. The outcomes of this research were concerned with school-based change, through active participation at the level of the practitioner, focusing on qualitative research. However, Reynolds (2001) contended that while much information was gained about change processes and factors affecting effective schooling within educational organizations through this paradigm of school improvement research, it was deficient in its attempts to effect actual improvement at the school level for quality education. Fullan (1991) maintained that knowledge of quality education is not equivalent to being able to effect that change in schools.

Reynolds (2001) theorized that the current new paradigm of school improvement research is both challenging and promising, as "researchers and practitioners struggle to relate their strategies and their research knowledge to the realities of schools in a pragmatic, systematic and sensitive way" (p.33). "'Third age' improvement programs that are instructionally focussed, context relevant, reliable in implementation, focussed upon building capacity and evaluated by the use of both 'hard' and 'soft' quantitative data" have begun to form (Reynolds, 2007, p. 471). The current context of school

improvement research involves contributions by those who are currently involved in school development, at both the practitioner and researcher levels.

The Emergence of SESI

While the merging of school effectiveness research with school improvement processes is influential on current education reform (Townsend, 2007), challenges still remain. School effectiveness research reached a peak in the late 1980's (Reynolds, 2001). The fields of school improvement and effectiveness were influential in the educational reform in many OECD countries, bringing their knowledge base to the practitioner level. However, the context of SESI research must continue to be involved at the practitioner level. Reynolds (2001) believed that involvement in researching the problem of "context specificity of improvement strategies in schools of different social backgrounds, levels of effectiveness and stages of development" (p. 40) is still lacking. Additionally, there is a need for providing support to school practitioners to generate their own knowledge within the context of their own schools, through relevant and modern evaluation and information systems (Reynolds, 1991). "Although the importance of teachers and their work in classrooms is certainly acknowledged, individual teachers are generally not considered to be the main lever of change for effective whole school improvement" (Creemer, Stoll, Reezigt, & the ESI Team, 2007, p. 834). Failure of school improvement projects/initiatives to engage in longitudinal studies (Hargreaves, 2004) with school effectiveness researchers indicates a further challenge in the continued synchronization of the two fields.

In the context of school improvement, school effectiveness and policymaking in the UK, Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber, and Hillman (1996) indicated that the identification of characteristics of improving schools is relevant in current research as it helps bridge the gap between the school effectiveness and school improvement. The field

of school effectiveness has been heavy with theory and the field of school improvement has been focused on identifying successful change. Understanding how that change occurs, to improve quality in the transition from ineffective to effective is still needed (Reynolds et al, 1996; Fullan 1991). Focusing on context, builds an understanding what "factors 'travel' internationally in explaining variation and those which do not" (p. 153) to facilitating the gap between theory and practice. Chi-Kin and Williams (2006) agreed that context is important and questioned to what extent "the social and political values underpinning the goals of education radically constrain the transfer of lessons learned in one place (country, region, community) to another" (p. 9). Additionally, Reynolds et al. (1996) theorized that examining change in schools over time is needed to develop a stronger understanding of the long-term impact of schools on academic outcomes.

Summary of School Improvement Research

Although tenuous in the struggle for researchers and practitioners to make sense of the SESI field, the merger of school effectiveness and improvement does provide beneficial advantages emerging from synchronization.

> *School effectiveness and improvement provide insights and knowledge to be used in school improvement. School improvement is a very powerful tool for the testing of theories. School improvement can also provide new insights and possibilities for effective school factors, which can be analysed further in effective school research. (Creemers, Stoll, Reezigt, & the ESI Team, 2007, p. 825)*

Rowe (2007) summarized the overall aims of both school improvement and effectiveness by stating, "What matters in schools is quality teaching and learning provision, supported by specified teaching standards and on-going professional development" (p. 780).

Teacher Professional Learning

The large majority of knowledge of teacher professional learning has been gained through qualitative methodology. This suggests that the knowledge gained through

professional learning is "subjective; holistic; problematic; a social construct" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 47). The research "offers 'thick' descriptions, and allows entry to subjective social constructions of people" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 45).

Case studies prevail within the research; various researchers have used constructivist approaches by focusing on the case, not the variables, to pursue understanding of and meaningful insight to issues intrinsic to the case (Schwandt, 1997). Meanwhile, other researchers have engaged in meta-analysis of documentation and research, to construct ideal programming or evaluation of professional learning. Overall, the prevalent use of qualitative research has led to critique from those interested in its evaluation, which will be discussed later in this literature review.

Teacher Professional Learning Research

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) conducted a longitudinal case study of teachers in four subject departments of two English secondary schools. These researchers used a constructivist approach, by conducting documentary analysis, interviews and observation to construct narratives of individual teachers' learning within communities of practice. The researchers then engaged in an analysis of the culture and practices of each department. The researchers were interested in how some secondary school teachers in England learned at work, and considered ways that learning could be enhanced.

Additionally, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) studied the ways in which teachers learn at work through individual learning, collaborative learning, and planned learning. These three methods of learning were then explored through three dimensions influencing the nature of that learning: the dispositions of the individual teacher, the practices and cultures of the subject departments, and the management and regulatory frameworks at school and national policy level.

Also working within a qualitative framework, Borko (2004) assumed a situated perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in which teacher learning was understood as a process of becoming knowledgeable about teaching through increased participation in the practice of teaching (Borko, 2004). This research considered a multi-focal lens for viewing both the immediacy of the individual learners and remoteness of the context of their social system. In this analysis of research, Borko posed two research questions: "What do we know about professional development programs and their impact on teacher learning? What are important directions and strategies for extending our knowledge?" She considered the key elements that comprise typical professional development: the program, the teachers who are learners in the system, the facilitator, who guides teachers as they construct new knowledge and practices, and the context in which the professional development occurs.

Wood (2007) conducted a case study of four American schools' initiation of Lucent Learning Communities led by school administrators and teacher leaders. The purpose of this case study was to provide insight to construction of the relationship between teachers and knowledge by exploring how teacher learning is conceived and practiced. She questioned, "Should teachers be passive recipients of others' expertise? Should they be researchers, scholars, theorizers?" (p. 281). Day and Leitch (2007) presented a review of research conducted in England by the EPPI (Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice Information). In a review of 13, 479 published papers on teacher professional development, collaborative teacher professional learning was linked to improvements in both teaching and learning. Wilson and Berne (1999) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of professional development projects which address the "what and how" of teacher learning. Their collection of research fell into three broad categories: "(a) opportunities to talk about (and "do") subject matter, (b) opportunities to talk about students and learning, and (c) opportunities to talk about teaching" (p. 177).

Their analysis described two examples within each category to provide insight to the acquisition of teacher knowledge. Their research indicated that professional learning is "oddly discontinuous" (p. 204). While there is a wealth of collaborative professional learning opportunities for teachers to dialogue about their experiences, there is little research to evaluate the professional knowledge gained through those communities. Furthermore, there are even fewer tested and proven theories of how teachers learn.

Teaching and Student Learning

There is still much to be understood about the process of teacher learning and application into practice. There is a lack of evidence to prove exactly how teachers learn from professional learning and how their learning impacts student learning (Borko, 2004; Day & Leitch, 2007; Wilson and Berne, 1999). Teachers welcome the notion of discussing ideas and experiences related to their work and have often embraced the collaborative approach to professional learning. However, more research needs to be conducted to gain comparative information about the implementation, effects and resource requirements of well-defined professional development programs. Such effort requires a longitudinal field of study of many professional development programs to understand the effect of diverse settings, the impact on teacher and student learning, and the policies and resources that enhance implementation (Borko, 2004).

Clark and Hollingsworth (2002) asserted professional development and teacher change have most often been directly linked with externally planned programs focused on "change as growth or learning" (p. 948). Previously, teacher professional development assumed a deficit model in which limited workshops targeted the mastery of prescribed techniques and skills. However, this type of professional learning received much criticism from researchers for its inability to lead to professional growth or change. Guskey (1986) stipulated that in order to realize the benefit of teacher development

programs, there must be a change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes. "Significant changes in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers is contingent on their gaining evidence of change in the learning outcomes of their students" (Guskey, 1986, p. 7). Therefore, evidence of student improvement gained by changed actions of teachers is a prerequisite to significant change in teacher's beliefs and attitudes. Guskey maintained that efforts to improve education must begin by recognizing teachers' knowledge of teaching and provide support for the implementation of new programming.

Professional development programming for teachers has now shifted "from an earlier conception of change as something that is done to teachers [passive participants] to change as a complex process that involves learning" (Clark & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 948). In this manner, "the key shift is one of agency: from programs that change teachers to teachers as active learners shaping their professional growth through reflective participation in professional development programs and in practice" (p. 948). Teacher learning should "not be bound and *delivered* but rather *activated* [italics in original]" (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 194). Providing teachers a new curriculum, for example, is not enough to effect change in teacher teaching and therefore student learning. By helping teachers understand their newly constructed knowledge, change in teaching and learning occurs.

Individual and Collaborative Learning

The shift in the conceptualization of professional development and learning for teachers reflects the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) who theorized that learning takes place through participation in *communities of practice* – in workplaces as living social communities. In this conceptualization of teacher professional learning, there is an emphasis on "the relational character of knowledge and learning, and . . . the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved" (p. 33).

Learning must be well situated within the social world of the participants in a community of practice, aiming for full participation for situated learning in authentic contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The notion of *communities of practice* places teacher knowledge and, therefore, learning as situated within the teacher's own experience. By engaging in collaboration with colleagues, problem-solving related to contextual issues, and reflection on one's own situation, teacher professional learning engages teachers as active agents in their professional growth. Current educational policies governing school improvement in both Canada and the England have placed quality teaching as key processes in school improvement. In this context, professional learning for teachers through communities of practice has been formalized as a key process in educational reform (Reynolds, 2007; Sackney, 2007); teaching becomes a learning profession and schools become learning organizations.

In Fullan's (1995) critique of site-based management initiatives, he asserted that schools were not learning organizations. There was a lack of evidence to indicate that reform addressed teacher collaboration, pedagogy or student learning. Fullan theorized that a *radical reculturing* of schools was needed to create learning organizations, which placed teachers as leaders for continuous learning and experts in the process of change. In this model, teachers are placed as key agents of change in professional development.

However, Senge (1990) theorized, "organizations learn only through individuals who learn" (p. 139). As defined by the notion of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), teachers' knowledge of their practice is situated within their experience of teaching and can be further understood through the community. In schools, the communities may take the form of networks of teachers within departments, school subject areas or even between schools. However, the overall goal remains the same: teachers engage in professional learning in collaboration with other teachers to reflect and construct their own knowledge of how to improve practice.

Teachers participating in communities of learning construct their knowledge in collaboration, placing them as both learners and knowers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). In this manner, teachers begin to self-identify as primary agents for changes in teaching and learning by "systemically inquiring into practices, consulting outside expertise, reflecting on what they had learned from experience, and engaging in searching conversations with one another" (Wood, 2007, p. 290). Similarly, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) asserted there was added depth to the learning of teachers in the departments that engaged in collaborative practice. "At its best, learning was ongoing whenever the teachers were together, through discussion, consultation and sharing of materials and ideas" (p. 119). According to Day and Leitch (2007), the collaborative learning resulted in "greater teacher confidence, commitment to changing practice and willingness to try new things, demonstrable enhancement of student motivation, and improvements in performance" (p. 714).

Additionally, it is important not to overlook the significance of individual learning. As individuals, teachers possess knowledge, understanding and skills that impact their future learning. The construction of knowledge is contextual to individual disposition. "The dispositions of individual teachers contribute to the co-production and reproduction of the departmental cultures where they work" (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005, p. 119). By combining both perspectives of learning, those of social and workplace participation and those of learning as personal construction, we work towards more effective ways of understanding and improving teacher learning (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005).

Teacher learning is highly contextual and current studies into the effectiveness of teacher learning fail to recognize the contextual nature of teacher learning (Guskey, 1994). The notion of transposing success from one collaborative community of teacher learners to another does not predict success. Teacher learning must be structured to

acknowledge the subject-specific knowledge required for individual departments, recognize disciplinary differences in professional learning and accept that different teachers will respond differently to the same circumstances (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005; Wilson & Berne, 1999). For example, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) identified how different departments in their study structured their community to meet its own needs, either for tighter links within the department or for tighter links with the external community (ie. other departments in the school or with other schools). Therefore, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) advocated the use of *fields* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) rather than *communities of practice*. "All human existence relates to the fields that people occupy. It is inconceivable to think of a person as not in a field" (p. 29). The notion of fields acknowledges the synergy between members and the uncomfortable equilibrium between them, explaining the effectiveness of their collaborative working existence. It provides a more succinct connection between the relation of social membership and social relations both within and without the immediacy of a department, and eliminates the narrow focus of a department community.

Teacher Knowledge

Identifying what constitutes meaningful teacher knowledge is problematic. Wilson and Berne (1999) recommended that the "what" of teacher learning is currently not addressed within research and needs to be "identified, conceptualized and assessed" (p. 203) to provide a comprehensive view of the knowledge required for teachers to enable effective change to their practice. Furthermore, participating in collaborative practice requires teachers to access their tacit knowledge; that is, knowledge which is gained by doing. Schön (1995) discussed tacit knowledge as "implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing" (p. 29). This requires "systemically inquiring into practices, consulting outside expertise, reflecting on what

they had learned from experience, and engaging in searching conversations with one another" (Wood, 2007, p. 290).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) theorized three conceptualizations of teacher professional learning. "Knowledge-for-practice" is based on the assumption that formal knowledge and theory is generated by scholars and researchers to be given to teachers to improve their practice. This concept of professional learning relies on expert professional knowledge about subject matter, educational theories and effective practices for teaching. Formal knowledge is explicit and privileged over conventional knowledge understood through practice. Cochran-Smith and Lytle posited that this particular conceptualization dominates the structure of teacher professional learning. The "knowledge-in-practice" conceptualization of professional learning is understood as teachers' practical knowledge that is "embedded in practice and in teachers' reflections on practice" (p. 250). Within this conceptualization, there is the underlying assumption that professional learning occurs by probing the embedded knowledge of expert teachers to build on teachers' own knowledge through reflection of their own experiences, requiring teachers to access their tacit knowledge. The third conceptualization of teacher professional learning is "knowledge-of-practice", whereby assumptions are made about effective teaching that is based on teacher knowledge generated "when teachers treat their classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time that they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). The concept of "knowledge-of-practice" rests on the premise that teachers are able to generate knowledge within the context of their classroom practice by working within a framework on inquiry as they "construct their work and connect it to larger social, cultural and political issues" (p. 250).

Policy and Practice

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) indicated that the frequent government-led curriculum initiatives commonly experienced by teachers were very influential in their learning. "Where policy affected teacher learning directly, it was based on a crude acquisition model" (p. 120). A lack of time and funding hindered government-led policy being realized at the school level. Also, "the policy approach toward teacher learning presented problems for experienced, successful teachers" (p. 121) who sought active participation in determining their learning. Unless teacher learning can be clearly measured within national level policy, it is not valued by current standards-based accountability measures. In this sense, there is disconnect between authentic involvement by the teacher and policy development at the national level.

Similarly, there is often disconnect between school improvement policy at the systems level and teacher practice at the classroom level (Day & Leitch, 2007). The tenuous links between teacher improvement through their professional learning, staff development, and school improvement are complicated by contextual variables such as the school situation, professional life phase of teachers, school culture, types of professional learning, and leadership (Day & Leitch, 2007). Day and Leitch asserted that evaluations of teacher professional learning effectiveness indicate that there is rarely a connection made between the benefits of learning to the individual teacher and to the school.

However, Day and Leitch (2007) advocated that policy makers ought to structure teacher professional learning without being preoccupied with predicting outcomes. In short, Day and Leitch asserted, " 'effectiveness' is not easy to assess" (p. 714). The researchers recommended that policy makers consider that teachers must have access to a wide range of criteria for effective professional learning. Effectiveness of programming

must consider the purpose of the learning and develop evaluation that explores the relation between the teacher, the pupil and the school.

Finally, in cases where government-led policy was realized at the school level, teachers valued the content and felt that they were able to contribute to the process (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Opportunity for integrating what had been learned into practice was key. This affirms that consistent implementation of policy requires a stronger connection between teacher learning and practice by actively engaging teachers with the content of their learning and the process of informing practice by this learning. There is a lack of evidence to indicate how teachers have engaged critically with their learning. While teacher learning is highly contextual (Guskey, 1994), research into the effect of diverse settings on teacher learning is required (Borko, 2004). School improvement research requires a deeper understanding of the context in which change is situated (Chi-Kin Lee & Williams, 2006; Reynolds, 2001). This research will address these gaps in the literature by exploring to what extent policy context may influence teacher understandings of their learning, particularly since improvements in their teaching quality have been implicated as the key factor in achieving effective schools. An agenda which places teacher quality as a barrier to school improvement indicates politicization of professional learning (Day & Leitch, 2007). Borko (2004) stated that, "professional development leaders must help teachers to establish trust, develop communication norms that enable critical dialogue, and maintain a balance between respecting individual community members and critically analyzing issues in their teaching" (p. 7). To explore issues of teachers' critical engagement with their professional learning, we must first understand how teachers perceive their learning. The complexity of professional learning in organizations is compounded by the political policy structures that have placed high value on its importance in school improvement. While the two contexts of this study both place teacher learning to the forefront of school

improvement, the insights gained for how the learning is perceived by teachers can inform practice in both contexts.

Summary of Teacher Professional Learning Research

Teacher learning models are diverse and represent a discontinuous field of study (Wilson & Berne, 1999). The notion of teacher knowledge is positioned centrally within the literature of teacher professional learning (Guskey, 1986; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004). Three key conceptualizations of teacher knowledge may be understood as "knowledge-for-practice", knowledge-in-practice" and "knowledge-for-practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Teacher knowledge is developed through both collaborative and individual learning (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Teachers interact with those who have particular expertise for teacher learning (Wood, 2007). Teachers participating in communities of learning construct their knowledge in collaboration, placing them as both learners and knowers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005). Teachers engage in professional learning in collaboration with other teachers to reflect and construct their own knowledge of how to improve practice. According to Day and Leitch (2007), collaborative learning resulted in "greater teacher confidence, commitment to changing practice and willingness to try new things, demonstrable enhancement of student motivation, and improvements in performance" (p. 714).

Teachers seek active participation in determining their professional learning (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2005) by engaging with policies to integrate what had been learned into practice. This affirms that consistent implementation of policy requires a stronger connection between teacher learning and practice by actively engaging teachers with the content of their learning and the process of informing practice by this learning.

Guskey (1986) argued that teachers seek involvement in their professional learning,

placing value on evidence of student improvement gained by changed actions of teachers.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to explore understandings and interpretations of teachers with respect to their professional learning in diverse policy contexts. To do so, I employed an interpretivist study where "the aim is to grasp how we come to interpret our own and others' action as meaningful" (Schwandt, 2000, p.192). People interpret their world and form knowledge of their experiences through their interactions. Consequently, they assign meaning to their experiences, through this interaction. Through an interpretivist epistemology, it is possible to "understand how social reality, everyday life, is constituted in conversation and interaction" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192). Interpretivism "considers understanding to be an intellectual process whereby a knower (the inquirer as subject) gains knowledge about an object (the meaning of human action)" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 193-194). An interpretivist lens enables the researcher to form an understanding by researching social reality in a particular way. By using an interpretivist lens to examine how policy contexts influence teachers' conceptualizations of their own professional learning, the ways in which teachers understand their professional learning within their diverse policy contexts provides insight into the complexities of the teacher learning environment.

A comparison of cases was used in this study to search for similarity and variance (Mills, van de Bunt & de Bruijn, 2006) in teachers' understandings of professional learning in two different contexts. Comparative studies are useful in understanding "unique aspects of a particular entity that would be virtually impossible to detect otherwise" (p. 621). Through comparative study, it is possible to see clear emerging themes by contrasting the data from both sites.

Research Design

This study involved a thorough examination of the policy contexts for

professional learning in two contexts to identify what similarities and differences exist in

conceptualizations of teacher professional learning. Additionally, this study considered in

what ways educational policy contexts might influence these conceptualizations. To

understand how teachers experience their learning in each context, it was necessary to

engage in dialogue with teachers about their learning through qualitative methods of

interview and focus groups. I designed the study to use comparative *instrumental case*

studies (Stake, 2000) of two schools, one in Alberta and one in the England, to probe the

teachers' perceptions and views of professional learning within the context of their

environment, based on the interpretivist assumption that is it possible "to interpret our

own and others' action as meaningful (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192).

Policy Analysis

Content analysis (Silverman, 2000) of policy documents within the contexts of

Albertan and British educational settings was used to identify the ways in which teacher

professional learning is represented in each context (Wellington, 2000). I began by

making an analysis of the types of policy instruments (Schneider & Ingram, 1990) related

to teacher professional learning in each context. These instruments included

governmental documents, local school district or educational authority documents, and

school improvement plans in each jurisdiction. The analysis of the documents allowed

me to interpret the purpose of teacher professional learning and how it is characterized

within key documents in each context. Additionally, I interpreted implementation

mechanisms as defined in the policy documents. This analysis helped me to interpret how

meaning is embedded in policy and how a policy document "bring[s] its content close to

the natural setting" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 300).

Site Preparation

Schools for the case study were chosen through convenience sampling. The respondents were teachers who participate in professional learning within the context of their school. Both sites were recommended by professionals who have worked in a consultative role with the schools and who have identified both schools as being concerned with their professional learning. Both sites had school leaders who have expressed teacher professional learning as a priority area in their schools. Both sites were rural schools. The target research participants were teachers and school administrators who work with primary aged children. It was my goal to have approximately 8 to 10 teachers as research participants in each site.

Due care was given to properly prepare the site before I arrived in each school. Free and informed consent (Sarantakos, 2005) was requested and documented from the teachers in each school. I planned to spend time in the classrooms and staff meetings observing the staff interactions during an initial period of the study in each school. This allowed for time for the research participants to become familiar with my presence as a researcher and feel comfortable in sharing their perspectives with me.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the teachers at each school site. The purpose of the interviews was to search for "linguistic constructions that reveal interpretative repertoires used by people to make sense of their lives" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 310). They were in the format of semi-structured interviews, which allowed for the teachers to talk about their experience with their professional learning while allowing me to probe for more detailed responses to ideas that emerge during the interview. Through this interview structure, I was able to closely understand the complexities within the context of each site and to form understandings of policy context that may have

influenced teachers' conceptualizations of professional learning. I planned to allot 30 to 40 minutes per interview. Initial open-ended questions allowed for teachers to express their own opinions/understanding of how teacher learning exists in their professional lives. The structure was flexible, with the interview questions being structured as an initial guide (Sarantakos, 2005). The interviews were conducted with teachers outside of instructional time to query the teachers' experience of professional learning in more depth. The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to probe for more detailed responses to areas that emerged during the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

The semi-structured interview guide was developed by reflecting through the literature on teacher professional learning and school improvement to provide a platform for talking about teachers' own experiences. I began with general questions about teachers, in which I asked them to elaborate on their own current experience of teaching. This provided space to form an inter-personal relationship in which teachers at the beginning of the interview. Similarly, I began with general questions about teacher professional learning, and then probed deeper into how policy might play a role in their understanding.

1. How long have you been teaching? Tell me about your teaching background.

2. Tell me about some professional learning opportunities at your school. How have you grown as a teacher? What kinds of things have you learned about being a teacher?

3. Tell me about a time when you felt a professional learning opportunity was effective or useful to you. Why was it effective?

4. Tell me about a time when you felt a professional learning opportunity was not very effective or useful.

5. When there is a new initiative at the school that involves professional learning for teachers, how is the initiative introduced? Planned? Evaluated?

6. Tell me about some initiatives that are happening nationally (England)/provincially (Alberta) in the last few years?

7. What are you doing with those policies/initiatives at the school level?

8. What is your role as a teacher in these initiatives? How do you feel about your role in this?

9. How would you summarize your professional learning?

Focus Groups

Discussion in focus groups with teachers provided some time for teachers to elaborate on themes that emerged in individual interviews. Focus group discussions provided an opportunity for teachers to engage in a collaborative discussion to identify "changes in the group and its members, as a result of the direction and intensity of the discussion" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 195). During the focus group sessions, teachers were asked to relate their understanding of their professional learning within the context of the *community* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The assumption here is that teacher professional learning is often collaborative. Therefore, in focus group discussion, I attempted to delve into the collaborative perspective of the learning. I planned to allot 60 minutes to each focus group discussion. Due to the size of the teaching staff at each school, only one focus group was conducted at each site with all the participants involved.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, to create a text reflecting the social discourse around teacher professional learning. Through content analysis (Sarantakos, 2005), the transcripts of the interview data were coded for themes and categorized by looking for conceptual patterns (Stake, 2000). Working within an interpretivist framework, I assigned categories from the constructed meanings of the respondents within the context of the research (Sarantakos, 2005). By reading to identify and code recurrent patterns in the content of the text, it was possible to identify similarities and differences of what is being said, identifying linguistic repertoires or "clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech" as the "building blocks used to make constructions or versions of cognitive processes, actions, policies and other phenomena" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 310). One way to understand people's interpretations of their environment/experiences is to use content analysis to "examine the way in which meanings of social phenomena, as they are employed by people to make sense of their lives, are constructed" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 310).

Data Validity and Reliability

Audit checks were gathered in the form of an investigator journal to "examine the processes whereby data were collected and analyzed, and interpretations were made" (Guba, 1981, p. 87). Dependability of the research was addressed through triangulation of research methods, as several teachers at each site participated in both interviews and focus group sessions. Member checks were conducted after interviews to confirm my interpretations of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

The results of this research are not generalizable to other cases. That is, we cannot say that this study could be reproduced with similar findings in every school in Alberta or England. Generalizations are time and context-specific, meaning that the

knowledge gained through this research is related to the context of this research. Findings are an interpretation of the time and place of the research. However, the analysis of the research will provide some insight to how teachers think about their experiences of professional learning, an area that requires further exploration in educational research.

Dependability of the research was addressed through triangulation of research methods, through interview and focus group sessions with multiple teachers in each site. During the interview and focus group session, I conducted member checks by re-phrasing and paraphrasing the participants' responses. Additionally, the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded using audio equipment so that written transcripts were created for participants to read for additional member checks.

This study was delimited to one school in each context. Rather than a broad based study, this research examined teacher conceptualizations of professional learning within each school. Conducting comparative research on this scale allowed the researcher to recognize comparisons between two individual schools by analyzing emerging issues within those two contexts. It was not concerned with making broad, generalizable conclusions, but rather sought to closely understand the complexities within two contexts to form understandings of how teachers' understand their professional learning and how those conceptualizations might be informed by current policy context. I was concerned with constructing knowledge in a particular context, to be able to develop a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and conceptions and then interpret the how the experiences are different or similar among teachers in those contexts, rather than expanding my interpretations to a larger context, such as a school jurisdiction.

The findings are dependent on each context. This study was primarily descriptive. It will be left up to the reader and to future research to draw conclusions about the generalizability of the findings. No study into the validity of teacher perceptions was conducted. In addition, the behaviour of the participants could have been

affected by the presence of the researcher and the perspective of the researcher could have influenced the interpretation of participant behaviours.

Ethics Consideration

Prior approval for this study was received from the University of Alberta Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board (REB). Participation in this research project was voluntary. Participants had the opportunity to choose not to participate at all, or to withdraw from the study at any time at their own free will. Any contributions from non-participants during interviews or focus groups were deleted from the final research findings. Participants were made aware that if they chose to withdraw from the study, all personal information would be returned to them. Throughout the study, participants were advised of any new information that may have a bearing on the decision to continue.

I protected the anonymity of participants and that of the school system. Participants' name did not appear on any information that was shared outside the parameters of data collection. Pseudonyms were used in reference to participants in publications or reports. Each participant had the opportunity to review the final transcript and had the right to request that information that might identify him/her be deleted from the completed report. The research methods employed within this study were not foreseen to cause any degree of discomfort, fatigue, stress and no predictable harm was experienced as a result of participation in this study.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to explore teachers' understandings and interpretations of their professional learning in two different policy contexts. To do so, the proposed interpretivist study enabled me, as researcher, to examine the ways in which teachers understand their professional learning within their diverse policy contexts. An interpretivist lens enabled me to form an understanding of the complexities of the teacher

learning environment and provided some insight into the ways that teacher professional

learning might be influenced by policy.

Chapter Four: Bridle Path Junior School Case Study

Bridle Path Junior School is a primary school located in a rural community in Yorkshire. The school has an enrolment of approximately 190 students aged 7 to 11, predominantly from lower middle class families. There are 10 teaching staff at the school, eight full-time teachers, two part-time teachers and five teaching assistants. The school has a full-time headteacher, with a teaching load of 30 per cent and a deputy headteacher with a teaching load of 80 percent. There is a range of teaching experience among the teaching staff. One teacher has recently completed her Newly Qualified Status (NQT) while the headteacher has been in her post for 11 years at the school, which she came to as an experienced teacher. The deputy headteacher has been at this school for 10 years. Several of the staff members did their teaching placements in the school as training teachers, receiving teaching contracts in the school after their placements were finished.

Initial Meeting with Teaching Staff

I met with the teaching staff as a whole on the first day I was at the school during a staff meeting scheduled after class time, providing an opportunity for me to personally explain the purposes of my study and the teachers' involvement as participants. Additionally, this arrangement provided time for the teachers to ask questions that they had about the study. A few teachers asked questions pertaining to logistics, such as how long the interview would take and if they needed to bring documents and evidence to the interviews. I explained that this study was about talking to teachers to try to understand how they think about their own CPD. It was not a study to evaluate the effectiveness of CPD opportunities or to check up on teacher performance around their own professional development so they were not required to bring any documents with them to the interview. I did, however, encourage them to bring any items that they felt were really meaningful to understanding their own professional development, if they had any. One

teacher brought her materials from the National College of School Leadership program, *Leading from the Middle*, to her interview. While she referenced the materials a few times, she did not rely on them to explain her own understandings and later said that she brought them as an example for me to see.

I spent the first week in the school, attending for half days to research the school level documents pertaining to CPD. The headteacher provided space in her office for me to work and was very open to sharing the documents related to professional development. I was also able to spend a few hours, during the first week, meeting in ad hoc intervals with the headteacher to get more information about particular programs for CPD or to clarify particulars about how the programs related to the school development plan or the Local Authority plans for CPD. The headteacher plays a leadership role around CPD in the school and is responsible for planning CPD as part of the school development plan. She works closely with the deputy headteacher to plan the school CPD. Meeting with the headteacher was an extremely beneficial time for me to be able to engage with the school development plan to understand how CPD was positioned within the school context.

The interviews were scheduled for 45 minute blocks during the following week. Each teacher was able to choose the time that they preferred to meet for the interview. Some interviews were planned during the teachers' preparation time, as each teacher receives a half-day of planning and preparation time each week. Other teachers preferred to meet while their students were in whole school assemblies or before or after school. Each interview was conducted in a confidential room setting, and the teachers were provided with a list of questions that we might talk about, as I explained that this was a semi-structured interview in which we will begin with some basic questions but we may spend more or less time on a question as the conversation continued.

After each interview, I wrote in my Researcher's Journal about the main ideas that emerged from the interview. I often wrote down some of my emerging thoughts

about how teachers understood their professional learning, relating it to what others might have said in other interviews. Also, I wrote about my own thoughts about the research process and my role as a researcher. As this was my first time to conduct interviews, I felt my own skills improving with each interview session.

Lastly, a focus group session was conducted on the Tuesday of the week of interviews, during the weekly staff meeting time. The focus group session was set in the staff room, with all the teachers sitting on couches in a circular pattern around the room. The session began after a short staff meeting, where the headteacher provided some information about upcoming events planned in the school.

Policy Context for Professional Development

The *Education (School Teacher Performance Management) Regulations* (DfES, 2006a) provide directives for school governing bodies to develop of Performance Management Policy for school governing bodies. Governing bodies and headteachers are mandated to devise a performance management plan for the school in which "the performance of every teacher at the school shall be managed and reviewed on an annual basis" (p. 6). In this document, CPD is characterized as being tied to the School Improvement Plan. This authority document also determines that teachers will devise their training and development needs and plans for addressing those needs in a way that is relevant to the School Improvement Plan. Bridle Path Junior School's Improvement Plan features *staff continued professional development* as one the key fey foci areas, whereby Performance Management is structured for staff members to identify professional targets for working with the *Open Futures Project,* the Virtual Learning Environment, and projects in Literacy, which will be described later in the study.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) prioritizes excellence in teaching (DfES, 2003a) by positioning CPD as the main tool to achieve the aims of the

strategy. In this document, there is focus on building teachers' own skills through professional dialogue to improve standards by addressing children's learning needs. Teachers are encouraged to apply the principles of good teaching and learning to their teaching practice. There is particular focus on teachers' identifying their own needs for improvement with the ultimate aim of the achievement of high standards in all curricular areas.

School governing bodies are instructed through *The Education (School Teacher Performance Management) Regulations* (DfES, 2006a) to develop a policy that links school teacher performance management to school improvement, school self-evaluation (SEF) and school development planning. In this way, teacher professional development is characterized as a process for building teacher-driven capacity that is congruent with school improvement plans. The *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES, 2003a) document recommends a leadership programme for headteachers and members of the school leadership team to support others in curriculum planning, enrichment, and improvement of learning and teachers. Headteacher Consultant Leaders are appointed to guide headteacher professional development in other schools in the Local Authority.

Networks of collaboration are used to spread good practice among schools with a team approach to building teachers' capacity (DfES, 2003a). Networks of schools are supported within government policies and funding is available to schools that work in networks, placing value on collaborative teacher learning. Within these networked schools, collaborative learning is increasingly valued as beneficial in education (Wilding & Blackford, 2006). Bridle Path Junior School is part of a *Creativity Network* of five schools that plans CDP for both headteachers and for teaching staff. The network arranges a variety of training/INSET (In-School Education and Training) initiatives, designed for either whole school learning, individual teacher learning within the network, or learning which is open to other school outside the network for a fee.

Subject-specialism is highlighted as a means for "informed professionalism", with a focus on developing the skills of teachers in the areas of literacy, numeracy and ICT. The *Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics* (DfES, 2006b) was introduced to help with customized planning, teaching and assessment of literacy and mathematics. The Framework is organized into 12 strands for literacy and numeracy, stressing the ability of professional dialogue between the Local Authority and schools to identify priorities for children's needs, address weaknesses and revise Framework implementation. There is an explicit focus on raising achievement in schools. Additionally, Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) develop teachers' abilities in the classroom setting, where a specially trained teacher devotes 20 per cent of their teaching assignment in the developing the capacity of other teachers in the local network (DfES, 2003a). This may include involve addressing a particular curriculum focus in the development of schemes of work, team-teaching, and observing lessons.

With the introduction of the *Primary Framework on Literacy and Numeracy* (DfES, 2006b), learning policy tools were also introduced to help headteachers and senior leadership teams inform expertly-led professional learning programmes aimed at developing skills and professional knowledge of teachers. Assessment for Learning was introduced as a mechanism to improve pupil learning. In documents such as *Leading Improvement Using the Primary Framework* (DfES, 2007), school leaders are guided for working within the school improvement cycle to devise professional learning for teachers. The cycle should focus on raising expectations, which will lead to school improvement. Implicit in this process is that notion that teachers share what works well in their own practice. Within these types of learning documents, leaders are shown how to engage staff school improvement, as a learning community, to develop learning-focused collaboration and strong, professional relationships. In this way, professional learning of

teachers is characterized as collaborative, classroom-centred and school-based in order to ensure learning for children.

Professional Learning at Bridle Path Junior School

At Bridle Path Junior School, the school improvement plan stipulates "staff learn new skills and share skills with one another for the good of the school and the pupils in it" (Bridle Path Junior School staff development plan). As previously mentioned, Bridle Path Junior School is part of a *Creativity Network* consisting of five schools in the Local Authority (LA). The headteachers of the networked schools meet formally at least once a half-term to plan CPD for their teachers and have chosen to focus on how creativity is addressed through the curriculum. The headteacher at this school conferred that the headteachers met more often on an informal basis. At Bridle Path Junior School, the headteacher identified that while the school's standardized achievement test (SATs) scores are very good, the area needing improvement is the children's writing. To address this, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have prioritized developing instruction within the confines of the curriculum to addresses creativity in children's writing.

The headteacher has stated that one main way of achieving this goal is through participation in the *Open Futures Project*. The *Open Futures Project* is a skills-based learning programme that helps young children develop specific, practical and personal skills. It provides teachers with alternative ways of developing all subjects within the National Curriculum with an increased emphasis on first hand experiences and learning by doing. This project aims to support schools in delivering the five key outcomes of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b): be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well being. The *Open Futures* programme proposes to provide teachers with practical, unique and effective approaches to delivering such a skills-based curriculum. There are four strands to the project: *Grow It, Cook It,*

Ask It and Film It. At Bridle Path Junior School, the headteacher decided that each of the strands would be covered in each of the year groups, with the understanding that the progress made in each strand could continue up to the next year group as the children advance through the school. As each strand was introduced in the school, the teachers in each year group received training through INSET, addressing the planning and managing skills for teaching a skills-based curriculum plus practical training from experts in the community. For example, the teachers working with the *Grow It* strand worked with experts from the Royal Horticultural Society to gain specific skills needed to grow vegetables. Alternatively, those teachers working with the *Ask It* strand received training from *Philosophy For Children* (P4C) consultants.

Bridle Path Junior School has also used the Creativity Network to access funding for training teachers on the *Mantle of the Expert*, a drama convention through which students take on the 'point of view' of people with expertise of some kind. The students and the teacher engage in a process of inquiry where they work together to create fictional responses to a theme of learning in the classroom. For example, in the Year 4 classroom, the teachers have created an inquiry around their themed topic of the Egyptians. The students work as 'experts' within a fictional setting focused on the inquiry. The aim is for the teacher to become a 'colleague', adopting a functional role alongside the children. Teachers are encouraged to balance the leading of the work with working as a colleague with the students in the drama. The method discourages teachers from directing the learning, telling the children what to do and how to do it and actively encourages children to communicate, collaborate and make decisions about what they need to do and how and when they should undertake tasks which are pertinent to the inquiry. The teachers at Bridle Path Junior School received an INSET day of training for using *Mantle of the Expert* in their classroom teaching in subject areas such as history and geography. Subsequently, a few teachers received training with a consultant

specializing on *Mantle of the Expert* in their classrooms. They worked directly in their classroom teaching by observing the way she led inquiries and also having the consultant observe their teaching to make recommendations for improving their practice.

The school has also recently been developing a *Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)*. The VLE is an interactive learning platform that allows learners and staff to access a wide variety of learning materials through specially designed online systems. Resources such as notes and handouts, practice tests, homework and curriculum related weblinks are found on the Bridle Path Junior School VLE. The coordinator for ICT (Information and Communications Technology) became interested in the VLE while there was opportunity for schools to sign up to be pilot sites for VLE development within the LA. She spoke to the headteacher about applying for pilot site designation and their application was successful. Through this pilot site designation, the ICT coordinator at Bridle Path Junior School received training to develop the VLE and to subsequently be able to train the teachers in the school to work with the learning platform. INSET days were organized by the ICT coordinator to work with teachers, based on her own training and experience working with the VLE. VLE's are now mandatory requirements in each school by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF).

Two teachers in the school have attended a leadership programme through the National College for School Leadership. The *Leading from the Middle* programme is a 10-month professional development programme for middle leaders. Two teachers from Bridle Path Junior School enrolled in the programme, supported by a leadership coach from their school. The program aims to

> *increase middle leaders' ability to lead innovation and change, deepen knowledge and understanding of their role in leading learning and teaching, build their self-confidence and competence as team leaders, show how effective management of people and resources can build capacity, encourages collaborative learning and working across the school. (National College for School Leadership, 2009, p. 8)*

The program involved online coursework, face-to-face activities with other middle leaders in the program, and coaching within the school context.

Other CPD opportunities are available to staff through the Local Authority *Continuing Professional Development Programme*. The courses are organized around priorities through *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b)*,* government initiatives, locally-determined priorities, and OfSTED reports. Teachers may submit requests to attend courses through their headteachers. The courses are mostly INSET courses offered by consultants in their area of expertise at the Local Authority offices, featuring teacher training in curricular areas or in initiatives undertaken by the authority.

The school improvement plan indicates that teachers are to address the *Open Futures*, VLE and Literacy initiatives in the school in their Performance Management goals. Teachers complete a Performance Management plan each year, to be reviewed and approved by the school headteacher, in which professional goals for CPD are set each year.

Themes Emerging from the Research

The following themes have emerged from the data collected in the interview and focus group sessions.

Student Learning

In discussing new initiatives that are introduced to the school, the teachers often discussed how the school's standards determined their CPD. The term *standards* was used by the teachers to refer to the children's level of achievement and learning. In asking why certain initiatives were addressed within the context of this school, the teachers discussed the *standards* as determining factors. This was evident in the ways that the teachers spoke about

> *The Maths [Framework], we're not doing it because it's, I think we*
> *believe that the results we get out of the children at the end of KS2 two,*

you don't have to do it unless, whereas Literacy we felt the need to
address that because the results weren't as consistent, but I think for the
Numeracy if it works we'll leave it for now. (Teacher 1, interview,
November 28, 2008, p. 13)

Similarly, Teacher 4 discussed how the teachers were working together to

"develop questions to investigate their own inquiry of how the *Mantle of the Expert*

impacts on the standards in Literacy" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 1). Teacher 7 was

particularly candid about the role of standards in determining CPD initiatives. "It's about

standards. Always standards. That's one of the biggest priorities" (Interview, December

3, 2008, p. 9).

In discussing what constituted effective CPD, it was clear that the teachers

conceptualized their own professional learning in relation to the way the children

achieved high standards, that is, the children's learning. Teacher 2 spoke about effective

CPD addressing "what I needed to teach the children. But I think particularly it focused

on what skills the children needed to learn" (Interview, December 1, p. 3). Later, she

stated that effective CPD "changed the way I thought about teaching and assessing

children, the way I responded to children in lessons" (p. 4).

When asked in what ways the children influenced her CPD, Teacher 4 stated,

"[They] will have to be, won't [they]? Because we'll have to teach in a different way"

(Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 6). Conversely, ineffectual CPD was characterized as

being not for the benefit of the children.

Similarly, Teacher 1 spoke about how the *Open Futures Project* offered effective

CPD for herself because "it's about the children" (Interview, November 28, 2008, p. 12).

With the same understanding of the relationship of CPD to the children, Teacher 1

addressed CDP as ineffectual when "I don't think the core of it is the children" (p. 12).

Echoing this sentiment, Teacher 4 stipulated that "in other things that I've done, other

things have been [ineffectual] in the past, haven't been much about the children"

(Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 5).

Teacher 7 spoke a lot about the relationship between standards, the children's

learning and CPD. She addressed the ways that the new framework in Literacy relates to

the standards for learning, even though the school has achieved high standards in Literacy

in the past. "The results are very, very good, but we still feel there's things we want to

change about the way in which we teach and the way in which the children learn,

particularly in Literacy" (Interview, December 3, 2008, p. 2). In summary, she said,

"everything has an impact on the children, or I wouldn't do it" (p. 5). When I questioned

how teacher professional development was related to the children, her response indicated

a clear connection.

> *They're completely inter-related. Everything we do, we do because we*
> *want to have an impact somehow on the way in which we work with the*
> *children. The whole of the school development plan is based on things*
> *that will impact on the children. (p. 6)*

Finally, in addressing CPD evaluation, the teachers referred again to the

standards achieved by the children's learning. In response to how we know if CPD is

working, Teacher 2 reflected that "it meant that the children had deeper learning"

(Interview, December 1, 2008, p. 2). Other teachers also reflected this understanding of

evaluating CPD against children's learning.

> *I suppose…it's if our results get better. And I think it's more than that.*
> *It's as well, if you look at the children of less ability. If it impacts on*
> *them, on their learning, then you know you're getting something right.*
> *(Teacher 6, interview, December 2, 2008, p. 5)*

Likewise, Teacher 8 thought CPD was effective when "it seemed to improve on

what they could write at the end of it" (Interview, December 3, 2008, p. 2). However, she

extended the success beyond academic achievement, in acknowledging the enjoyment of

children's learning. She confided that she had spent a lot of time to develop her skills in

teaching the *Mantle of the Expert*. In reflection, she discussed how this particular CPD

initiative was especially meaningful for her because of "the enjoyment that you could see that the kids were getting from it. You know, you could tell that they were really enjoying what they were doing" (p. 3).

Skill Development

When the teachers spoke about their CPD, they often used the word "skills" to describe the "what" aspect of their learning. The notion of skill development was used particularly to describe the professional learning structured as INSET training at the school or opportunities offered through the Local Authority. An example of this is how Teacher 2 used the term in several ways, throughout the interview when she described some CPD opportunities available to her. In one instance, describing a workshop offered by the LA, she said, "two people could go on the training, so we worked on it together and developed our own skills" (Interview, December 1, 2008, p. 2). Later, describing a CPD opportunity offered through a local university, she explained that this training, "really developed our skills, our understanding [of the subject area]" (p. 2). Teacher 6 reflected this same sort of usage of the term "skills" when she described subject coordinator meetings by describing their purpose, "then you start to build your skills" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 3). Similarly, when Teacher 1 described a particular professional development opportunity coordinated externally to the school, she said it helped her because, "I feel like I've now got more skills…yeah a lot more skills" (Interview, November 28, 2009, p. 3).

When asked to provide more explanation about what they meant by the term "skills", teachers often spoke about specific teaching skills required to teach in their subject area of responsibility or to deliver the curriculum objectives in the year group level they were teaching. Teacher 2 was very clear on how she understood "skills" in term of her own professional development.

I mean, my skills in terms of what I needed to teach the children. But I
think particularly it focused on what skills the children needed to learn. I
mean obviously you have to understand, you know, the information, [so
that] the best learning takes place. (Interview, December 1, 2008, p. 3)

In describing skills development on a particular training session, Teacher 3

reflected that she developed "the questioning skills, certainly" (Interview, December 2,

2008, p. 4). Teacher 6 spoke pointedly about the skills she developed at a numeracy

training session, where she learned "a lot of different strategies to use and calculations

such a using number lines, partitioning numbers more, allowing the children to develop

the reasoning behind the calculations", summing up the skill development as "it's

practical skills like that" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 3). In the same way, Teacher 8

described that she hoped her training for the *Open Futures Project* would provide her

with the skills needed to teach her strand of the project.

[I expect they'll explain] what they recommend you have [to know] to
actually manage it. Is it going to be run in small groups, is it meant for
classes of children run[ning] it or is it a small group activity?....I mean
obviously you've got your own common sense, but guidelines that will
actually, which I presume, you will receive guidelines of what's going to
be suitable to use. (Interview, December 3, 2008, p. 8)

However, sometimes, teachers also referred to the reflection skills required in

their practice. In speaking about CPD courses that Teacher 8 attends for her subject

coordinator role, she referred to the reflection skills that were developed.

Just sometimes even areas just to think about and make you step back
and think, 'Well why am I doing that? Should I be doing this?' Just
giving you those opportunities to think and to try and put that into
practice, put that into teaching, just to make you better really and try and
improve all the time. (Interview, December 3, 2008, p. 9)

Other teachers spoke about leadership skills that were developed. Teacher 5 spent

some time discussing a long term CPD course that she attended over the course of a year.

She explained that this course was not so useful in terms of her teaching practice but that

it did develop leadership and coaching skills. She was interested in

> *Looking at how the different aspects of a team and…how to deal with people differently. How to cope with anybody that's conflict. How to drive the school forward really with your idea and how to cope with people who don't want to do it. (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 4)*

Also, she described the professional coaching skills for working with other teachers that were developed through this course, as well. She was surprised that she enjoyed this part of the development but felt that it was useful because it "gives you the structure for how to talk to somebody and to coach them" (p. 4).

Finally, during the Focus Group Session, the teachers explained that when they were involved in working with others from outside the school, with the use of specialists who worked with teachers either on courses or within the context of the school, the teachers were able to develop their confidence at being able to try new techniques or to implement the new literacy and numeracy frameworks. In gaining skills to teach, they developed their confidence to be able to address new initiatives.

Teaching Others/Training

Teachers identified training others as a key part of professional learning. The teachers often spoke about developing their own skills to be able to demonstrate/share those skills with others. Their professional learning was often about the ways that they would receive training on a particular skill to teach a topic area, develop that skill within their own practice in the classroom, and when they felt confident in their own skill level, they would take on the role of sharing the information or being able to train others in their school with that skill. Teacher 2 summed up this process in her interview.

> *So I suggested to my [teaching] partner that we trial it and then move on from there. And then we'll feed it to the staff and discuss, say how it works, ask for ideas and then on from there. Sometimes it helps if somebody's had a go first, like we had the staff meeting you heard last week….[Other teachers] had been to some training and they fed back and that it's a case of well, how can we put that in practice? (Interview, December 1, 2008, p.6)*

Later, I asked her about her role as a subject coordinator, she echoed,

It doesn't just stay with me, within my classroom. It makes sure that
training I have has a whole school impact....As a [subject] coordinator,
the training I got is important. It doesn't just impact on me but it impacts
on others. And that I can provide the support for colleagues...that they
have some development opportunities. (p. 9)

Teacher 5 was very clear on the role of teacher training others. She often spoke about learning special skills needed for her practice and then developing her own expertise so that that she could train the other teachers. "I suppose my role was to show them how it could be formalized and how we needed to achieve these levels. And to show them, practice them….We need to give them a bit more confidence, a bit more training" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 5). Finally, when asked what her role was in CPD, she responded, "I am the trainer, I suppose. I was the trainer" (Teacher 5, interview, December 2, 2008, p. 5).

The time set aside for CPD time during the staff meetings seemed to be a central time for staff to share information. Sometimes the headteacher or deputy headteacher would share information about upcoming initiatives from the Local Authority. Teacher 4 stated, "[The headteacher] usually gives us the information at staff meeting, all together. She will talk it through and tell us what's happening" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p.6). Other times, staff meetings were dedicated to discussing CPD or for providing training. Again, Teacher 4 was clear that staff meeting time was used effectively in this way. "There would always be time given for staff training. INSET times are taken up. [The headteacher's] very good at making sure there's time for us to know what's going on" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 6).

Teacher 6 clearly saw the staff meeting time as being very effective for INSET. She has been working on developing some strategies to implement new curriculum into her own classroom teaching practice. As a subject coordinator, she went on training through the Local Authority to learn about developments in her subject area responsibility. She has then "come back to school to initially feed back what I learned or

what I found out at the meeting" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 7). Then she has taken ideas from that training, for example, suggested methods of teaching, and trialled them in her own practice, with the goal of being able to share what works with the other teachers in her school.

> We'll have staff meeting time and I'll introduce [the new suggested methods of teaching] to the rest of the staff. And suggest that they do it in small chunks....And then I can say from my experience, 'I've done [it like] this' because I've been through it. (pp.8-9)

She was clear that this was not a one-way process, though. She spoke of the training working in cyclical way. "Then we'll get feedback from other teachers and say, 'Well it didn't work but we could try this. Or this did work'" (Teacher 6, interview, December 2, 2008, p. 8). Teacher 8 also saw the benefit of being able to apply the training in ways that worked within the context of the school. "So in terms of teaching development, teachers can, well, different year groups access the training and then bring that back into the school and think about some areas and have people working alongside them in school as well" (Interview, December 3, 2008, p. 7). In this way, CPD as training was continuous; the teacher was initially trained but also worked at making sure that training could be applied within the school in a way that worked for all teachers.

Working with Other Teachers

The teachers spoke about the importance of professional relationships in working with others during CPD. They expressed the idea that their own professional learning was embedded in their relationships with others.

Part of CPD was teachers having the professional time to talk with others to develop their understanding of their own practice. Referring to opportunities beyond the context of the local school, many teachers spoke about the value of being able to work with other teachers in the Local Authority to develop understandings of how to implement new initiatives. Teacher 2 said,

I think one of the main things is when you get to talk to other[s] and find out what is going on at their school, discuss the issues….It gives you a good sounding board because again you can be become quite insular in your own school and [it's useful] just to hear about other people's experiences. You can reflect on your role and think about how can I learn from that and what can we take … and use to develop our practice. (Interview, December 1, 2008, p. 4)

Teacher 2 clearly conceptualized her own professional development in relation to working with others in the Local Authority as a way to improve her own practice.

However, other teachers valued developing this relationship within the context of their school. Sometimes, the teachers spoke of the way that they would observe other teachers in practice. Having the opportunity to observe others teach was both important to the teachers and was supported by the headteacher. Teacher 8 valued "being able to watch somebody and think, 'Well, I might be able to try a bit of that'" (Interview, December 3, 2008, p. 4). Later, when discussing how the different strands of the *Open Futures Project* are being developed in the school, she noted that this was an opportunity "to go watch other people doing things…to learn from other people as well they way that they do things….and then learn those sort of ways to teach that and then to be able to incorporate that into our teaching" (p. 4). However, she indicated that impetus for observations may arise when teachers recognized an area where they needed to improve. "I think we rely on one another's judgement and if something was working for one person, but not for another, well why is it not working for that person. Well, you know, is somebody doing it in a better way?" (p. 6). Conversations like this between teachers often led to observations of each other teachers' practice.

The relationship of working with others was also developed through working together towards meeting curricular goals within the Local Authority. Even though the school is single form entry (one classroom of each year group level), the teachers would work together to discuss planning and teaching to meet the curricular objectives. Subject leader teachers spoke about how they worked with other teachers to set targets for the

school in achieving particular goals supported by the Local Authority. Teacher 5 talked

about her role in helping the staff to work towards a goal in her particular subject of

responsibility. She was concerned about "involving the staff so that they've got an

understanding of what their part might be in leading us" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p.

5). She went on to describe how the teachers worked together by, "looking at how we

taught [this subject] and the lesson planning and the schemes of work" (p. 5). Similarly,

Teacher 6 discussed the ways that

> *The Literacy coordinator planned what to do and then worked alongside*
> *us so that we could make sure that we could follow the plan if it's what*
> *we thought was appropriate. And then, our suggestions would be to see if*
> *it worked. (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 8).*

In the same way, Teacher 8 discussed the ways that she worked with the staff to

plan a whole school project in her area of subject responsibility. She saw the importance

of all the teachers working towards achieving this goal with the children in their classes,

and her relationship with them was to support them through the project to be able to make

the goal happen in their own classroom. Importantly, all of these subject leaders saw

themselves as working with the other teachers to achieve significant goals in their subject

area that would ensure an achievement of standards in the school. The ability for teachers

to achieve certain goals and raising school standards was understood by teachers as being

significantly situated within their relationships with others.

Ownership

Many of the teachers spoke about their own role in deciding about their CPD.

When discussing CPD opportunities that were effective or ineffective for them, many

teachers stated that they were deliberative in their choices for their own professional

growth. Teacher 2 was very clear in her assertion that "I have selected the opportunities

very carefully" (Interview, December 1, p. 5). Similarly, Teacher 4 stated, "I've been

fairly selective in what I do" (Teacher 4, interview, December 2, p. 8).

The importance of their ownership of CPD seemed present in many different contexts. In working with expert professionals on school initiatives, teachers felt that they should be able to take things that were important for their own development to use in their classrooms. Many teachers reflected that they were often asked by the headteacher if they would like to attend a certain training program or certain initiatives that were designated to their year level of teaching. While this resulted in CPD that was initiated by school administration, many teachers suggested that they would make decisions about how the learning in those sessions could be used in their own classrooms. Teacher 8 discussed ways in which she would take ideas from one training session and use them within other curricular areas of her teaching. Teacher 4 was explicit in saying, "So I went along for the class but [the headteacher] also said that if any point I didn't want to go along with it, I could always say no" (Interview, December 2, 2008, p. 8). In reference to a particular Local Authority training session, Teacher 2 expressed her concern that the opportunity was not particularly effective at meeting her needs as a teacher. Her concern was that teachers should be able to identify their own priorities stating, "I think that they don't get a chance to say as an individual, as a school, exactly what was needed" (Interview, December 1, 2008, p. 5). When referring to opportunities where teachers have chosen their own CPD activities, such as the *Leading from the Middle* course, there was an understanding that teachers would "choose an area that could be improved [for themselves]" (Teacher 5, interview, December 2, 2008, p. 3). The importance for teachers to own their professional growth was summarized by Teacher 1, "I think…they should lead their own teaching like we're expecting children to lead their own learning. I mean teachers should be able to lead their own, you know, development" (Interview, November 28, 2008, p. 16).

Summary

The interviewed teachers in this study often discussed how the standards, that is, the children's level of achievement and learning, determined their CPD. The teachers understood that standards served as the drive behind both school improvement and their own CPD. There was a tight relationship between the student learning and the CPD for the teachers. In particular, the ways in which CPD was evaluated was largely determined by student outcomes. In this context, student learning and meaningful teacher CPD cannot be separated.

In order to achieve the desired standards, teachers referred to the skills they would need to teach to address the complexities of student outcomes and standards. The characteristic of skill development positions teachers as potential specialists or experts within this context and, certainly, teachers' roles are described this way in current school improvement policies.

However, teachers saw themselves more as collaborators. Teachers understood that their CPD is profoundly situated within collaborative dialogue with other teachers, considering their own professional learning as being embedded in their relationships with others. At times this understanding emerged as the notion of a highly skilled, expert teacher working with others in a training capacity. At other times, there was an understanding that CPD involved a collaborative relationship of working together to develop capacity for particular skills required to achieve improved student achievement. However, regardless of the method, teachers understood their learning as deeply embedded in collaborative practice.

Chapter Five: Valleyview School Case Study

Valleyview School is a public Kindergarten to Grade 12 school in mid-eastern

Alberta, in a rural community with an approximate population of 1100 people.

Valleyview School staff consists of 18 teaching staff plus a principal and vice-principal

with an enrolment of 289 students. There is one class for each of the elementary grades.

For this case study, I interviewed eight of the teachers who taught in the elementary part

of the school. Two of the teachers worked part-time contracts while the others taught full-

time, in a variety of grade level allocated positions. Some of the interviewed teachers also

taught some subjects in the middle school level. One of the interviewed teachers is the

school's Professional Development (PD) Representative for the school division PD

Committee, which she also chairs, and works as the coordinator of for PD activities in the

school.

Initial Meeting with the Teachers

As in the previous site, I worked quite closely with one staff member to organize

the site visits. In this case, the PD Coordinator held a significant role in planning PD for

teachers at the school and in the division. In this way, there were similarities in the roles

of the headteacher at Bridle Path and the PD Coordinator at Valleyview School. I spent

four consecutive Mondays at Valleyview School but was in touch with the PD

Coordinator at the school for several weeks before the visit. I spent the first morning at

the school meeting with the PD Coordinator and researching the school division and

school level documents. The morning session was particularly useful for me to question

any uncertainties as I developed my understanding about the policy texts related to PD.

I felt comfortable working with the PD Coordinator. She was very open to

working with a researcher from the university, as she has recently completed graduate

studies. She was very enthusiastic in talking about PD at the school and shared her

perspectives of what was happening in the school and at the school division level. Since she was the chair of the school division PD Committee, she was also able to place some of the PD opportunities at the school in context of the larger division for me. Again, this was very helpful for me in forming an understanding of how teachers engaged with PD at the school.

I met with the whole staff at the first recess that day, and was introduced by the PD Coordinator. She explained that I was at the school to work on a research project in the elementary section of the school. I briefly explained the purposes of the study, explaining that the goal of the interview sessions was for me to form an understanding of how teachers understood their own professional development.

I was a bit unsure about the length of these interview sessions, as I was concerned about reservations that the teachers may have in openly sharing their own ideas and thoughts with a stranger. So I ensured that I spent recess and lunch times in the staff room, talking informally with the teachers and teaching assistant staff. I began to feel very welcome among the staff, as one teacher jokingly blamed *the guest* for "taking the last of the coffee and not making a new pot." He announced that since I was new to the staff, I could take his role of "getting blamed for things around here." Additionally, there was a luncheon planned as a staff social each month. One of the organizing teachers ensured that the luncheon fell on a day that I was there at the school, providing me with the time to visit with the teachers on an informal level again. These gestures were appreciated as I tried to become familiar with the teachers.

Each interview was scheduled for 45 minutes. A total of eight interviews were conducted over the four-week period. A focus group session was conducted on the last Monday, during the embedded PD time in the school. I was provided with a separate room in the office area of the school, to conduct the interviews in a confidential setting.

Additionally, I used this space to investigate the PD related documents and to reflect in my Researcher's Journal after the interview sessions.

Policy Context for Professional Development

The *Ministerial Order (#16/97) Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta* (Alberta Government, May 1997) is a policy document aimed at defining and setting a standard of quality teaching the Alberta context. In this policy document, quality teaching is linked to decisions about pedagogical knowledge and abilities. The policy states that teachers should recognize their own professional needs and share their expertise in the development of quality teaching.

The policy document *Accountability in Education: Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation* (Alberta Government, January 2003) aims to ensure that teachers' actions, judgments and decisions are in the best educational interest of students and states that teacher decision-making should support optimal learning in the classroom. In this policy, teacher professional learning is defined as professional growth as a career-long learning process. Teachers plan to achieve professional learning targets consistent with the Teacher Quality Standard (TQS). In this process, teachers are mandated to develop annual professional growth plans with goals related to the TQS, taking into consideration the educational plans of the school and local school division.

To address capacity for teacher professional learning, the School Improvement Branch of Alberta Ed published the policy document, *Improving Schools: Investing in our Future* (McEwen, 2003), providing a foundation for improving student learning and performance in schools. Staff development is highly valued when linked to student learning. In this policy document, teacher professional development is characterized as the building of teacher capacity as a strategy for improving schools. In this way, teacher

professional learning is prominently situated within the school improvement agenda. The notions of professional development and professional learning communities are prevalent within this document. Professional learning is characterized as ongoing, intentional and systemic. That is, teacher professional learning constitutes inquiry through continuous reflection of practice. Professional learning communities should set standards for practice, in division-wide, school-based or integrated contexts, focused on a results orientation. Such standards require an orientation to action and experimentation in the implementation phase.

As already recognized, teacher professional learning is connected to the school improvement agenda in Alberta. In 1999, Alberta Education launched the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). The goal of AISI is to improve student learning and performance through targeted funding that supports initiatives within the school jurisdiction identified priorities. AISI projects support partnerships as teachers, superintendents, trustees, business officials, universities, parents, and government members are encouraged to work as partners in project development and implementation. AISI funding is provided in three-year cycles to school authorities for specific local initiatives focused on improving student learning. The *Alberta Initiative for School Improvement AISI Handbook for Cycle Three* (Education Partners Working Group, 2006) includes goal, principles, characteristics and research on how to improve student learning, criteria for AISI projects, and the intent for Cycle 3 of AISI projects. Within the context of AISI, it is argued that teacher professional development builds capacity, influences teacher practice focused on student learning. This focus on student learning leads to teacher inquiry and reflection, aimed at building teachers' capacity in knowledge and skills in the subject taught, pedagogical practices, and emerging technologies. Also, AISI projects depend on evidence-based practice in which teachers and other partners in the project are committed to analyzing strategies that work and building on them for

continuous improvement. In this way, teacher professional learning is job-embedded in the context of teachers' professional lives and is based on research so that educational practices benefit student learning and performance.

In October 2003, the Alberta Commission on Learning released *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds* (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003) to the Minster of Education, detailing the findings of public consultations about education in the province of Alberta. The report serves to highlight the commission members' recommendations for the future of Alberta's education system as developed through a consultation process with educational researchers, community members and experts in various educational fields. The document *Every Child Learns, Every Child Succeeds* contains deliberate actions needed in eight areas and has direct implications on the professional learning of teachers. In the area entitled *Excellent teachers and school leaders,* explicit recommendations are laid out to expand professional development. The report recommends that teacher professional development should be school division and school-level based. The assertion is made that school-level control is needed in professional development for teachers that focuses on student learning, and illustrates a direct relationship between "the content of staff development, the quality of staff development, and student achievement" (Reitzug, 2003, p. 124). In this way, teacher professional learning is characterized as locally driven and is clearly linked to student achievement. The recommendations are direct in the need to "develop and implement comprehensive professional development plans for every school jurisdiction and every school" (Alberta Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 119) and to "require all teachers to have targeted annual professional development plans that are directly linked to their schools' improvement plans" (p. 120). Additionally, schools and school boards should be required to submit annual reports of their professional development plans with specific reference to the objectives, allocated time and resources, and actions taken with evidence of results.

To support the implementation of teacher professional development within school jurisdictions, *A Guide to Comprehensive Professional Development Planning* (Alberta Education Partners, 2005) acts as a policy tool to support school authorities and schools in developing comprehensive professional development plans. This document characterizes professional learning as the wide range of activities the school jurisdiction staff engage in individually and collectively to improve their practice and enhance student learning. Within this policy document, professional learning is based on evidence collected in schools. Collaboration among partners is essential to support effective PD that leads to improved professional practice and enhanced student learning.

Professional Learning at Valleyview School

PD activity is divided into three levels: *school division level PD, school level PD and individual teacher PD*. The *school division level PD* is planned by the school division PD Committee, consisting of teachers and division office staff. This committee develops a three-year PD plan based on the school division priority of assessment. The committee is responsible for planning three days of collaborative inter-school groups, focusing on teacher needs and choice. During these days, some sessions are devoted specifically to large groups for assessment, and other parts of the day consist of teacher chosen smaller group sessions. The school division is currently on year two of this three-year cycle.

The school division AISI Projects focus on "enhancing person and social development", "encountering real world literacy", and "enriching mathematical learning". The plan for AISI projects details the consideration given to instructional strategies, student assessment, professional development and parental involvement and communication for each project, within a timeline of three years.

Enhancing Personal and Social Development

This project is designed to teach social skills and character education to students in Kindergarten to Grade Five based on an identified need within the school division. Throughout the three years of this project, an appointed teacher project leader has prepared lesson plans and materials to pilot the project. This project leader has the responsibility to share the lesson plans, materials and assessment tools related to enhancing student social skills with teachers within the school division.

Encountering Real World Literacy

This project is designed to improve Grade 4 to 8 students' engagement in inquiry-based activities to support new curricula and increase authentic and practical learning. Additionally, this project seeks "to challenge staff to thoughtfully consider how multi-literacy is approached in classrooms and will challenge staff to engage in best practices in the area of student literacy development" (Mountainview Public Schools AISI Projects, 2007, p. 4). The plan identifies a goal of teachers working collaboratively to study and plan for instruction in response to current practice of teachers planning, teaching and assessing in isolation. Significant changes to instructional strategies are considered in the plan. Release time is provided for school administrators and key teachers to organize professional development with staff to address the instructional strategies required to achieve the project goals. Research-based strategies are shared during semi-monthly embedded PD time and additional release time is available for teachers to collaborate with other professionals and develop university partnerships. Teachers are expected to share lessons and formative assessment tools, leading to a "greater tradition of being reflective and collaborative members of the school community" (Mountainview Public Schools AISI Projects, 2007, p. 6).

Enriching Mathematical Learning

This project focuses on achieving student learning improvement by clarifying student outcomes written in student language, consistently using mathematical conventions throughout the school, differentiating instruction for students, encouraging self-assessment for students including rubrics in student language, and providing opportunities for students to participate in Math Fairs. The professional development plans for this project include teachers becoming familiar with the Nelson program through mentorship and teacher facilitator training and teachers collaborating in professional learning groups.

The *school level PD* is largely delivered through embedded PD time, with two-fold priorities. Most of the PD time is devoted to the assessment PD at school level while other sessions might involve in-service PD to timely relevant topics, ie. public health presentation, etc. At the beginning of the year, a whole school PD event was led by the PD Coordinator to identify priorities that the school wanted to work on during the upcoming year.

Individual teacher PD is characterized as needs-based and is embedded in the teacher growth plan. Teachers are required to submit a PD plan of what they will do during their individual PD time, detailing the focus of their activity, its duration and how it will be evaluated, to the principal. Most of the elementary teachers have chosen to work in groups during this time, focusing on addressing the school priorities.

Themes Emerging from the Research

The following themes have emerged from the data collected in the interview and focus group sessions.

Collaboration

A central emerging theme in the research was collaboration. When the teachers talked about their professional learning, they often spoke of it in terms of collaborative practice. The formal structures of the collaboration varied as did the numbers of professionals involved, and the focus of the collaboration. However, the teachers in this context characterized their professional learning as collaborative in nature.

It is school division practice to structure professional learning at the school division level in groups. In this way, the collaborative structure is determined by the policy context for school division planned opportunities. Additionally, during the embedded PD days at the school, the teachers often worked in groups on school priorities or their own individually identified PD goals. Teacher 16 spoke about the structure of the embedded PD days.

> *Well, our embedded PD is divided into thirds. One third is for group work. One third is for your individual goal. And one third is for assessment. So we are obliged to learn about assessment because it's one of the division's goals. So when it is assessment Monday, so to speak, then [the PD coordinator] lead[s] those. So [she will] plan what we do ... and [she will] try to move it forward according to the PD plan that [she has] put together for the division. So for example, the next time we meet as a group we'll be looking at rubrics. So [she] will provide some directives. Sort of learning more, perhaps an activity. Sort of show [the teachers] where to go to get help. Then possibly give [the teachers] time to do some of that exploration on their own. (Interview, February 23, 2009, pp. 2-3)*

The PD coordinator plays a significant role in planning and delivering embedded PD activities at the school level. Several teachers spoke about the way that this coordinator works with them in terms of the school division priority of assessment. Teacher 9 spoke about the way that the PD coordinator both introduces the content of the PD sessions and the collaborative structure for working together with other teachers during embedded PD time.

> *Well we have different little sessions on these Mondays. Like we're meeting right now and we have somebody that leads us and we do*

different group work, we do different things. We've gone through and narrowed things down to try and figure out what [we] are trying to assess, is this important to be assessing this, should the kids be helping in their assessment . . . . Generally because we try and stay either course specific or age specific. (Interview, February 2, 2009, p. 6)

Similarly, Teacher 10 discussed the ways that the PD coordinator would bring topics to be discussed around the area of assessment to the school level embedded PD time and also organize the PD into collaborative groups, with a focus on teachers relating the material to their own context in the classroom.

...And then there's other times too when we'll have, like [the PD coordinator at the school] will do, she's done a lot of work with assessment and she'll discuss a lot of assessment kind of as a big group which is kind of been the focus of the region. And so we'll do those kind of things too and then, "How does it apply to your grade level?" and that kind of thing too. So it's kind of a combination I would say, sometimes you're more within a group as a large group and sometimes we split up to other groups with other kind of PD activities. (Interview, February 2, 2009, p. 2)

Additionally, Teacher 12 indicated the collaborative nature of individual PD goals, where teachers have chosen to work together on achieving similar goals.

There are some that are planned PDs which sort of cover the division requirements that are needed to be done, but we have also have all picked our own professional growth plan PD objective. And we're quite lucky because here at our staff, the elementary teachers have done a collaborative one together where we're trying to post all the learner outcomes that the kids would be learning throughout the year in the core subjects and post them in kid friendly terms so that the kids can see how we are teaching and where we teach from. . . . And so that's been a really neat thing and a really good bonding thing for all of the elementary to understand what each other is doing and helping each other plan that. (Interview, February 9, 2009, pp. 1-2)

When talking about how they engage with others during their embedded PD time, the teachers often spoke about the ways that working collaboratively provides opportunities for teachers to share ideas about teaching and learning. Teacher 11 spoke in a particularly descriptive way about how working collaboratively during individual PD time was useful in sharing ideas for the teachers working on writing student outcomes in child friendly language.

*And this year because we have a different goal and a different topic it's
structured a little differently so we decided to work on the outcomes and
these posters to present the data to the kids. . . . So just going through the
steps together to see where we're at. If someone couldn't find what they
needed, then we'd go online together and help them. You know, 'What do
you think of this? Is this too much on a poster?' Just bouncing ideas,
same old kind of thing, two heads are better than one strategy.
(Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 3-4)*

Later in the interview, Teacher 11 described an event where she worked with

other teachers in the division who were teaching in the same grade level. She described

this PD event as a particularly useful opportunity for teachers to share ideas of what they

do in the classroom with other teachers.

*We could sign up with which ever group we wanted to go with and they
were by grade and by subject. . . . And I, speaking on my behalf anyways,
I find those very, very, very useful. I come back with a ton ideas from
other [similar grade level] teachers, especially since I teach in a school
where there's one [classroom for each grade level]. . . . And so those
days mean a lot to me when we can connect in the [same grade level]
teacher's classroom, and [talk about] 'What do you do for your Spelling
program? What do you think of the new Math? What are you going to
use for manipulatives?' I think that's PD as well. It may not be zeroed in
this huge project, but it's connecting to find out how to better teach your
kids. That's probably the most valuable PD that I could ask for.
(Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 5)*

Teacher 12 also discussed the ways that teachers in the school division will share

ideas with other teachers, characterizing teacher PD as collaborative at the school

division level, too.

*I've been very fortunate because not only [my] own staff is very caring
and giving and generous with their things and their knowledge. I've
really had loads of people in our division who, if I say, 'I don't have
anything about this,' or, 'I don't know how to do this activity well,' then
they'll send you their ideas immediately, like there's no hoarding and
[saying], 'Oh I'm not going to share that with you.' It's been really nice
to have people that are willing to talk to you and share with you and
realizing it's for the benefit of kids and that's what they feel. (Interview,
February 9, 2009, p. 4)*

When describing a PD opportunity that was particularly effective, Teacher 15

discussed an opportunity for working with other teachers in the division to plan units of

study.

We had brought our textbooks and some of our own resources and we just sat down and right to it, "Okay, what's our first units? Sports. Okay what do you read? That's good and that goes over this part of the curriculum. Yeah, I have that novel." So it was just total group work collaboration, no holds barred, just everyone shared. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 7)

For some teachers, working together on a similar goal has been an important part of their professional development as it helps to ensure that they are working towards a common goal for the PD. Teacher 9 stated that working together on writing the learning outcomes for students in child friendly language is helpful because "it has been a good opportunity for us to all sit down and talk about it and we're kind of on the same page….And we're not all over the map" (Interview, February 2, 2009, p.4). Similarly, Teacher 15 talked about how working together was important in her professional development as a way to bring teachers have an understanding of what each other is doing.

I think from my experience from our staff without it, people are going in so many separate directions and it's a way to pull everybody back, re-organize and it's great that each group is working on a separate goal, but I think it's important to just make sure everybody's on the same page and then go again. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 3)

Teacher 14 discussed how working collaboratively ensured that teachers were aware of what other teachers were doing in their own classrooms.

I guess you could say you could have done it on your own just because you're grade specific and there are not other Grade Three teachers, but by working together we have a better idea of where everybody else is. We have a better idea of making sure everybody's on the same page and we're approaching things the same way and it also just gives us different ways of, I guess when you come right down to it, the meat and potatoes, 'What are you going to do? That's a good idea. I'm going to use that idea or I think I'm going to try doing it this way.' And it's just a nice way to share things. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 5)

In the focus group, the teachers confirmed this aspect of their professional development as they described the group work as providing "continuity" and "cohesiveness" (Focus group session, February 23, 2009).

For some teachers, the collaborative aspect of working together was important in ensuring that goals were achieved. Teacher 10 talked about how a Literacy group working together during embedded PD time helped to keep teachers focused in achieving their goals. "So they've been beneficial. I think those are nice when everyone's focused on an idea and can spend the time banging ideas with each other" (Interview, February 2, 2009, p. 1). This teacher often spoke about the ways that the collaborative group work helped teachers to stay focused on what they were trying to achieve.

> *So the PD days are probably the best days where you can actually be*
> *focused and, 'Okay, you have a few other people here working on the*
> *same thing, let's get something done' kind of thing. Where otherwise it*
> *just becomes more difficult to find the time or to make the time. (p. 10).*

Teacher 11 also expressed her satisfaction with being able to complete a task when a group of teachers were working together on writing the student outcomes in child friendly language.

> *And that's been wonderful because we have for a long time wanted a*
> *little more time to connect and work with our colleagues that work with*
> *similar students or similar grade levels. I can't say enough good about*
> *how that's working out. (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 2)*

The focus of collaborative work on achieving goals was important to Teacher 15 as well. This teacher spoke about how collaborative work was a purposeful choice by the teachers to ensure that their goals were met.

> *I think just the whole idea of when we tried to discuss what was*
> *important in our school, what kinds of goals we wanted to achieve, and I*
> *think we realized as individuals that if we each took on a different job it*
> *might not be as successful, but we'd be more responsible to our group,*
> *knowing they're relying on us. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 9)*

Teacher 16 discussed the ways that talking with others helped her to see in what ways the teachers might be valuing the same things in their own professional development. When I asked her if there was resistance by the teachers in professional

development, her response indicated that while there may sometimes be resistance, in

talking to others, she realized how much they talked about the same ideas.

> But I'm sure there are some who would say, 'Oh for crying out loud just
> let us do our own thing.' But in saying that, it's interesting because it's
> almost as though we're saying the same thing but maybe just in a
> different way. I've had conversations that have almost started off as a
> debate and even though they're using completely different language I'm
> just nodding and saying, 'Do you actually know that you're agreeing
> with me? You're just saying it a bit differently than me.' And I have
> conversations around the staffroom lunch table or after school. And
> sometimes they start off as a little jab and then we go places with it.
> (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 12)

When I questioned Teacher 16 about the "places they go", she explained that

working collaboratively has helped her and others to identify shared goals for what they

want to achieve in the school and then helped them work towards those goals together.

The collaborative aspect of teacher PD in this school context was deeply

embedded in the way that teachers talked about their professional learning. In all of the

teacher interviews and the focus group session, the teachers referred to the way that their

own learning involved learning with and from others in groups. When asked about why

their PD was structured this way, the teachers talked about the way it helped them in their

own learning. Teacher 11 summarized this when she said, "…I'm finding the group

work the most benefi[cial] directly to my class for right now because it's what you

wanted to work on. It's what you feel that you need to have in your program" (Interview,

February 11, 2009, p. 3).

Improving Teaching Practice

While teachers described the context of the professional development

opportunities as highly collaborative, they also spoke about PD being effective when

collaboration is relevant to their own teaching practice. When asked if a teacher's PD

should be connected to the classroom practice, Teacher 11 was clear. "I think it should

definitely be connected to the classroom" (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 9). When

describing the role of the teacher in PD, Teacher 10 spoke pointedly about the importance

of learning something for your teaching practice in the classroom.

> *Well I think you have to try and make an effort to learn something that,*
> *hopefully that's something that you can concretely apply to your*
> *classroom, but if not at least maybe it's something that's given you kind*
> *of a nudge to think of something in a different way. Like the assessment*
> *thing, you know I didn't really get the idea of it, but then after you think*
> *that, 'Well maybe there are things that I could be assessing differently or*
> *better or why did that person get that mark?' Where a lot of it comes*
> *from experience and you compare other projects or whatever through the*
> *years, but you know just to try to be a little more specific in learning*
> *what I'm marking kind of thing. (Interview, February 2, 2009, p. 8-9)*

Later, this teacher went on to discuss how some embedded PD time had led to

changes in teaching practice.

> *I can apply it to a lesson that I can use for the kids that I think can be*
> *beneficial, they're going to learn something here today or this might help*
> *with reading comprehension or maybe this will peak their interest a little*
> *bit just to change things up sometimes. Sometimes it doesn't have to be*
> *something big, but it can be just something that just changes the way you*
> *might be doing something a little bit and it might make you, 'Oh I've*
> *never thought about that before.' You know just to give you a little more*
> *energy, 'I'll try this this way,' you know and that's always a good thing.*
> *(p. 9)*

The need for PD to be relevant to teachers' own needs for their practice was also

evident in the way that Teacher 12 talked about effective PD opportunities. She discussed

at length a PD opportunity that began with a training session with an expert on a

particular literacy program, and then continued with some teachers in the division who

met on a regular monthly basis over a year period to continue to discuss the ways that

they used the program in their teaching of literacy.

> *I just appreciate the fact [this] part of professional development seemed*
> *much more realistic to me. Sometimes I found PD to be just so like*
> *overwhelming almost, you know where it was just too many things, too*
> *many approaches, too many... too much things that were difficult to put*
> *into action, if you know what I mean? Like it wasn't sort of straight*
> *forward enough for me, whereas lately it's been things that you go,*
> *'Yeah that's realistic for me, like I can see how that is a far better way of*
> *teaching, but I don't have to throw out everything I ever did or have*
> *known how to do. I just have to tweak the way I've been doing it. I now*
> *know a better way.' (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 3)*

Also, in discussing how PD is connected to her practice in the classroom,

Teacher 12 compared the literacy and the assessment PD opportunities she has had in the

school. In this context, she spoke about effective PD as being relevant to her own

teaching practice.

> *Well I think pretty important [that it's related to my teaching practice]*
> *because it seems like there is already so much that you're doing. . . . And*
> *now this year with our structured PD the assessment is moving into*
> *things that are much more helpful, like where can you go to find rubrics*
> *that might help you plan a better rubric for your class, where could you*
> *go to get "I Can" statements? (Interview, February 9, 2009, p.)*

In the same way, she explained that we know PD is working when teachers "are

able to get the things they want put into their classroom…so I guess that would be their

way of achieving what their PD plan was" (Teacher 12, interview, February 9, 2009, p.

13). In a similar way, Teacher 11 described an ineffectual PD event in the school as being

a lecture sort of activity without there being a significant connection to her classroom

practice.

> *So I just found that when were' told about the PD over and over and*
> *over again without connecting it to the classroom and giving us a day,*
> *'Okay now you go work on you project UBD [Understanding Backward*
> *Design] time and then show us what you've accomplished'. It maybe*
> *wasn't as successful as it could have been, just because too much time*
> *was based on telling us about it and not enough, 'Now you go try it' or,*
> *'You go make something in your lesson plan that can foster your UBD*
> *planning.' (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 7)*

Later in the interview, she confirmed that PD must be connected to her classroom

teaching practice. "I try to find something that would make learning maybe a little more

fun or just a little bit different than the year before . . . . I do think it should definitely be

connected to the classroom" (p. 8).

Similarly, Teacher 14 said the effective PD was collaborative in nature but must

also be relevant to her own teaching practice in the classroom.

> *I guess it's because, 'Oh I can use that in my classroom. That's a great*
> *idea. I'm going to write that down and I can start using that right away.'*
> *. . . . And some are the meat and potatoes, this is what you can do to*

teach this strategy, this is what you can do to teach this outcome. And when you have things like that it makes you go, 'Ah-ha, I hadn't thought of that.' It just makes it easier. . . . So at the beginning of this year I was able to meet with a teacher from [another school in the division] and a Social Studies expert, I guess you could say, from [the division office] and he came to our school and we just spent the afternoon discussing different ways to teach things and talking about different websites we could pop on that had different strategies. That one was probably one of the best ones just because I felt I was struggling so much. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 6)

Later on, she spoke again about how important PD was for her teaching.

Whether or not it makes your teaching job easier by, 'This is a great technique in order to teach this outcome.' Or it makes your life easier as in, 'This is a good planning strategy on how to plan to make sure that you're encompassing all of these outcomes.' (pp. 7-8)

The importance of the relevance of effective PD to the teacher's practice was evident in the way that Teacher 15 reflected on a particular PD event that she found useful "because I came back and I could use it the next day. It wasn't something that I had to figure out, "Where am I going to put this?" (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 7). Later, when reflecting on a PD opportunity that was not very effective, she explained that it was not particularly connected to her teaching of her subject in the classroom.

For me it's the few times we've been given articles just on different topics and not really explained like why or how it's going to connect to what we're doing. And then we would summarize it or do some meaningless task. And for me it was sometimes on topics that I necessarily didn't see connected to my [my subject]. (p. 7)

In summary, Teacher 16 spoke about how her own PD must be relevant to what she does in a practical way.

You know we can't just sit and say, 'PD is good, we need PD. We want to be professional. We need to learn. We need to do this so the kids are better.' Okay, I agree with that. So what's our plan to make that happen? (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 9)

Students' Learning

Some teachers described the relationship between their own PD and the students' learning. Teacher 9 spoke about how PD has changed over the course of her teaching

career. She described the emergence of the importance of what she was learning in her own PD as being connected to what she could bring back to her students. In some cases, her own PD was implicated in the academic learning needs of the students. In other cases, she referred to how it was important for her to learn how to deal with the emotional development of the children.

> When asked how PD has helped her to develop as a teacher, she responded, "How can it not? Really when you're walking away with something new, a different way to approach the kids, that's great. I can take something back to my students to make their lives easier, to make their learning easier" (Interview, February 2, 2009, p.10-11).

Later, she reflected on the way that PD impacts on her practice to address students' emotional and learning needs.

> PD is worthwhile when it is applicable to your subject area for sure. When it is applicable to the, not just the academic portion of what you're dealing with everyday, but the emotional... all that stuff that you're dealing with the kids during the day, but it's got to be relevant. That's my biggest thing, Melody, because lots of times, not lots but there are times when you walk away going, 'You know, that's not going to catch it.'.... So PD for me has got have some relevancy that I can take back to share with my students in my room. (p. 11)

Teacher 14 spoke about the planning of PD events involving the students. She talked about the way that when the teachers planned the PD focus for the year, they often chose topics that involved the student engagement in learning.

> Last year we focused on Literacy, getting parents more involved in working with their kids, reading with their kids. This year we have focused on student outcomes, making our outcomes more student friendly so that they are able to realize what it is that they are learning and able to be more specific with them in how things tie in to what they are learning and what's going on in the real world. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 4)

Similarly, Teacher 12 stated, "It's been really nice to have people that are willing to talk to you and share with you and realizing it's for the benefit of kids and that's what they feel" (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 4). Both of these teachers have placed students' emotional engagement with learning as an important part of the teacher PD.

In terms of PD evaluation, Teacher 12 spoke about the effectiveness of her PD as being evident in the way the children could respond to new strategies that she implemented in her teaching.

> *The children would be able to show you better what they know based on the fact that you've been discussing the learner outcomes, you've been putting them up on the board and…. are they recognizing that what exactly they have done in their booklet relates exactly to what we put on that poster? You know, will they make that connection….So you're sort of looking for observation of that sort of connection. (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 12)*

When asked how PD has helped her to grow as a teacher, Teacher 12 later discussed the ways that the students' involvement in her lessons has improved. She talked about how her growth as a teacher has impacted her teaching and the way that the children have responded to her.

> *Well I think when I can teach what my outcomes are in a better way, like teach my curriculum in a better way. And it's funny how experience in teaching you realize every year how something can be better, even the look on the kid's face. When they're engaged in what you're doing that is a huge indicator of their learning to me. (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 6)*

When talking about a specific PD opportunity, she again referred to the students' involvement in the lessons. "How can I teach the same skills that I would, but now I teach it in a better way that's more engaging for them" (Interview, February 9, 2009, pp. 15-16).

Teacher Driven Reflective Practice

Teachers often talked about the importance of their input in deciding PD opportunities and topics. While some PD at the school is focused on school division goals, the teachers also participate in deciding their own school related and personal goals. The importance for teachers to drive their own PD in each context was a central theme in the way they talked about what they did during each activity.

In terms of the few school division planned days, where all teachers would gather in a central location for PD, the teachers talked about the way teachers have "been able to chose more of what we can do as teachers for our own program" (Teacher 11, interview, February 9, 2009, p. 9). The Division PD Committee is responsible for planning these days, considering teachers' suggestions "as to what direction we would like to go, what interests we have" (Teacher 14, interview, February 23, 2009, p. 7). During these days, however, "there are also times when this is also what the division is focusing on, so during the day you'll be at this session which his mandatory for everybody" (Teacher 14, interview, February 23, 2009, p. 7). Teacher 12 suggested the emergence of teachers' involvement in choosing the sessions they want to attend is a response by the school division to the teachers' feedback. Also, she valued the commitment by the division for a PD plan spread over three years.

> *Maybe they've heard us say that too much information is not necessarily a good thing. That we need to have some really good choices to choose from for an extended period of time. And then I like this three year plan thing. (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 18)*

Many teachers discussed the importance of teachers' choice in PD so that proper time can be given to develop their own goals. In this way, time was a significant factor in teacher-driven PD.

In terms of school PD days, the PD Coordinator plays a significant role in planning school level PD. One teacher described how the PD Coordinator considered both the school and the teacher needs.

> *. . . . And then there's other times too when we'll have, like [the PD coordinator at the school] will do, she's done a lot of work with assessment and she'll discuss a lot of assessment kind of as a big group which is kind of been the focus of the region. And so we'll do those kind of things too and then, "How does it apply to your grade level?" and that kind of thing too. (Teacher 10, interview, February 2, 2009, p. 2)*

Another teacher discussed the effectiveness of the PD events at the school level.

So the other PD days include sometimes the whole staff working on school goals, or we might have a guest speaker come in to talk to us about a topic or [another teacher] is one of the PD leaders, she might be like on the committee so she works on assessment with us as well. So we have a variety of things to look at, but I'm finding the group work the most benefit directly to my class for right now because it's what you wanted to work. It's what you feel that you need to have in your program. And the others are very helpful and they kind of give us the backbone and the background knowledge we need to accomplish these projects in our groups, so I think it's a good mix right now. (Teacher 11, interview, February 9, 2009, p. 3)

Similarly, Teacher 12 confirmed that the school level PD was very useful for her as it provided time to work on the PD on goals that were important to teachers.

Okay I actually really enjoyed the last way we have done professional development, because we've picked sort of a goal we could work on for an extended period of time, instead of in the past where you'd go to the full day PDs several times a year. And it seemed like something new would always be on those days, like you'd break off and go into these different things and then bring it back to your room and you'd think, "Oh yeah that was really neat," but you never talked about it again so you'd stuff it away and never think about it. (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 1)

The PD Coordinator confirmed this process in her interview. She referred to the way that she tries to take into account what the teachers want when planning the PD. In discussion with me, she talked about how she begins to plan school level PD based on the division plans and then continues the planning process with teacher feedback for what their priorities and needs are as teachers.

When asked who or what is driving PD, Teacher 14 reflected that there are a multitude of actors in this process. "I think some teachers will go, 'Well I didn't like this, so I want this.' And other teachers are going, 'Okay we learned about this, now we're going to focus on this.'" (Interview, February 23, 2009, p. 9). Later she reflected on the complexity of who is driving PD.

I would love to say the teachers are driving it. That would be the ultimate because it is our PD, but I think it's not fully teacher driven and I don't think there's any way that that'll ever change. I think the teachers will always have their say, but I also think there's always the higher mucky mucks that think, "Yeah that's good, but we want you to focus on this

*now." So I think we will always have some sort of say in it, but I don't
think it was always be 100 percent teacher driven. (p. 10)*

The teachers often referred to the idea that having teachers involved in the

decision-making around PD has increased teacher enthusiasm and "buy in". Teacher 11

was clear that this was the case and it has, in fact, made PD more enjoyable.

> *I think whenever a teacher has choice on what they want to spend their
> professional time on, that's when I think you get really effective results.
> They come away with what they really needed for their classroom. . . .
> And it's, to be honest, it's a little more enjoyable, too. . . . But I've just
> found since we've been able to choose more of what we can do as
> teachers for our program, that's when everybody's been eating it up and
> really looking forward to it and excited about it. (Interview, February 9,
> 2009, p. 9)*

When teachers were asked to identify the priorities or focus for teacher-driven

PD, they often spoke in terms of their own reflection on their practice. When asked to

summarize the experience of PD, Teacher 10 stated,

> *I think a good portion of it has to be something you yourself find
> important, self-directed, for example, if I find that kids are struggling
> with reading comprehension what have you, then that's something,
> 'Okay what can I do to help that, you know what can I do to improve
> that?' Is there some courses I could take or I shouldn't say courses, but
> even just some sort of activities we can do as a group or individually that
> would help that. Ask other people like, 'What problems do you see? What
> can be done to improve that area?' (Interview, February 2, 2009, p. 10)*

This was confirmed by Teacher 11, who stated, "I can choose what I feel in my

professional opinion what's maybe missing from the program or what I could add into the

program and benefit all students" (Interview, February 9, 2009, p. 10).

Teacher 15 described this process as "self-evaluating" her own practice. She

spoke at length about how she reflects on her own practice to determine what needs to be

done in her own PD, stating at one point, "I guess sitting and really looking for that,

'What about my teaching really needs some fine tuning?' Not just saying, 'Oh yeah I

think I'll go to this course.' Just really self-evaluating maybe" (Interview, February 23,

2009, p. 11). Later, she commented

> *I guess that gut feeling it just isn't right. And I mean for being in the classroom I'd remember thinking, 'I just didn't like that, it just didn't feel right'. Yeah so for me it would be my instinct. I mean I would use what the kids told me too. (p. 11).*

When I asked her to explain how she knew if her PD was working, she reflected on the informal nature of the evaluation. "I don't know, maybe having that good, 'I'm doing a good job for the benefit of the kids,' feeling more days than I did before" (p. 12).

Summary

Teachers at this school conceptualize teacher PD as being significantly teacher-driven. They reflected that sometimes PD focused on school division priorities while other times there was a focus on to identifying exactly their own professional needs, to improve their teaching practice and to impact students' engagement with learning. The teachers expressed the need to work with others in a collaborative way to improve their own practice. Additionally, working with others ensured that they were "on the right track" as they worked towards shared goals in achieve tangible outcomes in the PD time for their practice. To do this, the teachers expressed the need to have focused time, and were satisfied with the embedded PD time that has been allocated at the school level.

Chapter Six: Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore: 1) how teacher professional learning is conceptualized in school improvement policies; 2) teachers' conceptualizations and understandings of their own professional learning in each school, and 3) the ways in which the policy context influences teachers' understandings of their professional learning. A comparison of cases was used in this study to search for similarity and variance (Mills, van de Bunt & de Bruijn, 2006) in teachers' understandings of professional learning in two different contexts. Comparative studies are useful in understanding "unique aspects of a particular entity that would be virtually impossible to detect otherwise" (p. 621). Through comparative study, it is possible to see clear emerging themes by contrasting the data from both sites. Considerations for both similarities and variance in the data are illuminated through comparison. In comparing emerging patterns and themes in each context, this research considered the context of school improvement policies in two different settings. Comparing the interpretations of the ways that teachers speak about their professional learning provides insight to the ways in which teachers understand their own professional development in each context, allowing for consideration for the ways in which policy context might influence the teachers' understandings of their lived experiences in their professional learning.

Conceptualization of Teacher Professional Learning in Policy

Teacher professional learning in England is characterized within educational policy documents with a focus on raising achievement and improving student standards. CPD is tied to the school improvement plans. Headteachers and senior leaders in the school guide expertly-led professional learning programmes aimed at developing skills and professional knowledge of teachers. Teachers are expected to devise their training and development plans in relation to the school improvement plans. Bridle Path Junior

School's Improvement Plan features *staff continued professional development* as one the key fey foci areas, whereby staff identify professional targets for working with the *Open Futures Project,* the Virtual Learning Environment, and projects in Literacy. Teacher professional development was characterized as teacher-driven capacity building in line with school improvement plans.

CPD is positioned to build teachers' own skills through professional dialogue to improve standards addressing children's learning needs. Teachers are encouraged to apply the principles of good teaching and learning to their teaching practice, by identifying their own needs for improvement with the ultimate aim of the achievement of high standards in all curricular areas. Headteachers and members of the school leadership team supported others in curriculum planning, enrichment, and improvement of learning and teachers. Subject-specialism is highlighted as a means for "informed professionalism", with a focus on developing the skills of teachers in the areas of literacy, numeracy and ICT. In summary, there is a focus on developing teachers' skills to raise the standard of student achievement.

In Alberta policy documents, professional learning is characterized as processes focused on improving teachers' practice and student learning. Leaders within school are responsible for working within the school improvement cycle to devise professional learning for teachers to raise expectations. By doing so, there is an assumption that improvement through professional learning opportunities occurs when teachers share what works well. Professional learning in this context was conceptualized as building capacity of teachers through professional learning communities with a prevalence of collaborative learning.

Professional learning leaders are responsible for engaging staff in the improvement agenda of the school within a learning community to develop learning-focused collaboration. In this way, professional learning of teachers is characterized as

collaborative, centred in the teacher' practice and school-based in order to ensure student learning. In summary, there is an emphasis on collaborative reflective practice to develop teacher's understandings of how to improve student learning.

A summary of the policy contexts is outlined in Table 1. In comparing the purposes of teacher professional learning in policy, it is clear that the English context focuses on student achievement whereas teacher practice in relation to student learning is the focus in Alberta. Such difference suggests a difference in focus and difference in the positioning of the teacher in the purpose of professional learning. In the English context, the teacher is situated further from the center of teacher professional learning with the focus on student achievement. Certainly there is a role for the teacher, too, to work with experts to develop skills and abilities to impact on student achievement. In the Alberta context, the center of teacher professional learning embodies a relationship between the teacher as reflective practitioner and student learning. Continuous professional reflection on practice through teacher-driven PD leads to non-specific implementation, whereby interpretive programming occurs as teachers reflect on what is needed to address both professional growth plans and school improvement plans.

Table 1. Summary of Teacher Professional Learning Policy

	Policy Context of Teacher Professional Learning at Bridle Path Junior School in England	**Policy Context of Teacher Professional Learning at Valleyview School in Alberta**
Purpose	Raise achievement and improve standards	Improve teachers' practice and student learning
Characterization	Performance Management connected to school improvement processes Focus on teacher quality through building "skills and abilities"	Build capacity: professional development and professional learning communities Individual and collective continuous inquiry as research based practice
Implementation Mechanisms	Performance Management Plan structured around management and review of teacher performance Use of consultants for specific implementation strategies focused on numeracy, literacy and technology Between school collaboration through networks Specialisation - teacher quality focused on specialist skills and teacher expertise	Professional growth plans take into consideration the school improvement plan (AISI) Teacher – driven Open-ended and non-specific implementation Reflection of practice Sharing of expertise among teachers Interpretive implementation rests at school authority and school level Building teachers' capacity in subject knowledge, pedagogical practice and emerging technologies

Teacher Conceptualization of Professional Learning

Certain themes emerged as intersecting within the comparative process of data analysis. The intersecting themes will be explored in this next section to examine the similarities and variances in the data (Mills, van de Bunt & de Bruijn, 2006).

Collaborative Learning

The notion of collaboration was prominent in both the research contexts. However, the way collaboration was discussed and understood in the context of teacher

professional learning was varied between schools as conceptualizations of processes for expert-led training and knowledge sharing.

Bridle Path Junior School

In England, the notion of collaboration forms a strong base to teacher CPD policy discourse. Headteachers are directed to encourage teachers to develop learning-focused collaboration and strong, professional relationships (DfES, 2007). In this context, collaboration is placed within the context of school improvement as a mechanism for teachers to work with others in raising standards by sharing their knowledge or expertise, something the teachers often referred to as "training". Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) refer to this conceptualization of professional learning as "knowledge-for-practice". In this context, CPD is characterized as expert-led, requiring teachers to become knowledgeable in ways that impact on standards through "informed professionalism" (DfES, 2003) by developing teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching through subject specialism. As such, teachers are positioned to work with others in a collaborative way by means of teaching or training others, focused on the goal of improving school standards and raising student outcomes. The teachers at Bridle Path School spoke about collaboration as a way to use the expertise of other teachers to develop their own teaching practice. The expertise is shared with other teachers to ensure that other staff members would benefit from teachers' learned knowledge.

While the collaboration aspect of professional learning is evident in the understanding of CPD as training colleagues, the teachers in this school also reflected shift toward a more constructive knowledge process when working with their colleagues as they indicated that reflecting on expert knowledge within the context of their own classroom practice occurred between the expert teacher and trainee colleague. Rather than simply indicating how to perform certain tasks, the two teachers would work

together to develop an understanding of how to develop practice in the context of the local classroom. Such process indicates a shift to the "knowledge-in-practice" conceptualization (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) of professional learning. This conceptualization of teacher professional learning acknowledges the embedded nature of knowledge in the context of the teacher's practice.

The notion of "expertise" connotes a deficit in terms of teacher knowledge for generating school improvement initiatives, whereby teachers gain "knowledge-for-practice" from external sources. Within the predominant conception of teacher professional learning in this context, teachers' experiences are not deemed as significantly valuable in generating knowledge for school improvement. Rather, there is an external expectation of what is needed for school improvement/student learning and that teachers can access the required knowledge to enact that change. In this way, teachers are positioned on the periphery of knowledge generation while acknowledging external agents as centrally possessing the skills and knowledge that teachers must acquire in their expertise to address enhanced student achievement, and therefore, learning. In this situation, teacher knowledge is a construct that is gained by engaging with experts, those who know what is needed to achieve the best possible teaching. It is unfair to say that the teachers in this context would naively accept any such construct as relevant to their practice. However, it was clear in speaking with the teachers, that knowledge for teacher professional learning was best developed in consult with experts outside the teachers' own experiences of their daily practice.

Valleyview School

In the PD policy context of Alberta, professional learning is characterized as the wide-range of activities the school staff engage in both individually and collectively to focus on improved practice and enhanced student learning (Alberta Ed Partners, 2005).

Collaboration among professionals is essential to support effective PD that leads to improved professional practice and enhanced student learning. Within the conceptualization of "knowledge-in-practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), there is the assumption that professional learning occurs when teachers have the opportunity reflect on knowledge of good practice. Teachers "pose and construct problems out of the uncertainty and complexity of practice situations that they make new sense of situation by connecting them to previous ones" (p. 263). The notion of "knowledge-in-practice" requires teachers to access their tacit knowledge, which is "implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing" (Schön, 1995, p. 29). The teachers at Valleyview School spoke about collaboration as a way of individuals working in groups to share ideas about teaching. Teachers commonly used the term "share" in talking about how they worked with others. In this context, teachers worked in collaboration with their colleagues to engage in reflective practice about what they determined was needed in their own individual professional learning and how to properly address that need within the context of their classroom teaching. Their collaborative work is guided by the school improvement plans, and they discussed the importance of sharing what each other was doing in developing their own individual capacities to address school improvement directives.

Teachers also discussed the ways that working collaboratively in groups enabled them to confirm their own practice against what others were doing. They often expressed the importance of "being on the same page" as their colleagues in the school and in the division. There was a strong importance for the teachers to build their understandings of what was needed to address school improvement by discussing what others were doing and developing a common approach to problems. Collaboration involved a significant sharing of ideas in enhanced professional autonomy, whereby teachers engaged in decision-making about what works best for their own individual classrooms.

The notion of sharing connotes an understanding that knowledge for teacher learning is constructed in a social context with other professionals at the school level, in the context of their daily practice. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) draw on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) to argue that all learning is centrally concerned with social relations and belonging while also arguing that the notion of *field* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) of practice better describes teacher collaborative engagement in the context of their professional learning. The notion of sharing practice to develop school improvement knowledge indicates that teachers are positioned centrally within the process of knowledge generation. In this situation, knowledge is a construct that can be best accessed through teachers' own tacit understandings of what constitutes good teaching as developed in their practice of being a teacher.

Inquiring into Teaching Practice

Teachers in both policy contexts inquired into their teaching practice. Yet, there were differences in the ways that teachers understood the relationship between their professional learning and their teaching practice.

Bridle Path Junior School

The policy context of CPD for teachers in England is focused on building teachers' own skills by applying the principles of good teaching and learning to their teaching practice with the ultimate aim of achieving high standards in students' learning. The notion of skill development was also prevalent in teachers' understandings of CPD at Bridle Path Junior School. Teachers often described CPD using terms such as "developing my skills" to improve student achievement and "impacting on standards". The teachers often identified a process in which they reviewed student achievement, often through standardized test results, and sought ways to improve results by developing their own skills in their teaching practice. The notion of skill development indicates

competencies that are gained through CPD to address student learning needs. Therefore, there is a close relationship between the teaching skills that teachers learn during CPD and student achievement driven by pressures for high standards in student learning.

In this context, there is cyclical process for teacher professional learning in which student levels of achievement are used to determine what needs to be improved in the school, informing the school development plan, thereby influencing teacher professional learning. Similarly, evaluation of teacher performance and CPD is measured against student levels of achievement, which inform school development plans. Then in turn, teacher professional learning is focused on the teaching skills required to address student achievement. In this cyclical process, there is a close coupling between student standards of achievement and teacher professional learning, whereby significant importance for good teaching is placed on evidence of student learning as achievement.

The notion of *skills* indicates a particular knowledge base is required for good teaching. When a teacher learns the required skills, then they become good teachers who are able to impact on student achievement. This notion of a particular set of knowledge-based skills is reflective of the notion of "knowledge-for-practice", whereby teachers obtain knowledge for their practice from an external source. While this conceptualization of teacher professional learning was prevalent in Bridle Path School, it most often represented the teachers' understandings of how professional learning initiatives are begun within the school context. For example, the professional learning aspect of the *Open Futures Initiative* was significantly structured around the notion of building skills for teaching a particular strand, based on seeking the input of other professionals external to the local school context. When teachers mastered these required skills, the expert teacher would teach the skills needed for the program to the other teachers. Again, this is reflective of the "knowledge-for-practice" conceptualization. However, when discussing the *Expert of the Mantle Project* in the school, teachers reflected on a process whereby

the group of teachers who had already been trained in the required skills to deliver the program were using it to work with each other to build their own understandings of how to use it in their practice, relying on their tacit knowledge of what works in the context of their own classrooms. Such process indicates a shift towards the "knowledge-in-practice" conceptualization of professional learning, whereby teachers "invent knowledge and make it explicit through deliberation and reflection" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, p. 264). In doing so, there is a recognition that knowledge required for quality teaching is not only positioned outside the teachers experiences, but that teachers also possess the "knowledge-in-practice" required to strive toward developing quality teaching skills in the context of their classroom.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) argued that the construction of knowledge is contextual to individual disposition in the co-production and reproduction of cultures of learning. In this case, it is not clear to what extent the individual teachers' dispositions influenced their choice to work toward knowledge construction by manipulating skills, rather than focus on building skills as determined by an external knowledge base, in the context of the *Mantle of the Expert Project*. However, it is apparent that the teachers in this group believed that the skills required for effective quality teaching in this case should be developed through a process of knowledge construction, rather than training.

Considering the many professional learning initiatives at the school, it was clear that evidence of student achievement, or standards, was closely linked to teacher CPD. That is, even though there was a marked shift towards constructing knowledge, it was always predicated upon evidence of impacting on what the teachers referred to as standards. In this way, there is a direct relationship between teacher professional learning for skill development and student achievement in this context.

Valleyview School

In the policy context of PD in Alberta, quality teaching is linked to decisions about pedagogical knowledge and abilities placing a focus on optimal student learning. Teachers are expected recognize their own professional needs in the development of quality teaching through continuous reflection with their teaching colleagues. Within this context, PD is conceptualized as a relationship between the content of staff development, the quality of staff development, and student learning. At Valleyview School, the teachers understood their PD as enabling them to impact student engagement in learning. The teachers sought ways to teach their students in a more effective way and make learning easier for students. In discussing how PD is evaluated, teachers indicated that they reflected on their own sense of what worked in the classroom, looking for indicator in students' engagement and the teachers' own sense that they were better able to teach curricular objectives. In this way, teachers understood their own reflective practice as a key process in their PD.

In this context, there is a profound emphasis on teacher professional reflection. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), reflection is a key process in workplace learning, as individuals reflect, often with colleagues, authentic problem-solving based on contextual issues within one's own practice. The process for teacher professional learning at this school can be understood as beginning with school division priorities predicated on a loose understanding of the student learner, followed by a process of professional teacher reflection, often in collaboration with colleagues, to develop their own understanding of what needs to be changed in teacher practice. In this context, teachers engage in professional reflection to evaluate their PD by reflecting on student engagement as an indicator of success. Within this understanding of professional learning, there is significance placed on teachers' reflection, thereby valuing a sense of the professional autonomy of teachers to reflect on how to address quality teaching.

In this school, there were three formalized levels of PD: those at the school jurisdiction level, at the school level, and at the individual level. The notion of professional reflection on practice was evident at each level of professional learning. At the jurisdiction level, the teachers self-selected topics on which they preferred to work during whole division PD days. The focus of these sessions was often on teachers sharing what was deemed as good practice in their classroom. During embedded PD time, teachers often worked with others to reflect on topics related to school priorities, such as assessment, discussing what was important in the context of their own school and classrooms. Similarly, some embedded PD time was allocated for individual professional learning. All except one teacher chose to work with others in collaborative groups during this time, to address the school priority of assessment. For example, there was a strong group of teachers who worked on writing student outcomes in child-friendly language, an assessment practice that was deemed effective during their school PD time. Through all of these examples, there is evidence that significant value is placed on knowledge generated about effective teacher practice as teachers shared their tacit knowledge of what it meant to teach well. Such conceptualization of teacher professional learning reflects the notion of "knowledge-in-practice" as teachers own knowledge of their practice is valued.

In this context, teacher professional reflection is positioned centrally in the process of school improvement. The relationship between school improvement and teacher reflection, therefore, positions the teachers' knowledge of their own practice as central within processes for improving the practice of teaching. For some of the teachers at Valleyview School, professional learning involved writing student outcomes in child-friendly language. In this way, the student learner was implicated in the teacher PD, but characterized in a loose connection. It is unclear in this context how the student learner

plays a role in the professional development of good teaching practice and how teacher professional reflection leads to enhanced student learning.

Conceptualizing Student Learning

The theme of student learning has emerged throughout the discussion of teachers' understandings of professional learning in each context. This is not surprising, as Wilson and Berne (1999) indicated that the field of teacher professional learning is diverse and that the ways it is understood cannot be easily compartmentalized into distinctive themes. Overlap between emerging themes in a diverse field is expected. However, a brief examination of the notion of student learning on its own is warranted in this study in order to analyze how student learning is understood differently in each context.

Bridle Path Junior School

The notion of student learning is highly researched in the area of school improvement literature (Rowe, 2007; Stoll & Fink, 1996). However, Wilson and Berne (1999) argue that teaching behavior and student achievement are rarely linked for study in educational research of teacher professional learning. In fact, a review of literature on teacher professional learning has rarely produced a discussion or understanding of the role the student learning. Yet, in the case of the teachers at Bridle Path School, professional learning and student achievement are identified as very closely linked, as explained in the analysis of teaching practice in this document. The teachers at Bridle Path School often spoke of the importance of addressing standards at the school, referring to how students achieved, both in formalized testing (known as SAT's in England) and teacher assessments of learning. In this context, student learning as achievement, reflected in the school standards, impacted teacher professional learning in an immense way. The notion of "excellent" standards was clearly understood by teachers as

excellence in student achievement and, therefore, consequently, in student learning, and areas that needed improvement were clearly identified in the school improvement plan. Given such clear understanding of student learning as student achievement, there was a clear understanding of what needed to be improved in the way of teachers' skills to address the deficit areas in student learning. In this way, the relationship between school improvement, student achievement and teacher professional learning is relatively explicit and overt.

Valleyview School

In the case of the teachers at Valleyview School in Alberta, student learning was often referenced in terms of student engagement. This was particularly evident in the way that the teachers spoke about evaluation of PD opportunities. When asked how they knew if a particular PD initiative was working, teachers often referred to their own reflection on practice as evidenced by student engagement with the course content. Improved student engagement meant that students were learning and therefore, that PD was working at improving teachers' professional growth. The relationship between student learning as engagement and teacher professional learning was based primarily upon the role of the teacher in professional reflection on practice. Such positioning places an increased sense of professional autonomy for teachers in addressing student learning within school improvement processes.

In the context of Alberta, with a presence of provincial standardized testing as part of the provincial pillar for accountability in school improvement, it is interesting that teachers still chose to address student learning as engagement through professional reflection rather than referring to significant data on test scores. Provincial achievement testing (PAT's) occurs in Grade Three and Grade Six in Alberta, while there is a wider focus on all levels of primary school standardized testing in England (required for Year

Two and Six, optional for the other year groups but most often still conducted in schools). It is not evident in the data in this study to what extent standardized testing played a role in teachers' understandings of student learning. However, there is a clear difference in the way that teacher professional learning and understandings of student learning are linked to school improvement processes.

Teacher Ownership of Professional Learning

In both contexts, there was a strong presence of teachers' sense of ownership and agency within their own professional learning. Clark and Hollingsworth (2002) theorized a shift in the nature of teacher professional learning to reflect a complex process whereby teachers played an enhanced role in their own learning, rather than mere participants in the disconnected workshop model of professional growth. Teachers in both schools in this study valued the importance of professional learning which placed an emphasis on their professional needs in the context of their classroom teaching. Professional learning opportunities delivered from central locations such as school division and Local Authority sites were considered to be ineffectual in meeting teachers' needs in the context of their classroom. In both contexts, teachers shared the belief that their current professional learning opportunities are highly valuable to their professional needs when they are situated within the context of their own practice, indicating the importance for teacher ownership in professional learning. The teachers valued ownership in determining what constitutes professional learning and how policies for their own learning are played out at the school level. However, the ways in which they valued their ownership differed in each context.

Bridle Path Junior School

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) critiqued the professional learning opportunities in England for the way that they are often bound by managerial and

accountability mechanisms. The teachers at Bridle Path School valued the way that they were able to take more prescriptive, determined professional learning and make it meaningful in their own local context of the their classroom. In doing so, there was recognition by these teachers that large scale or national priorities were important to their school improvement and also in their own professional development. This was evident in the way that they supported the *Open Futures* and *VLE* projects. The teachers at Bridle Path School were clear that they valued professional learning and initiatives for school improvement when they were directly related to what they would do in the classroom. The determinant of effective CPD was that it could directly relate to what they could do to impact on the achievement levels of students in their own classrooms, and the teachers valued the opportunity to make initiatives meaningful in their classroom. For these teachers, ownership meant determining how to use otherwise determined initiatives in their classrooms.

Valleyview School

At Valleyview School, the teachers valued being able to determine how they worked with others in their professional learning. For these teachers, working together in a collaborative way was highly valuable, and the teachers reflected that working with others was a key determinant of effective PD. Like the teachers at Bridle Path, the teachers at Valleyview School critiqued PD opportunities that left them questioning its application to their classroom practice. However, in the case of Valleyview School, the teachers placed an immense priority on working collaboratively with their colleagues. The teachers valued the ownership of being able to determine how they worked with other teachers in their professional learning.

Comparative Models of Teachers' Understandings of Professional Learning

By comparing and contrasting the places of intersection in the emerging themes of the data, it is possible to form a more concrete understanding of how teacher professional learning is conceptualized by teachers in each school.
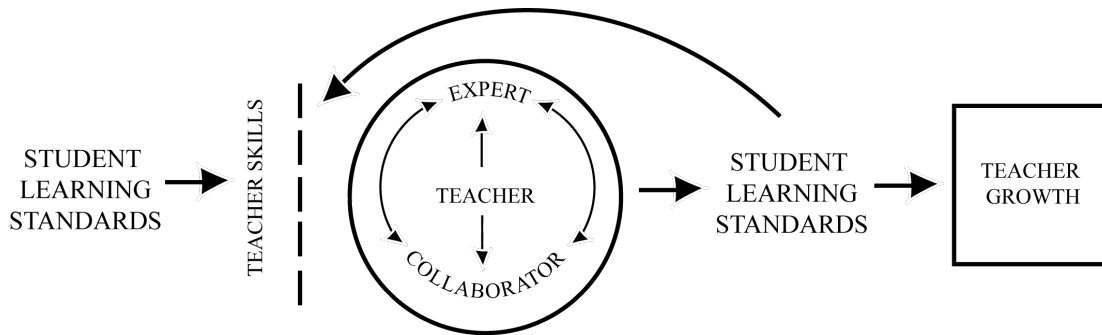
Bridle Path Junior School

The teachers at the school understood teacher professional learning as skill development for the purpose of impacting on student achievement standards. Considering the many professional learning initiatives at the school, it was clear that evidence of student achievement, or standards, was closely linked to teacher CPD in implementation and evaluation phases. School improvement plans indicate priority areas for school development often based on school standards. In this way, there is a direct relationship between teacher professional learning for skill development, student achievement and school improvement policies in this context.

The teachers at Bridle Path Junior School primarily understood themselves to be positioned outside of knowledge construction, indicating that the knowledge for what is to be learned in CPD is given to teachers through training models. As such, there is a valuing of external knowledge to the teachers' practice. The concept of "training" is well connected with the teachers' understanding that CPD provided the opportunity to share expertise to develop their "skills" as teachers. The notions of skills and training are relational and indicate a predominant conceptualization of knowledge transfer from external knowledge bases to the teacher. There was, however, an indication that understandings of knowledge construction shifts as certain professional learning initiatives develop in the school. While it is not clear in what ways this shift may be influenced by factors such as teacher disposition, the shift does indicate that there may be

emerging multiple understandings of the role of teacher knowledge in professional

learning in this context.

Figure 1 illustrates the process of teacher professional learning at Bridle Path

School. At this school, teacher professional learning began with student learning

standards, as a basis for determining what skills must be developed in teacher learning.

Teachers engaged in processes of interaction with both trained professional experts, from

both within and outside the school context, and with each other to develop their own

knowledge for skills that would lead to improved student learning and achievement. In

evaluating the effective CPD, teachers consider student learning as achievement, as the

process is refined and renewed until satisfactory changes in student achievement are

reached.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Teacher Professional Learning at Bridle Path Junior
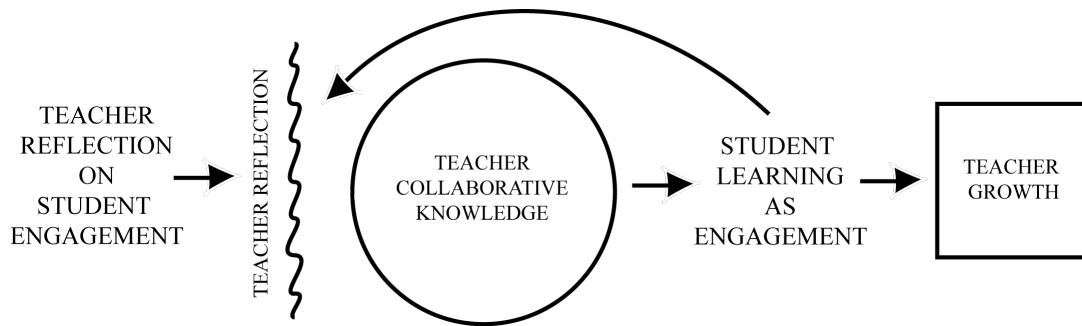
School

Valleyview School

The teachers at Valleyview School understood the primary purpose of

professional learning as improving teaching practice through teacher reflection. The

notion of collaborative teacher reflection featured prominently in teachers'

understandings of professional learning as they worked with other teachers to reflect on

how their practice could be enhanced to better engage their students in learning. The structure of professional learning at this school required teachers to work on school related priorities during particular embedded PD sessions. However, the teachers also often chose to work on those priorities in collaborative groups during their individual PD time, indicating the marked presence of teacher professional collaboration. In evaluating if professional learning worked for students, they often commented on reflecting on student engagement as a determinant of the teachers' learning and practice. In this way, teachers used their own sense of reflection about their practice in the context of their classrooms to plan and evaluate their PD.

The prominence of teacher reflection indicates a significant positioning of teacher knowledge within the practice of the teacher. They viewed the knowledge for professional learning to be within their own practice, that is, in a process of construction. Teachers in this context saw themselves as knowledge constructivists.

However, given that there was a heightened sense of professional reflection in this context in determining teacher professional learning, there is an indication that teacher professional learning is loosely connected to school improvement policies as implementation and evaluation lies within the teacher.

Figure 2 illustrates the teacher professional learning process at Valleyview School. The professional learning began with teacher reflection on student engagement with teacher practice. The teachers continued in a process of reflection in which they interacted collaboratively with other teachers to develop their knowledge of effective teaching practice, reflecting on what works in the context of their classrooms. To evaluate teacher professional learning, the teachers relied on reflection of their own professional practice and how students' engagement may have improved, thereby assuming student improved learning. This process of reflection then began a new process for teacher professional learning.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Teacher Professional Learning at Valleyview School

Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Learning

Teacher learning models are diverse and represent a discontinuous field of study (Wilson & Berne, 1999). However, teacher professional learning has been studied and can be conceptualized based on the findings of this research study.

Teacher Knowledge and Collaborative Learning

The notion of teacher knowledge is variable within these two contexts of professional learning. While Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued a prevalence of "knowledge-for-practice" in the field of teacher professional learning, the data in this study suggests that this is not always the case. In the context of Bridle Path Junior School, it was evident that conceptions of "knowledge-for-practice" are prominent in teachers' understandings of their learning. However, there is suggestion of a shift toward "knowledge-in-practice" within the CPD. It is unclear why this shift has taken place. However, in recognizing how teachers value participation in their professional learning, one possibility for the shift may be due to an increased sense of ownership among teachers as professional learning opportunities progress in stages of development. Additionally, the teachers at Valleyview School understood their professional learning in ways that align with the "knowledge-in-practice" conceptualization. For these teachers,

professional learning is based upon assumptions that their own sense of personal reflection informs the knowledge needed for improving practice.

In conceptualizing the nature of teacher knowledge in professional learning, it is possible to envision a variable understanding among teachers of the way that knowledge is both learned and constructed. Additionally, there are possibilities for variable understandings within a single initiative, suggesting that the way that knowledge is understood emerges and changes with teachers. Explanations for the variability are not understood through analysis of the data in this study. The extent to which the individual teacher disposition or school culture impacts on this knowledge is not known and may require further study.

Additionally, there are tensions emerging from the data to suggest a symbiotic relationship between individual and collaborative knowledge. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) indicated that teacher learning was both individual and collaborative. For the teachers at Valleyview School, there was an enhanced sense that their own individual reflective knowledge of what they do in the functioning of their practice as teachers was immensely valuable towards knowledge construction with other teachers. Such understanding indicates that knowledge construction in the process of professional learning is not necessarily dichotomous in nature, being individual or collaborative, but rather involves variable individual learning and collaborative learning that may inform each other in a symbiotic relationship.

Student Learning

Guskey (1986) argued that "significant changes in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers is contingent on their gaining evidence of change in the learning outcomes of their students" (Guskey, 1986, p. 7). Evidence of student improvement gained by changed actions of teachers is a prerequisite to significant change in teacher's beliefs and

attitudes. However, in the context of this study, it is clear that teachers' understandings of what constitutes student learning is variable in different contexts, as well. The data from this study indicates that student learning is conceptualized in different ways so that the idiographic relationship between teacher professional learning and student learning is variable in the field.

Influences of Policy on Teachers' Understandings of Professional Learning

The notion of policy web (Joshee & Johnson, 2005) is particularly useful in understanding the ways that teachers' understandings of professional learning may be influenced by policy contexts. Policy is not simply adopted at the school level but is rather constructed in the process of interaction with actors at the implementation level (Joshee & Johnson, 2005), giving way to what Goldberg (2006) described as the sticky intertwining of policies as "the mess of a melted marshmallow" (p. 2). In this study, there is a clear emerging connection between policy and the ways that teachers understand the context of their teaching. The way in which teachers act as individuals within the collective space of policy construction needs consideration.

Table 2 illustrates the ways that teacher professional learning is conceptualized in both policy and teachers' understandings at each school. To engage in a comparison of these conceptualizations, I will begin by considering the conceptualizations within each school context, comparing the policy and the teachers' understandings. Then I will discuss comparisons and contrasts between the two school contexts.

Within school improvement policies in England, there is an understanding that teacher professional learning is for the purpose of raising student achievement. The teacher as learner is placed in a tightly coupled relationship with student achievement. In order to improve students' learning, as measured through achievement tests and outcomes, teachers are required to engage with experts to gain expert knowledge to

develop their practice, and then to train others so their practice can further improve. In the policy context, teachers are expected to gain expert knowledge as they seek to improve their students' achievement.

The teachers themselves also understood their role in terms of improving students' achievement, but they placed an emphasis on developing their skills. They were concerned with what they needed to do, in specific and tangible ways, to improve the way they taught so that they could improve the way their teaching impacted on student learning, as measured by achievement. The teachers acknowledged areas where improvements in students' achievement, what they termed *standards*, were needed, and then sought the skills they needed to make an impact on those standards. However, the teachers also acknowledged a collaborative aspect in their professional learning that enabled them to better develop and refine their own skills. There was a validation of what was expected of them from policy expectations, in terms of the skills that were required to enhance student achievement, skills that were often determined by experts in the field, either consultants or other professionals.

There was a tight coupling between the policy and teachers' professional learning understandings, so that what was needed for professional learning as made explicit in policy (raised student achievement) was mediated by teachers through skill development. Therefore, in making sense of what was expected through policy, the teachers have placed their own skill development as a mediating process. The teachers have not significantly questioned the process or made the notion of student achievement or skill development particularly problematic. Rather, they have interpreted their role in the professional learning to be to develop their own skills to impact on student achievement.

Within school improvement policies in Alberta, there appears to be a relationship between teachers' practice and student learning. In this conceptualization, professional learning is intended to improve teachers' practice through a process of continuous

inquiry. There is an open-ended understanding of implementation, meaning that the school improvement plan provides a beginning platform for teacher professional learning, but that PD is teacher-driven as teachers build their capacity through individual and collaborative inquiry.

In teachers' understandings of professional learning at Valleyview School, there is an increased emphasis on teacher reflection of practice. Teachers mediate the expectations for their professional learning, as it is understood in policy, through the process of reflection on their practice and how students engage with their practice. To do this, teachers valued the collaborative approach, whereby reflection is done in collaboration with other teachers in the school and school division community. As such, teachers' practice is developed in both doing practice and in reflecting with others on their practice, as they consider how students, as learners, have engaged with the teaching practice. Teachers made sense of what they do in their professional learning through their own practice. The conceptualization of teacher professional learning that teachers in Valleyview School articulated placed emphasis on improved practice for increased student engagement. The assumptions embedded within this conceptualization are that student engagement equates with student learning. In this way, both improved teacher practice and increased student engagement are mediating variables that are assumed to result in improved student learning.

Table 2. Comparison Between Policy and Teachers' Understandings at Each School

	Bridle Path Junior School		Valleyview School	
	Policy Context of Professional Learning	*Teachers' Conceptualizations of Professional Learning*	*Policy Context of Professional Learning*	*Teachers' Conceptualizations of Professional Learning*
Purpose of Teacher Learning	Raise achievement and improve standards	Purpose of PD is to develop skills for teachers to impact on student achievement standards	Improve teachers' practice to improve student learning	Purpose of PD is improving teacher practice through teacher reflection based on student engagement
Characterization	Performance Management connected to school improvement processes Focused on teacher quality through building "skills and abilities"	Based on model of training and sharing of expertise Tight coupling to school improvement plans Collaborative characteristic based on training others	Builds capacity: professional development and professional learning communities Individual and collective continuous inquiry as research based practice	Based on a model of professional collaborative reflection Loose coupling to school improvement plans as emphasis is on teacher reflection Collaborative nature with focus on reflection on practice
Implementation Mechanisms	Performance Management Plan structured around management and review of teacher performance Use of consultants for specific implementation strategies focused on numeracy, literacy and technology Between school collaboration through networks Specialization – teacher quality focused on specialist skills and teacher expertise	Predominantly "knowledge-for-practice" model, with some shift toward "knowledge-in-practice" as CPD initiatives develop in phase	Professional growth plans take into consideration the school improvement plan (AISI) Teacher-driven Open-ended and interpretive implementation rests at school jurisdiction or school level Reflection on practice Sharing of expertise among teachers	Predominantly "knowledge-in-practice" model

Policy contexts were meaningful to teachers in that their understandings reflect the embodiment of teacher professional learning in practice. In comparing the ways for which policy becomes lived teachers' experiences between Bridle Path Junior School and Valleyview School, there were differences in how policy was mediated. Using the metaphor of a policy web, Joshee and Johnson (2005) argued that the open spaces between the threads in the policy web provide spaces for individuals to have "freedom to act in ways that support, extend, or undermine stated policy objectives and to introduce new ideas that may influence the policy discourse" (p. 55). In the context of Bridle Path Junior School, there were limited mediating factors, as teachers acknowledged and validated policy conceptualizations of teacher professional learning, prioritizing the development of their skills in their role as teacher learner. Using the metaphor of policy web, teachers' understandings are closely woven with the policy understandings at Bridle Path Junior School. The spaces for teachers' own agency in informing how policy directives are experienced is comparatively minimal within this web. In the context of Valleyview School in Alberta, the understanding of what teacher professional learning means was mediated through their teachers' own practice and student engagement. There is a more support for loose interpretations of what teacher professional leaning means in both policy and in teachers' understandings. In the metaphor of policy web in this case, the spaces for teacher engagement in interacting with policy directives is considerably broader, placing an enhanced role for the teacher in mediating school improvement practices.

With this understanding of how teachers mediated the process of making sense of their own professional learning, questions arise for the explicit ways that policy influences teachers' understandings. A surprising aspect for me in the process of data collection was the non-emergence of the explicit role of policy in teachers' discussion of their professional learning. Teachers were little able to refer to policies that might be

influencing the nature of their professional learning. Nor were they able to discuss in a direct manner which policies or initiatives directly impacted their professional learning. There was little connection/awareness for the teachers in how professional learning was structured within the context of school improvement policies and consequently how it affected teachers' experiences of their daily practice. Although it was a part of what they did, they were not able to confidently identify how it was developed in policy. In the individual accounts and focus group sessions, the understanding of the role of policy within the collective context of policy was little understood by teachers in an explicit way.

Bourdieu (1991) understood a relationship between collective space and individual agency. In understanding how individuals act within collective spaces, Bourdieu (1991) discussed "the sense of the position one occupies in social space" (p. 235). He argued that in order to understand how actors move within open spaces, consideration must be given to the context of their lived experiences. The ways individual actors understand their experiences in collective spaces is "learned and constructed in, through and as a part of the business of everyday life" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 69). In this way, "actors do not just confront their current circumstances. They are an integral part of those circumstances. Within them they have grown up, learning and acquiring a set of practical cultural competences, including a social identity" (p. 70).

With this understanding of individuals' agency in collective space, Bourdieu (1990) theorized that understanding the habitus of individuals in society, that is, the structured and structuring dispositions that produce practices in the social world, provides insight to individuals' functions within it. In this way, "agents to some extent fall into the practice that is theirs rather than freely choosing it or being impelled into it by mechanical constraints" (p. 90). Bourdieu commented on the social construction of reality in his assertion that "no doubt agents do construct their vision of the world. But

this construction is carried out under structural constraints" (p. 130). Teachers in this study do act as agents in the construction of policy in their every day lives but construction is contained within the lived experience of the policies. The ways in which policy influences their understandings appears to occur in ways that are not apparent to the teachers.

Because there was a lack of discussion by teachers about policy, it is unclear how exactly policy shapes teachers' understanding of professional learning. Though, it is clear in the conceptualization of teachers' understandings in each context that there is a connection between policy documents and the way teachers understand their own learning. How can we account for the connection if teachers were unable to speak directly about policy? Bourdieu (1991) argued that individual practice is embedded within the collective social construction of an individual's existence in his/her field. Insights from Bourdieu help us to understand the ways that teachers might construct practices that enable them to cope with the pressures of school improvement, and that their own practices are validated when they align with the structures of the system when school improvement targets are met. In the stickiness of policy construction at the school level, teacher professional learning and growth is tightly intermingled with school improvement policies. The daily practice of teachers may require that they focus on attending to the pressures of these policies that have become a part of the lived experience of teaching, disenabling teachers' ability to reflect on them as part of their practice.

If teachers are little able to identify the policy contexts that influence their professional learning, is it important that they begin to do so? Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) suggested the need for a conceptualization of teacher professional learning as "knowledge-of-practice", whereby teachers become engaged in a culture of inquiry in their practice that links professional learning and larger change efforts in schools. Such

change results in teachers transitioning from the notion of improving individual practice to the notion of collaborative inquiry that focuses on larger school change agendas, including notions of school improvement, curriculum change and social justice issues in schools.

> *What may be important here is not the trade-off between an emphasis on the individual development, on the one hand, and larger political agendas on the other. Rather, what is important is whether or not and to what extent opportunities for individual learning and development are understood by the participants in learning communities to be connected to and carried out in the service of larger agendas for school and school change. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 281)*

Furthermore, doing so requires teachers to become aware of the political and social context in which their professional learning is situated, so that teachers may challenge the purposes and underlying assumptions of educational change rather than simply helping to "carry out the most effective methods for pre-determined ends" (p. 295). Doing so requires teachers to have a sense of awareness of policy context and the way that their own professional learning is embedded within these contexts.

Chapter Seven: Recommendations and Conclusions

This research study set out to compare two teacher professional learning contexts as they are situated within school improvement policies. Qualitative comparative case studies were used of two schools, one school in England and another school in Alberta, to engage in interpretivist study to examine: 1) how teacher professional development in conceptualized within policy; 2) how teachers conceptualize their professional learning in each context; and 3) in what ways policy context may influence teachers' understandings of their professional learning.

In my analysis, I drew upon professional learning literature, recognizing how the phenomenon is embedded within the policy context of school improvement discourse, to understand how knowledge is constructed in collaborative and individual practices in the two schools. This analysis was useful to understand the variability of professional learning conceptualizations and the way that teachers interact with policy in discussing their professional learning. In this chapter, I will summarize the major findings from the study. Based on the findings, I will present suggestions for teacher practice within their professional learning and possible considerations for future research.

Summary of Interpretations

Teacher learning models are diverse and represent a discontinuous field of study (Wilson & Berne, 1999). In comparing the ways that professional learning is understood in these two different policy contexts, the nature of teacher professional learning as it is understood in the research literature can be better understood. While it would be reasonable to expect variance and discontinuity between two schools in England and Alberta, there were central themes that emerged in the teachers' understandings in both schools. The differences and variances in understanding of the concepts within those themes provide some insight to how professional learning is experienced in the field, how

it is context dependent and how the variability demonstrates significant differences in meaning for teachers.

The ways that teachers conceptualize teacher knowledge is variable between these two contexts of professional learning. In the context of Bridle Path Junior School, it was evident that conceptions of both "knowledge-for-practice" and "knowledge-in-practice" are present within teachers' understandings of their learning. There was a marked shift towards a "knowledge-in-practice" conceptualization as particular projects advanced in development at Bridle Path Junior School, indicating an increased valuing of teachers' own knowledge constructed through the experience of their teaching practice. Additionally, there are possibilities for variable understandings within a single initiative, suggesting that the way that knowledge is understood emerges and changes as teachers develop in their professional growth through professional learning opportunities.

Knowledge construction in the process of professional learning is not necessarily dichotomous in nature, being either individual or collaborative, but rather involves both individual learning and collaborative learning that may inform each other in a symbiotic relationship. In this way, it is important that school jurisdictions value both forms of learning, recognizing that there is benefit for teacher knowledge to develop by engagement in varied professional learning.

The notion of collaboration is prominent in school improvement policies and teachers' understandings of their professional learning. Yet, the ways in which collaboration leads to concrete professional growth is not clear.

In the context of this study, it is clear that teachers' understandings of what constitutes student learning is variable in different contexts, as well. The data from this study indicate that student learning is conceptualized in different ways so that the relationship between teacher professional learning and student learning is variable in the field.

The data indicate a clear relationship between policy documents and the way teachers understand their own learning. Because there was a lack of explicit discussion by teachers about policy, it is unclear how exactly policy context shapes teachers' understanding of professional learning. However, the notion of policy in teachers' tacit understanding suggests policy directives were internalized and materialized at the school level as teachers in this study made sense of their role in school improvement processes.

Recommendations for Teacher Practice and Policy

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued for "knowledge of practice" in order that teachers may challenge the purposes and underlying assumptions of educational change rather than simply helping to "carry out the most effective methods for pre-determined ends" (p. 295). Therefore, opportunities for teachers to become aware of the policies both in their school jurisdiction and within the larger context of school improvement policies could be useful in placing teachers in an empowered position to be able to effect school improvement that can interact with teachers' knowledge of practice as it is constructed in their daily teaching.

Collaboration was a significant theme in the data. A focus on developing teacher-researcher relationships so that teachers themselves can help to reflect what happens in the collaboration process that leads to improved student learning. In doing so, teachers can take further ownership for their learning by being able to say what works in the context of their own classroom, and to ensure that their professional learning is geared toward the children with whom they work everyday.

The findings in this study suggest that policy context does matter in how teachers understand and make sense of their roles within teacher professional learning. Therefore, I would argue that policymakers must be considerate of how policy is taken up by teachers in schools. Expecting success in transporting policy from one context to another

fails to consider the agency of actors to interpret policy in the process of implementation. Acknowledging the notion of engagement with policy, rather than mere implementation, will require that policymakers work with teachers to create policy that contains spaces within its design for the teachers to make interpretations based on their own local knowledge. Doing so values teachers' knowledge of practice. However, that knowledge should also be reflective of the needs of the students as learners in the classroom. What we do as teachers, and policymakers, should acknowledge the actual learning needs of the students in our classrooms.

Considerations for Future Research

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) argued for conceptualizations of teacher professional learning as "knowledge-of-practice" in order that teachers may become more active in challenging the purposes and underlying assumptions of educational change. Doing so assumes that there is a role for teachers to play in effecting change in large-scale school policy through their professional learning opportunities. Further research into how teachers might use their professional learning as a mechanism for larger scale change is needed. Case studies that examine situations where teachers have identified themselves as empowered actors in policy construction might provide insight to how "knowledge-of-practice" is developed, and in what ways teachers engage with policy to make change that matters to teachers.

The ways in which collaboration leads to teacher professional growth must be considered by educational research. Hargreaves (2006) claimed that teachers must "ensure that their *collaborative energies* are *directly* connected *to* the task of *improving teaching, learning and caring* in school" (p. 687). Achieving this task requires teachers to work collaboratively towards professional growth but also raises questions about how collaboration is conceptualized. Teacher collaboration is often used to increase teacher

workload under the guise of enhanced working relationships (Renihan & Renihan, 1992).

Without teachers being able to directly express how professional learning addresses their

own professional growth in the context of the classroom, I question how we can ensure

that working together better addresses teachers' professional needs rather than simply

leading to enhanced teacher workloads. The tension between quality versus quantity of

teacher professional learning needs to be addressed through long-term qualitative studies

that seek to involve the teacher in the research process.

Explanations for the variability of knowledge conceptualizations are not

understood through analysis of the data in this study. The extent to which the individual

teacher disposition or school culture impacts on this knowledge is not known and

requires further study. Also, further research into other contexts and other schools within

the same policy contexts could be explored to study other factors that impact on teachers'

understanding of their own learning.

Additionally, this study provides some insight to how teachers understand the

notion of knowledge within their own practice. The nature of teacher knowledge has

emerged as a theme within this study. Juxtaposed against the variable notion of

collaboration, the nature of teacher knowledge presents ambiguities about just what is

teacher knowledge. Future studies that explore the epistemology of teacher knowledge

could provide enhanced understandings of how collaboration generates knowledge, how

teacher knowledge is connected to better student learning, and the role of policy in

guiding how knowledge is constructed among teachers. Doing so would require studies

that consider varied contextual factors in schools, perhaps through longitudinal studies

that allow for deeper study of the phenomenon of teacher learning.

Finally, I question the nature of teacher-driven professional learning, for its

assumptions that it might always lead to teacher growth and enhanced student learning.

How much of teacher professional learning is truly teacher-driven, rather than actually

determined by competing pressures of accountability and reform? Ball (2006) claimed that decisions are "informed by the priorities, constraints and climate set by policy environment" (p. 696). The relationship between teacher growth, teacher-driven professional learning and policy needs further consideration to ensure that children's learning is not lost in the complexity of school reform.

Final Reflections

As a beginning researcher, I, too, engaged in a process of professional learning. In doing so, I felt a heightened sense of inquiry into my own professional learning experiences as a teacher, into what I have learned from engaging in both individual and collaborative learning in various primary school contexts, and the ways that the policy contexts have shaped who I am as a teacher. However, I have also engaged in reflection about the process of being a researcher. I have questioned, "Who am I as a researcher? How can I access the knowledge that is being constructed by the teachers? In what ways can I interpret the observations and conversations I record in processes of data collection? What are the political contexts of my understanding of who I am that enable or constrain my ability to access the teachers' understandings of their own professional learning?" I wrote in my Researcher's Journal, had conversations with colleague graduate students and university professors who have mentored me in the research process, and read through data transcripts over and over again, reliving the conversations I have shared with the teachers in this study. Engaging in this process of reflection has helped me to understand the nature of "knowledge-of-practice" that Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have advocated. The knowledge that has been generated in this process has, indeed, represented a significant professional growth for me as a teacher and beginning researcher.

I have formed a deeper, meaningful appreciation for the value in locating yourself as researcher to the participants in the study. This became evident as one teacher questioned at the end of her interview, "So do you teach? You aren't teaching right now, are you?" In the brief time she took to ask these two questions, I immediately felt as an extreme outsider to the school, to her experience as a teacher and to the learning process I hoped to build with the participants in the study. In response to her question, I explained my teaching experience to her, and that I *was* still teaching, as a sessional instructor to third year education students in the undergraduate program at the university. I made the point clear that I was still a teacher. I had, in fact, taught for several years in elementary schools, also in a rural setting. We continued our conversation after the tape recorder was turned off but a transformation in our researcher-participant relationship occurred so that it was like a new interview had begun. I felt that she opened up to me in a more meaningful way. She was a different person in front of me, and in reflection, I realized, too, that I was a different person as a researcher. I have not used that interview data in this study as I felt the recorded interview was not, in fact, a successful one, mostly due to my own emerging researcher skills. However, it was one of the most useful interviews in terms of my own professional learning as researcher. I reflected on this teacher's questions in my Researcher's Journal, and felt that I must ensure that I locate myself as a teacher and researcher to the participants, by situating myself in a more meaningful way to the teachers before I continued with the interviews. I ensured that time was spent before each interview, to situate myself as a teacher with a multiplicity of identities: teacher, graduate student and researcher. It is a lesson that was rewarded.

In the focus group interview at the end of the period at Valleyview School, one teacher remarked to me, "Thank you for doing this with us. You've really made me think about what we do. I don't think I would have thought about these things before." Other teachers confirmed that the interview process had developed an increased awareness for

the teachers about what they do in their professional learning and what role they play in making decisions, questioning why they do what they do. The same teacher later commented, "And you know, you're really talented at this. I really felt like you honestly cared about what we were saying. You really wanted to know what we had to say. Thank you." As a beginning researcher, I often questioned my ability to do this work. The recognition from the teacher who participated in the study was an immense surprise and validation of what I tried to do. I do care about what the participants have to say. I do care about who they are as teachers and what they experience in the daily practice of teaching and learning. Most importantly, I felt a great sense of accomplishment that the participants were able to benefit from the research, too. The notion that the process of talking with teachers about their own professional learning created an increased awareness for one teacher about her own practice, and the context in which her practice was situated, was evidence that "knowledge-of-practice" can be developed in a meaningful way for both the teachers in schools and the academics with whom they collaborate.

Finally, at the end of the study, I remembered a conversation that I had previously had with a visiting scholar to our university from England. I was pleased to share my ideas for my research with this scholar, hoping that he might have some insight for me before I began my research (an example of "knowledge-for-practice" within my own professional learning opportunities as a graduate student). However, I was disappointed by the response from the scholar, who was certain that there were profound barriers to me doing research in a school in England, for there would be nuances within the context of the English school system that I would never be able to understand as an outsider. I discussed my disappointment with other professors here at the University of Alberta, who reassured me that, while research must be conducted with caution and

attention, that my teaching experience in the English system would be a rich resource for me to use as I sought to understand what I was seeing in the research process.

In completing this research study, I am now able to reflect on my own sense that I felt more of an insider within the English school than I did with the school only a few hundred kilometres away from my home in Edmonton. Throughout the data collection period, I often questioned, "Why is that?" In analyzing the data from the research study, it became clear that the teachers at Bridle Path Junior School had a strong sense of "knowledge-for-practice" in their understandings of professional learning, whereby formal knowledge and theory are generated by scholars and researchers for teachers to improve their practice. In fact, upon arrival at Bridle Path Junior School, a teacher remarked, "The researcher is here", which left me in a brief state of shock that someone referred to me as "a researcher". My positioning as an outside researcher, travelling across the Atlantic Ocean to collect data, is congruent within a conceptualization of professional learning *for* practice.

However, on the contrary, as an outsider to the field of practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004) in which knowledge for teacher professional learning was constructed through processes of reflection at Valleyview School, there was tension in my ability to engage more fully with the teachers. While the teachers made me feel very welcome and participated with a zealous effort, I felt myself as more of an outsider to their context and experiences. The nature of the phenomenon that is being researched has a significant impact on how I engaged with the phenomenon as well. Through a process of deep reflection of the situated context of the research sites and discussion with other professional researchers, I was able to understand more about the political context of researching that will influence my future research practice.

I have enjoyed this study in that it has been an opportunity to learn about teacher professional learning and policy contexts, but also to learn about myself. I am a teacher,

who values the local knowledge that is constructed in the practice of teaching but questions how we can ensure that our professional learning as teachers leads to better learning for students. I am a graduate student, who seeks to learn more theory to understand the experiences of my teaching practice but continually questions how to apply that theory to inform my own future studies. Also, I am a researcher who is beginning to understand the importance of ensuring research matters to those with whom we work and study.

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APPENDIX A: Letter of Initial Contact

Hello,

My name is Melody Viczko. I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. I am involved in a research project exploring teachers' understanding of professional learning in two policy contexts.

I am conducting a study that will examine the influence of policy context on teachers' understandings of their own professional learning. I hope that this study will yield insights for practitioners, provide direction for research, guide policy development, and influence leader preparation and development initiatives. Most importantly, this type of descriptive research will lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of teacher conceptualizations of professional learning in a variety of contexts.

I will conduct one-on-one confidential interviews, administer questionnaires, observe staff meetings, and conduct focus group discussions. I am looking for teachers who might be willing to participate in these—to discuss the topics outlined above. The Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta has approved the plan for this research on ethical grounds.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and if you participate in an interview I will strive to protect your confidentiality.

If you are interested in participating, I would be very pleased to organize a time to sit down with you and chat. Please send me an email at mviczko@ualberta.ca or contact me by phone at 1-780-707-5464, or you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Paul Newton, at 1-780-492-0773.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Best regards,

Melody Viczko

Hello,

My name is Melody Viczko. I am a graduate student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, Canada. I am involved in a research project for my Master's thesis on exploring teachers' understanding of professional learning in two policy contexts.

I am conducting a study that will examine the influence of policy context on teachers' understandings of their own professional learning. I hope that this study will yield insights for practitioners, provide direction for research, guide policy development, and influence leader preparation and development initiatives. Most importantly, this type of descriptive research will lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of teacher conceptualizations of professional learning in a variety of contexts. I am looking for teachers to participate in this study.

During this study, you will be required to participate through all the following research methods:
- **Confidential interviews**
  - 1-2 semi-structured interviews lasting 30 minutes each
- **Questionnaires**
  - 1 questionnaire which would require 15 minutes of your time, to be completed and then returned to me in a sealed envelope to ensure your confidentiality
- **Focus Group Discussions**
  - 1 focus group session with approximately 8 to 10 participants for approximately 60 minutes

The interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded. As a participant, you will be provided with the opportunity to check the data as it is collected. Transcripts of the interviews will be transcribed by personnel who will agree to abide by a confidentiality agreement.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the following rights:
- To not participate in the study.
- To withdraw at any time without prejudice to pre-existing entitlements, and to continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate.
- To opt out without penalty and to have any collected data withdrawn from the data base and not included in the study. If you choose to opt out of the study, data will be withdrawn and returned to you prior to data analysis. Also, you will have the opportunity to look at the transcripts of the interviews and focus groups to ensure that they capture your intended meaning and to ensure that any identifying information has been removed from your documents. This will be the participants' final opportunity to withdraw from the study.
- To privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Participants' name will not appear on any information presented. In any publications or reports, I will refer to participants and the school system with pseudonyms. Each participant will have the opportunity to review the final document and will have the right to request that information that

might identify them be deleted from the completed report. There are risks from conducting research in focus groups; however, all participants will reminded of their position of trust and rights to confidentiality during these sessions.

- To safeguards for security of data. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years in the Department of Educational Policy Studies (as required by University of Alberta guidelines), and will not allow for identification of any individual. Given these precautions, there are no foreseeable risks in this study. After the data analysis, all data will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.
- To disclosure of the presence of any apparent or actual conflict of interest on the part of the researcher(s).
- To a copy of a report of the research findings. You can indicate your interest to receiving a copy of the research findings by emailing me at mviczko@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta, Canada. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751. Additionally, you may contact Dr. P. Newton, my supervisor, at the University of Alberta at (780) 492-0773.

I am providing two copies of this introductory and consent letter, one to be signed and returned and one for you to keep for your own records.

Please sign and return one copy of this form to your headteacher, in the sealed envelope.

- -

I, _____, understand the guidelines above, agree to participate in this study and have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Participant's signature: Researcher's signature:

_____   _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Confidentiality Agreement

This form may be used for individuals hired to conduct specific research tasks, e.g., transcribing, interpreting, translating, entering data, shredding data.

Project title – A Comparative Study of Teacher Development in Educational Reform Discourses

I, ————————————————— , the —————————————————————
       (specific job

description, e.g., interpreter/translator) have been hired to   —————————————————————

I agree to -

- keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.

- keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.

- return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.

- after consulting with the *Researcher(s),* erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

- other (specify).

—————————————————   —————————————————   —————————————
         (Print Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

Researcher(s)

—————————————————   —————————————————   —————————————
         (Print Name)   (Signature)   (Date)

APPENDIX D: Data/Transcript Release Form for Interview and Focus Group Participants

Dear _____,

I very much appreciate your participation in this study. Please fill in your name below, read the paragraphs that follow, and if you are comfortable that the transcript accurately reflects your words, please sign where indicated.

      I, _____, have reviewed the completed transcript of my personal interview and acknowledge that the transcripts accurately reflect what I said in my interview(s).

      I authorize the researchers to use any artefacts that I have provided for this study.

      I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Melody Viczko to be used in the manner described in the letter of consent.

      I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Participant's signature: Researcher's signature:

_____   _____

Date:

_____

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your contributions are greatly

appreciated.

Appendix E: Letter of Ethics Approval

Notification of Approval - Delegated Review

From:	Dr. Ingrid Johnston, Chair Education, Extension, Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB)
To:	Melody Viczko
Study ID:	Pro00002539
Study Title:	An Examination of Comparative Teacher Development Policies in Educational Reform Discourses
Study Investigator:	Melody Viczko

	Approval Date	Expiration Date	Approved Document
Date of Informed Consent:	11/7/2008	11/7/2009	Introductory and Consent letter Alberta B.doc
	11/7/2008	11/7/2009	Introductory and Consent letter England B.doc
	11/7/2008	11/7/2009	Data and Transcript Release D.doc

Funding/Sponsor (free text):	There are no items to display
Funding/Sponsor (validated):	There are no items to display

Thank you for submitting the above ethics application to the Education, Extension, and Augustana Research Ethics Board. Jennifer Kelly has reviewed your application and, on behalf of the Education, Extension, Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB), approved it as of 11/7/2008 . The approval will expire on 11/7/2009.

A renewal report must be submitted prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval at that time. If you do not renew before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Sincerely,

Ingrid Johnston, Chair
Education, Extension, Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB)

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).