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Attaining professional goals using the expertise of colleagues

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Attaining Professional Goals
Using the Expertise of Colleagues

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October, 1999.

ABSTRACT

This study examines one method of providing professional development, which addresses the individual needs of experienced successful classroom teachers. It is a qualitative investigation into how teachers attain their professional goals using the expertise of their colleagues through a collaborative and collegial process. Data were collected from regular meetings by the participants and their personal journal entries related to the project. The data were then compiled in a context chart and a descriptive matrix, to enable case studies to be compiled. The findings contribute to enhanced understanding of how professional development may be provided to experienced classroom teachers.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

E. R. Pashley.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Educational change involves learning how to do something new. Given this, if there is a single factor crucial to change it is professional development. In its broadest definition professional development encompasses what teachers bring to the profession and what happens to them through out their careers. (Fullan, 1991, p. 289)

Providing professional development for teachers is a complex task as professional development can mean different things to different people. Professional development is the growth of any aspect of a teacher, which impacts on and enhances their teaching practice. This professional development umbrella encompasses further skill development to enable the teacher to be a better classroom technician and to provide better opportunities for learning, investigation, consultation and evaluation than are already occurring in the classroom (Little, 1993, p.133). Professional development can occur in many forms, and the form regarded as being beneficial to one group may not be considered as such by another group.

Teachers regard professional development as very important and there are frequent opportunities for teachers to attend sessions to increase their knowledge or to become aware of new teaching strategies. The most common format in those sessions is "information giving" to participants by a presenter who is regarded as having specific expertise. Because of time

constraints and the nature of the format, interaction in the sessions is usually nil, or at the very best, extremely limited. A short question time at the conclusion of the presentation does not provide an opportunity for an inquiry approach by the teacher.

The participants accept this mode of professional development because importance is placed on the content of the session even though particular individual difficulties will often occur when implementing the new ideas in the classrooms. Some teachers tend to choose to not attend "information giving" sessions as the distribution of a well-written handout, which they can study carefully, is considered by teachers as a better use of their time.

The Problem

One problem teachers experience with "information giving" professional development is that often the topic is not considered by the teacher as an area of need. Teachers are aware of the numerous facets of teaching and learning. There are countless areas within the educational arena related to special needs of students in the classroom which they would like to pursue and explore more fully. Unfortunately the opportunity for them to become involved in an educational pursuit of their own choice or need is rarely provided by the school. It is often perceived by the administration of the school that good teachers will carry out these pursuits in their own time.

The type of support given to teachers is often dependent on the size of the school, the structure of the school and the priorities of the administration. These factors may determine the direction of the resources in the school and may not include the teachers' preferred topic choice of professional development.

The professional development (PD) offered to Education Department teachers as part of the in-school PD, is tied in with packages prepared and presented by members from District Office. An individual or small group pursuit into interest areas reflecting teacher needs may not enter into the recognised professional development arena. Emphasis in teaching seems to be locked into set parameters of *how* to do things and as a result, teachers are becoming increasingly disheartened with the trend of professional development as it is too prescriptive. The development of individual flare is not nurtured and the achievement of personal professional goals is ignored by education decision-makers. The encouragement needed for teachers to be creative in their teaching must be more than verbal support from colleagues, it must be supported by the governing body.

The professional development of teachers must be appropriate to their needs. Experienced classroom teachers should be provided with the opportunity to critically analyse their teaching methods and then have the

support to design and develop different classroom and school practices if and as required.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine and investigate one method of providing professional development that addresses the individual needs of experienced, successful classroom teachers by drawing upon and utilising the expertise of their colleagues in a collaborative and collegial setting.

Background

Professional development in Western Australia has traditionally been linked to curriculum areas, although this began to change with the introduction of the Better Schools Report in 1987. This report initiated the decentralisation of the Education Department in W.A., through the devolution of decision making to schools and the introduction of school development plans.

The content of the Better Schools Report resulted in major restructuring, both of the central education body and of schools. For the report to be accepted by the teaching community, the central body of the education system considered it essential to provide teachers with the opportunity to understand school development with regard to whole school planning and decision making. Consequently, the focus of the professional development sessions changed from classroom curriculum to whole school planning.

The then Ministry of Education planned a series of professional development sessions for each school, which included the creation of the school mission statement, development of the school priority plan and the management information system. Together these components made up the school development plan. The processes used by the facilitators in the formation of the school plan exposed many teachers to a different style of professional development where they were able to have input prior to a decision being made.

Each of the school development plan areas had a large component of new knowledge for the teachers. The participants were encouraged to use their personal and professional expertise wherever possible to interact with colleagues in given tasks, to discuss relevant issues and to be active in the decision making process related to the school development plan. Often however, the process was hurried and the end result was confusion rather than enlightenment making the process more time consuming with only some positive results.

The content and mode of professional development, where interaction occurred between teachers, was different from that which staffs had previously experienced. To move the sessions along and to maximise the time available, staff members were frequently allocated to groups and encouraged to operate in a collaborative and collegial manner. Often the

members of the groups working together were not compatible and in these instances, members were not able to work collaboratively. Dominant group members regularly over-rode others without realising the relevance of collaborative exercise to their classroom practice. Hargreaves (Fullan, 1990, p. 15) refers to this process as *contrived collegiality*.

In the literature, the terms "collaborative" and "collegiality" have been used in many ways, and generally have implied a similar meaning. I consider it important to differentiate between these terms and in this study collaborative refers to colleagues who have similar interests and are willing to inquire and investigate issues pertinent to their teaching styles and ideals. Collegial refers to the support and assistance each member of a group gives and receives from other members in the group

Simultaneous with the development of school planning was the implementation of a language focus in selected primary schools. The language project was to highlight the value of the collaborative approach in professional development.

In Western Australia, in 1989, a Commonwealth Government Specific Purpose Grant was used for the First Steps Programme. This programme was developed to assist primary school children from Years 1-5 who were considered to be at risk in the area of language. Language curriculum

programmes were developed, compiled, and implemented through an innovative model of professional development.

The first phase of the introduction of First Steps was structured to provide teacher relief to allow the classroom teachers time to attend the professional development sessions during school hours. The programme provided teachers, who had been trained in collaborative skills, to work with the teachers in their classroom following the in-service programme. This support maximised the professional development received by the classroom teachers as they had a model and a mentor with them, while they practised the new skills introduced in the professional development sessions.

In 1991/92, the Specific Purpose Grant for First Steps was reduced to such an extent that the collaborative teacher component of the professional development was removed from the programme. In the second phase of First Steps, the professional development model was a series of sessions directly linked to the modules in each of the language areas. This included "walking through" the materials and having each section explained by the facilitator from notes previously prepared by the Central Office First Steps team. The participating teachers then returned to their school with the expectation and hope that they would be able to include these strategies in their teaching repertoire without the support of the mentors who had previously assisted.

Teachers found it very difficult to implement the new strategies without the collaborative and collegial support. The difficulties experienced in incorporating the new strategies diminished the value of attending these later First Steps sessions and participants became disheartened.

The style of professional development adopted in the second phase of First Steps was similar to that employed in the professional development sessions delivered prior to the Better Schools Report. That style comprised of "information giving", regardless of teacher expertise and experience, without support and assistance for implementation in the classroom. Classroom teachers considered phase two less successful than phase one, as the loss of classroom support significantly hampered the inclusion of the First Steps teaching strategies into teachers' repertoires.

The collaborative support method initially used in implementing the First Steps material and strategies into the classrooms was considered highly successful by teachers fortunate enough to have the opportunity of this experience. The teachers recognised that the incorporation of collegial support with collaborative planning and teaching was an effective training method for the development of skills required to implement the strategies of First Steps.

An Emerging Concern

First Steps implementation floundered with the removal of the collaborative teacher programme. This occurrence highlights the value of collaborative planning and collegial support for the success of teacher professional development programmes. The relevance of content also emerged as a vital component of professional development success. Most of the content included in the First Steps modules was not considered "new" to experienced teachers. It was a compilation of strategies that were considered good teaching practices. Many teachers who attended the second phase of the First Steps sessions were already using these strategies in their classroom. The format of the professional development sessions did not allow the participants to build onto the teaching repertoire already in place. Unfortunately current general professional development often seems to ignore one or all of these components.

The decentralisation of decision making throughout the state school system means professional development responsibilities now rest with the school or the district. Training programmes have been developed by centrally based staff to best utilise the available resources within each district. This has resulted in packages being developed for large numbers of teaching staff regardless of teaching experience, size or location of the school. These packages involve workshops in and out of school hours often using staff meeting times and school development days. The content of the packages

includes prepared ideas and materials suitable for a preconceived notion of best teaching practice. These packages neither allow for teacher individualism in the exploration, investigation of the allocated topic or issue, nor for the critical analysis of the practices which are already occurring in the classroom.

The continued professional growth and development of experienced classroom teachers has emerged as an area of concern. As a result of the industrial action carried out by the teachers' union in 1995, teachers in 1996 were required to carry out 20 hours of professional development per year with 10 hours of this time to be logged out of school hours. In 1997 the out-of-hours expectation was increased to 15 hours. In 1998 there was no mention of expected professional development hours from the central body or the teachers' union. What was stated was that all school staffs were to complete the centrally prepared Performance Management modules by the end of that year. Classroom teachers, who attended a centrally organised Train the Trainer course in 1996, presented these modules to the schools in their vicinity. These sessions were conducted in and out of school hours.

The impact of these conditions, in the area of professional development, was as follows. In 1996 and 1997 District Offices sent lists of free one hour seminars to the schools in their districts to assist teachers who were experiencing difficulties in finding other sources of professional

development. The seminars were on a variety of topics and could be accredited towards the out-of-school hours professional development teachers were required to attend during the year. While the personnel at the District Offices provided a service and the seminars that were offered were considered necessary by some teachers, what was provided was information. This information may not have necessarily impacted on the operations of every teacher who attended the seminar. The vital question was whether the attendance of teachers at these seminars satisfied a professional need or whether their attendance simply fulfilled the out-of-hours requirement set out by Central Office?

As the content of the performance management modules had no relevance to classroom teaching, they had little impact on classroom teachers or on their work. Teachers tolerated them, as it was a directive from the administration that all teachers attend these sessions.

Little (1993) has recognised many of the shortcomings of non-specific professional development. To develop a teacher professionally, an opportunity and context should be provided that will allow them to learn, investigate, experiment, consult and evaluate that which is occurring in their classroom. In the case of experienced teachers, non-specific professional development provision is inappropriate. To cater for the experienced teachers' needs demands a different style of professional development,

which enables them to explore and develop their practices, skills and knowledge.

Rationale

Teaching is an extremely challenging and complex profession and support by colleagues is essential for the well being of teachers (Bennett, 1996). When teachers congregate, the conversation usually revolves around the students and the school or classroom programmes that are currently being delivered. Teachers who sustain professional growth are interested in how other teachers deliver curriculum even though they may not necessarily agree with one another. This form of interaction could be termed "social brainstorming". Outcomes from these sessions give teachers the seeds with which to experiment and evaluate processes that have been successful for their colleagues. At the very least, discussion gives them confidence that their peer group deems the practices they successfully employ worthy of consideration.

Often the concept of professional development is in the form of "topping up" teachers, where the rationale seems to be that improved quality of teaching is related to the amount of information given. Experienced, successful classroom teachers have already developed their teaching repertoire for the local context. What is required for them is an opportunity to critique what is occurring in their classroom and investigate methods which may be more

beneficial to their students. It may be necessary to alter an existing practice by trialling alternative strategies. Given the opportunity, the discussion of strategies other teachers are using in their classroom may provide a more intensive array of techniques from which to choose.

Frequently when problems or hiccups occur in classroom management or the delivery of curriculum, there is little support available for the classroom teacher. The committed teacher will try to overcome the problem by exploring available avenues. These may include trying to work on the problem by locating resources in the area, attending a relevant professional development session if one is available and/or discussing the problem with someone who might have experienced a similar situation.

Teachers need to be encouraged to critically analyse what has occurred in their classroom and to improve their quality of teaching by building on successful teaching practices. The improvement of skills, discovery and development of new practices, and an increase in teacher expertise, may have a direct result in the improvement of student performances.

This improvement of student performance is the ultimate goal towards which teachers strive and towards which professional development is usually directed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the exploration of a method of successful professional development, which would cater for the needs of experienced classroom teachers, it is important to acknowledge the literature that relates to attaining professional goals using the expertise of colleagues. Related areas include:

- *selection of an appropriate style of professional development befitting the participants;*
- *development of a collegial group incorporating collaborative planning;*
- *use of reflection techniques in teaching and planning.*

Modes of Professional Development

There are many different modes of teacher professional development and each would be considered successful when the particular style was suited to the needs of the audience as well as the achievement of the stated objectives. There are some modes more appropriate for particular circumstances such as the launch of a new document or a syllabus change. In these cases, the need to reach the appropriate people as quickly as possible is paramount so an "en masse" information session might be most appropriate. On the other hand, the use of this mode would most likely prove to be inappropriate for the identification of a concern in a particular teaching area.

The emphasis of recent professional development research throughout the western world has been in the area of whole school staff improvement to fit with school restructuring and school planning. Little (1993) described this era as the *climate of educational reform* and stated that the training model traditionally used in teachers' professional development is inadequate in a time of change. The training model she referred to was a "stand and deliver" format where presenters addressed a mass teacher audience. The purpose and objective of these presentations would be "...focussed primarily on expanding an individual repertoire of well defined and skilful practice" (p.129). Hargreaves (1991) commented that professional development of teachers needs to be presented in an interesting and a more meaningful way:

For some reformers, improving teaching is mainly a matter of developing better teaching methods of improving instruction. Training teachers in new classroom management skills, in active learning, co-operative learning, one to one counselling and the like is the main priority. These things are important, but we are also increasingly coming to understand that developing teachers and improving their teaching involves more than giving them new tricks... We are beginning to recognise that, for teachers, what goes on inside the classroom is closely related to what goes on outside it. The quality, range and flexibility of teacher's classroom work is

closely tied up with their professional growth – with the way
that they develop as people and professionals. (p. vi)

Teaching is not limited to occurrences in the classroom, and neither should the professional development of teachers be that narrow. "Professional development today also means providing occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy and learners" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p.597).

There has recently been investigation into an area of action research known as the appreciative inquiry. Bushe (1995) refers to this inquiry as both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action. It is an attempt to generate a collective image of a new and better future by exploring the best of what is and has been. In this study the teacher research will incorporate the recently recognised aspects of the appreciative inquiry. The four principles for carrying out appreciative inquiry are:

- begin with appreciation;
- be applicable;
- be provocative;
- be collaborative.

Bushe explains the process as a grounded observation of the "best of what is", then through vision and logic collaboratively articulate "what might be", to "what should be" and collectively experiment with "what can be". "The great promise of appreciative inquiry is that it will generate self-sustaining momentum within an organisation towards actualizing the values that lead to superior performance" (Bushe, 1995, p.3). In this case the organisation is a particular section of the school.

Alternative provisions need to be incorporated into teacher professional development to enable teachers to effectively participate in the decision making within the school. Teacher development and school development must go hand in hand. According to Fullan (1991, p.289) one cannot occur without the other.

There have been many inquiries as to why professional development has not been successful. As a result of their work in "coaching" teachers, Joyce (1990) documented reasons why professional development was not always successful. Fullan (1991, p.316) using this information as a basis, identified seven main reasons for failure of professional development while Pink (1989), based on his study of four urban improvement projects, found 12 factors that acted as barriers to effective staff development. Fullan and Pink's reasons and barriers shared a common thread as to why teachers were not experiencing success in their professional development. This

thread was based on the one-off workshops, which they both considered widespread but ineffective. This style of professional development did not meet the needs of the targeted audience as people other than those for whom the inservice was intended, frequently elected the topic. Follow up implementation support and evaluation of the workshop occurred infrequently, as did the recognition of differing requirements of the schools and teachers. Very little attention seems to have been paid to Fullan and Pinks' identified factors yet these are considered to be the blocks to successful teacher professional development. Further research in the area of staff development caused Little (cited in Fullan, 1991, p. 317) to report, that most districts provided, "a lengthy menu of short term workshops." What was labelled as professional staff development was in fact referred to by Little as "service delivery" (Fullan, 1991, p. 317). The workshops were based on packaged programmes presented by specially trained presenters, the content was biased toward skill training and was not necessarily appropriate to classroom circumstances.

Successful staff development, like successful change, requires great skill, sophistication and persistence of effort. Loucks-Horsley, Harding, Arbuckle, Murray, Dubea and Williams (1987) state that,

Teacher development is a complex process whose success depends upon a favourable context for learning and practical, engaging activities. Availability of resources, flexible working

conditions, support and recognition can make all the difference in the desire of teachers to refine their practice. Similarly, staff development experiences that build on collegiality, collaboration, discovery and solving real problems of teaching and learning summon the strength within a staff, instead of just challenging them to measure up to somebody else's standard. The focal point is the individual working with others, trying to do the best possible job of educating children. When staff development emphasises an idea or approach without considering the person(s) who will implement it, the design and results are weakened. (p. 7)

The underlying premise through all of the research carried out on professional development is that it must be ongoing and carried out in a conducive environment. Fullan concurred with both Stallings' (1989) model and Little's (1993) framework which both emphasise that for staff and professional development to be effective, the process must be conducted in a supportive environment.

Stallings (1989) stated that teachers are more likely to change their behaviour and continue to use new ideas under certain conditions. Her model for successful staff development included:

- ♦ learn by doing - try, evaluate, modify, try again;

- ◆ link prior knowledge to new information;
- ◆ learn by reflecting and solving problems;
- ◆ learn in a supportive environment - share problems and successes (p. 4)

Little (1993, p.138) developed a framework for successful professional development based on six principles of the delivery.

1. Professional development must provide a meaningful intellectual, social and emotional interaction with ideas and materials that can be incorporated into discourse with colleagues and peers.
2. Professional development needs to consider the context in which the content is used and the experience of each individual teacher.
3. Professional development offers support for the differences in professional discussion and provides the opportunity for collaboration and long term inquiry.
4. Professional development includes whole school practices and interconnects with the relevant classroom.
5. Professional development encourages all members of the school community to use inquiry techniques.
6. Professional development will ensure that the teacher interests and institutional interests are not working against each other.

These six principles encompass the 10 characteristics of successful teacher professional development summarized by Loucks-Horsley and associates

and the 10 features identified as indicative of effective practices by Dunlop (1990). However, as Collins (1991, p. 219) points out, even though we know, from research, a surprising amount about how to make professional development of teachers successful, the administrators of our educational systems do not necessarily follow such advice.

In his guidelines for effective professional development, Fullan (1991) suggests.

All promoters of professional development should pay attention to and worry about two fundamental requirements: (1) incorporating the attributes of successful professional development in as many activities as possible, and (2) ensuring that the ultimate purpose of professional development is less to implement a specific innovation or policy and more to create individual and organizational [sic] habits and structures that make continuous learning a valued and endemic part of the culture of schools and teaching. (p.341-3)

Fullan also suggests that the ultimate goal would be altering the culture of learning for adults and students so that engagement and betterment would be a way of life in schools.

We will have arrived when professional development as the workshop or the course gives way to how the teacher and the

administrator go about seeking and testing improvements as part of their everyday work inside and outside the school. In this way the variety of formal and informal learning experiences would merge – training and sharing workshops, teacher-teacher interaction, one to one assistance through coaching and mentoring, meetings trying out new approaches, observing and being observed, individual and team planning, monitoring results and other inquiry, and the like. Thus, learning by educators would not just occur during formal workshops, but would become a natural part of the work setting.

As long as there is a need for improvement, namely forever, there will be a need for professional development. Problems of teaching in the modern society are getting more complex. In-built professional development of the type described is the premier strategy for coping with growing complexity. People change by doing things in conjunction with others, while obtaining new insights and commitments to do better. (p. 344)

Lieberman (1994, p.15), recognising that some benefit can be achieved from attending workshops and in-services with good presenters, believes that

teachers need to be considered as adult learners. Effective teacher development requires a major commitment to provide the kind of conditions that make possible teachers' continual growth. As society changes and evolves so too must the strategies by which we prepare our children for their responsibilities. The extension of this is that the procedures for the preparation and nurturing of the teacher must also change and evolve to fit the scene. This is supported by Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995, p. 598) "Effective professional development requires the teachers to be learners as well as teachers and allows them to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role."

Characteristics of effective professional development as stated by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) are based on the six principles developed by Little. This style of professional development moves from the old models previously used in teacher development to a new image encompassing adult learning concepts. Policies regarding teaching and teachers need amending to allow schools and teachers to have more responsibility for student learning:

Though the outlines of a new paradigm for professional development policy are emerging, the hard work of developing concrete exemplars of the policies and practices that model "top-down support for bottom-up reform" has only just begun. The changed curriculum and pedagogy of

professional development will require *new* policies that foster new structures and institutional arrangements for teachers' learning. At the same time, we will need to undertake a strategic assessment of existing policies to determine to what degree they are compatible with a vision of learning as constructed by teachers and students and with a vision of professional development as a lifelong, inquiry-based, and collegial activity... New approaches to the professional education of teachers are needed, and they require new structures and supports. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p.598)

Development of a Collegial Group Incorporating Collaborative Planning

Ingvarson (1982) carried out research on the impact of in-service programmes. Teachers were asked to consider the sources of actual change they had made. Contact with other teachers rated higher than written information, inservice courses, regional consultants or any other sources. Peer interaction was deemed to be a powerful learning device.

Thirteen years later, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin wrote:

To serve teachers' needs, professional development must embrace a range of opportunities that allow teachers to share what they know and what they want to learn and to connect

their learning to the contexts of their teaching. Professional development activities must allow teachers to engage actively in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time and to reflect on the process as well as on the content of what they are learning. (1995, p. 599)

Education researchers have concurred that teachers need to be actively involved with other teachers in furthering their educational pursuits. Little (1984) reported that collaborative teams showed the potential power of people working together to learn, to support, to practice new skills and attitudes and to improve schools and the relationships among people in them. Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) stated that teachers have not had sufficient opportunity or encouragement to work with their peers, to learn from each other and to develop their expertise as a community.

In a case study of teacher professional development compiled by Retallick and Brennan (1995), teachers identified an important source of learning – their colleagues:

Teachers learn from each other both in planned activities and informal ways eg. discussions in the staffroom. In collaborative school cultures where teachers are keen to share ideas with colleagues there is likely to be more workplace learning occurring than in individualistic cultures.

Whilst the research does not suggest that this is an immutable law (there are cases of significant workplace learning which are essentially individualistic) it is safe to claim that teachers generally feel that having a someone or a group "to bounce ideas off" is an important source of learning. A collaborative culture is more likely to encourage risk-taking with new approaches and strategies since the risk of failure is shared and therefore less threatening for each individual. An ethos of caring about colleagues was particularly evident in some of the research schools and teachers believed that this was important for their workplace learning. (p.8)

Teachers working collaboratively require situations in and out of school surrounds where they are able to explore, discuss and investigate ideas pertinent to their experience and level of expertise. This view, according to Lieberman (1994), accepts the understanding that teachers are reflective practitioners, and that they have a knowledge base, which is continuously being built upon through the ongoing inquiry into their own practice. This understanding is incorporated with the notion of collaboration with colleagues who are involved in discussions on re-evaluating values and practices.

Teachers working with colleagues in a collaborative manner provide a supportive atmosphere in which teachers can learn from one another. The learning may encompass many areas as the strengths of the group unfold. This collaborative culture in a school or group needs to be nurtured and members of the collaborative must participate willingly in the process. According to McLaughlin (1994), the elements that encourage collegiality within the staff or group include the building of a professional community. A community has a problem solving structure in place with the teachers having some influence and control over their work. A comfortable working mode of collegiality promotes openness and trust within the group and allows for a professional relationship to develop among teachers.

The trust that develops within the collegial group allows and would indeed encourage the participants to share concerns that were being experienced. The group would be used as a support to develop new ideas or solve any problems. Situations such as this occur infrequently in teaching and rarely are there opportunities for teachers to relate their stories in a meaningful way to colleagues. Connelly and Clandinin (1995) believe teachers use narrative to make sense of an experience. By telling a story about themselves, they relive the experience and try to identify a purpose for the incident to enable them to plan and develop strategies for dealing with that incident if it should reoccur. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) recognise that teachers use stories to share professional knowledge; telling a story is

sharing an incident. They identify three types of stories that are told by teachers; *sacred stories*, *cover stories* and *secret stories*.

The *sacred story* is what **should** be happening in the classroom - the theory, research and knowledge – even though the teacher may not have the expertise. These stories are told to teachers by the schools and educational systems. The *cover stories* are those where teachers tell the "accountability" story of their classroom. This would include the planning information, evaluation and assessment strategies that are in place. The teachers portray themselves as the expert outside the classroom. The *secret stories* are about what actually occurs in the classroom. These stories are usually told to the few trusted colleagues in a safe place, where support is available. This safe place could be a collegial group.

Use of Reflection Techniques in Teaching and Planning

Statements have been made by researchers that teachers are reflective practitioners if they operate in a 'collaborative' mode (Lieberman, 1994; Little, 1990, 1993; Hopkins, 1987) and that they are reflective professionals who construct meaning (Korthagen, 1993). Yet the education of teachers tends to neglect the importance of reflection on personal and professional experience for the purpose of restructuring practice. Reflection seems to be the skill that teachers develop to analyse what has occurred in the

classroom. While reflection can be carried out individually, it has more significance if done collaboratively (Connelly, Clandinin & Fullan, 1993, p.3).

Reflection is founded on the belief that knowledge about teaching is in a tentative and incomplete state. It is a process that is fundamentally about creating improvements in educational practice and hence, best begins with the experiences and not the technical skills of practitioners (Smyth, 1992, p.15).

Schon (1983,1987) espouses two elements of reflective practice; reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The first occurs when the person who is involved in the action, actually changes something within a situation, which makes an immediate difference to the outcome. The second occurs after a routine action ends up with an unexpected result and the participant reconstructs the experience to interpret what occurred and why. Decisions can be made about alternative actions in similar situations.

Korthagen (1993) concurs with Schon and states that reflection can change future actions. The proponents of action research would agree, as critical reflection of an action is a major basis for an innovative change (Carr & Kemmis, 1988). Action research is engaging systematic reflection on an action in relation to some aspect of the practice being critically analysed. Reflection is a critical phase of the action research process. The process

comprises of identifying a concern; planning an action; carrying out the action; collecting data and reflecting on the data to make a judgement about what occurred and how worthwhile it was. On the basis of the reflection, a further plan is formulated and the process is repeated. There are many published papers extolling the successes of action research as a process.

Louden (1992), Richert (1991) and Smyth (1992) have conducted research based on reflective methods. Louden (1992) worked collaboratively with a classroom teacher in the curriculum areas of science and writing. When discussing the lessons and exploring the issues and the actions of the students and the teacher throughout the lesson, Louden categorised the reflective responses given by the teacher. These categories were technical, personal, problematic and critical interest. The teacher used these four domains to try to analyse her personal and classroom experiences. Louden proposed that these kinds of reflection are those teachers use in their work to construct meaning for what has occurred in the classroom.

Richert (1991) promotes the use of teacher "cases" for reflection and enhanced understanding of how teachers learn. The "cases" are journals kept by teachers and contain records of the events, the problems, the teacher's thoughts, actions and resolutions. The purpose of recording in the journal is to help teachers think about what they are doing and the reason for doing it. Most importantly the journal helps teachers to learn from their

own experience and how to make sense of the complexity of the task at hand. "Teachers learn to be reflective as they learn to think critically about their work and learn to see their work as problematic rather than given" (Richert, 1991, p.125).

As a result of his research, Smyth contends that the classroom is not the only place where a reflective practitioner uses reflective technique. Smyth has identified six key principles that he believes underpin reflective practice.

1. Reflection should not be restricted to technical skills.
2. Reflection should not be restricted to teachers reflecting individually.
3. Reflection is a process of challenging.
4. Reflection is fundamentally about creating improvements in educational practice.
5. Reflection is founded on the belief that knowledge about teaching is in a tentative and incomplete state.
6. Reflection occurs best when it begins with the experience of practitioners. (Smyth, 1992, p. 15-16)

The way forward for Smyth, in terms of encouraging a reflective stance towards teaching, is through teachers asking broad questions about what is worthwhile in teaching and why. He suggests that teachers need to engage in four forms of action and questioning with respect to their teaching:

- Describe – what do I do?

- Inform – what does this mean?
- Confront – how did I come to be like this?
- Reconstruct – how might I do things differently?

Baird (1992) also employs a reflective and metacognitive approach to improve the quality of teaching. He uses the term "collaborative reflection" for teachers reflecting on themselves and their practice within a process of systematic enquiry and by collaboration among members of a group. He provides three guiding principles:

- Converge processes and outcomes in teaching, learning and research;
- Support change by providing adequate and appropriate time, opportunity, guidance and support;
- Base personal and professional improvement on reflection.

The use of reflection techniques in teaching and planning has become more apparent. Teachers, who strive to improve an aspect of their teaching, question their delivery technique used during a particular lesson or topic. This could result in changes being made to improve following lessons. Often this is an involuntary action and not deliberately labelled "reflection". Reflection techniques are an essential tool for classroom teachers and are an integral part of the process in collaborative planning.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

This research contains phenomena, events, institutions, problems, persons and processes. All of which may effect the results of the study. Shulman (1981) suggests:

Educational research methods are forms of disciplined inquiry. They are disciplined in that they follow sets of rules and principles for pursuing investigations... Education itself is not a discipline, but rather a field of study on which we bring to bear the various forms of disciplined inquiry. (p.12)

An eclectic approach was favoured as an appropriate framework for this piece of research. This approach is based on literature from extensive research in the use of reflection techniques in teaching and planning (Schon, 1983, 1987; Korthagen, 1993, Louden, 1992; Richert, 1991; Baird, 1992 and Smyth, 1992) and on the increased attention in the importance of classroom research.

This is a qualitative study using teacher research which is "systematic and intentional inquiry about teaching, learning and schooling carried out by teachers in their own school and classroom settings" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p.27). In teacher research, the teacher becomes an active agent in researching his or her own practice, and gives a subjective account of the aspect being pursued.

The framework for this dissertation takes into account the above research of Cochran-Smith & Lytle together with the four principles the appreciative inquiry offered by Bushe (1995). In practice the teachers' research includes a subjective appreciation of all aspects of planning procedures to achieve desired outcomes. This type of teacher research incorporates the plan – act – reflect cycle of action research with the addition of Bushe's principles. These principles begin with appreciation of where the teacher currently is, so the research topic needs to be appropriate and applicable to the teacher's situation and the plan to be challenging and provocative using a collaborative approach.

Cochran-Smith & Lytle also support the notion that "...research by teachers represents a distinctive way of knowing about teaching and learning, that will alter, not just add to, what we know in the field... Research by teachers will represent a radical change to the current assumptions about the relationships of theory and practice, schools and universities, and inquiry and reform" (1993, p.85).

An observer or facilitator in the same situation provides an objective account. Cochran-Smith and Lytle refer to this as the "inside – outside" perspective.

The key components from the literature which guide this research are:

- Professional development must respond to participants' professional requirements;
- The professional development structure must be flexible, dynamic and responsive to the specific and changing needs of teachers;
- Participants learn in a supportive environment with a collegial group, which utilises collaborative planning;
- Participants strive to attain excellence in a designated [teaching] practice.

Chapter Four: Method of Investigation

The Sample

The three participants in this study teach at one of the largest government primary schools in the metropolitan area. Two were selected from respondents to an invitation issued within the school to middle primary teachers interested in improving any aspect of their classroom practice. Two teachers at the same year level responded. The third is the researcher. This was opportune, as the three had been meeting regularly conducting school "cell" meetings for twelve months. During this time, the three had successfully worked on several year level projects and the collegiality of the group was evident by the ongoing support each participant received from the other two.

Each of the participants has been teaching at the school for a number of years. The school has nearly 1000 students in pre-primary to year 7 with over 45 nationalities represented necessitating an English as a Second Language Centre with 2 full time teachers. The economic status of the population of the school is generally middle class with few unemployed families.

The Data

In qualitative research, Miles and Huberman, (1984) recommend that the methods used in the analysis of the data need to be practical,

communicable and aimed toward interpretive understanding. They point out that "...most published qualitative research provides detailed descriptions of settings, people and processes that were studied, say little about how the research got the information and almost nothing about the specific analysis procedures used" (p. 22). The collection of data from this study is clearly documented, as were the analysis procedures used to form the interpretations. All data used in this research were collected using audiotapes of each meeting and the teachers' journals. From these two sources, information was collated onto a context chart and descriptive matrix (see Appendix A). The context chart was designed to record interactions between group members in relation to particular areas. These areas emerged from important considerations identified in the literature and my own beliefs on collegiality and collaborative practice.

The particular areas on the chart were, referral to group member, offer of support, offer ideas, offer encouragement, offer constructive criticism, positive response to ideas, negative response to ideas and clarification.

The descriptive matrix was a record of exchanged views, reactions and collective thoughts of the group members.

The audiotapes collected from each meeting were replayed and the information was tallied against the appropriate area on the context chart.

The descriptive matrix was incorporated into the array with the context chart. Comments made during meetings were recorded in the boxes of the matrix and this information was then used in the analysis. The data set is available from the author should any one wish to view it.

Peshkin's (1993, p.24) view of areas that result from interpreting qualitative research data are explaining and creating generalisations, developing new concepts, elaborating existing concepts, providing insights that change behaviour / refine knowledge / identify problems, clarifying and understanding complexity and developing theory. The types of outcomes that arise from this research result from themes that emerged from the teachers' research, recurring ideas generated by the participating teachers and comments and reactions to the process throughout the research. These were collated from the audiotapes and the journals.

The design of this study allowed three experienced primary teachers who taught the same year level at the same school, to conduct teacher research and to explore and analyse the methods, practices and skills that were being used in their separate classrooms. The two main data sources for this study were individual teacher journals and the in-school and out-of-school meetings. The teachers involved formed a collaborative group for a school term of ten weeks to provide innovative ideas, encouragement, support and constructive criticism to their colleagues in the group. The data used in this

research were collated from the individual teacher journals and the audio recordings of each meeting.

The Procedure

At the beginning of the first meeting, the researcher explained that the purpose of the group was to explore and trial a procedure that would provide meaningful professional development for experienced classroom teachers drawing upon the expertise of their colleagues. Each participant selected a focus teaching area, which they wished to develop, explore or implement in their classroom through this process.

The research process was described. This included keeping a journal to record their thoughts and experiences for the duration of the research and attending regular fortnightly meetings. At the meetings each person would discuss his or her progress in the focus area. The other group members would assist by offering support and suggestions if difficulties occurred. Clarifying questions were invited and answered. An explanation of the role of the researcher was provided.

The role of the researcher in this study was twofold. First, the researcher compiled each group member's story based on the journals and the audiotapes of the meetings, and second, as an active group member participating in the meetings undertaking the tasks required to pursue a

focus area. This dual role allowed for both the inside perspective of a participant within the group and an outside perspective of the group as a whole. At the first meeting each of the group members expressed their satisfaction and understanding of the procedure.

Teacher Journals

Each participant recorded the area of focus and the reason for the particular selection in their journal. The journal was used to record the events, observations, experiences, thoughts, questions and reflections on practices in the classroom throughout the study. The journals became interactive among the three members of the group when once a fortnight, each was passed on to the other two group members for their scrutiny, written comments and suggestions on the matters recorded by the owner. This exchange was carried out a day prior to each meeting to allow group members some time to reflect on the feedback received from their colleagues, and to ensure maximum use of the meeting time.

Meetings

The purpose of the meetings provided the group with the opportunity to clarify and discuss the comments written in the journals by the other group members, and to collaboratively examine, analyse and interpret the experiences that had occurred during the previous two weeks. During discussions the group offered assistance in the formulation and planning of

the next step or steps towards the achievement of the set goal. This allowed each member to access the collective expertise of the individuals in the group. The meetings were audio recorded for further analysis and the duration of each meeting was accredited as hours of professional development for each participant. The meetings were held every two weeks each lasting approximately two hours.

The most effective way of presenting the data is in the form of a series of case studies, as this allows for each of the participant's stories to unfold.

Chapter Five: Data Collection

The Teachers' Stories

The teachers' stories are compiled through the examination of their personal journals and through analysis of the meeting audiotapes. When compiling the stories of Shirley, Jan and Matthew, it was immediately apparent that they operated very differently in their own classrooms, which impacted on their individual project. This demanded that the records of their individual stories should be prepared in different styles to fairly represent the efforts of each person in the research. The different styles and formats might also reflect the particular qualities of each individual. The stories follow the same format, meeting by meeting accompanied by appropriate journal entries.

When the teachers' stories had been constructed, a copy was given to each and they were invited to comment on the descriptions and to correct any representation that they felt to be inaccurate or unclear. The participants did not make any changes to their stories.

Shirley's Story

Shirley has been teaching for 20 years with experience in all primary year levels. She has taught in both country and metropolitan schools and has been at her current school for five years. When the opportunity arose for her to be involved in a small group learning experience with some of her colleagues, she was extremely enthusiastic and started to plan, prior to the

first meeting, which focus area she would select. When Shirley reported at the meetings, she tended to provide detailed explanations as she had so much background information, which impacted on the development of her idea. I have attempted to be concise in her story yet still allow her enthusiasm in the involvement in this research to be evident.

First meeting (23 April)

I want to change my reporting to parents! I have felt for years that my feedback to parents has been superficial and the only parents that are seen [in interviews] are the ones you (I) don't need to see but even with them the comments are usually meaningless. "Oh, they're doing fine" is a usual line of mine. The parents of strugglers are usually unobtainable. In this time era of accountability I would like to make parents aware of things we do, things we teach and also our expectations. I feel often that they are as complacent in their responses. "Oh well...I was never any good at..." Which I feel is a totally inadequate response. Parents are responsible and so are we. I think I do a good job but with their responsiveness and assistance, things could be a lot better. If parents are aware of what the students should be able to do then surely they could reinforce some areas at home, when they are out, during the hols. etc.

1996 is decision time. I have started sending info home to parents by selecting 5 or 6 children per week. Each week I endeavour to pay close attention to the selected students in their performance [in the classroom], especially in the area being reported on. The two curriculum areas first selected are writing and maths with a few concepts in each. The first problem occurred in the design of the sheets. Originally I wanted to be able to complete the sheets on my computer but with one problem after another with my computer, I have to do the recording on sheets. The sheets were designed so the concept areas had to be selected early in the year, ie writing in sentences, self-correcting, sequencing etc. What I didn't realise was that it would be difficult to link all of the concepts selected in the one area, in the one report. The areas also incorporated a general comment, student and parent comment.

The feedback from some of the parents has been extremely positive so I think what I am doing is going to be worthwhile in the long term. What I need to do is refine the process in time. By the time I collect the relevant information on students, it leaves the weekend to write them up. This has not worked out, as it is never completed. So I changed the time frame from Wednesday to Tuesday instead of Monday to

Friday. The other thing is that I need to spread the writing up over several days.

Streamline the process? How to make more effective use of my time? (Journal Entry)

Jan's response in Shirley's journal –

Streamline idea. Have you considered (once you've established which concept areas you wish to report on) using a tick box approach and commenting on areas of need?

eg. Can use fullstops

Can use capital letters

Comment.

Matthew's response in Shirley's journal –

Am I right in saying that this form of reporting is designed to replace semester reports? I still feel we need formal written reports, you quickly get an idea of where a student is "at" when you pick them up half way through the year. Do your interviews get sidetracked? eg. "Well how is X going in his/her other subjects? Do you time limit each interview?

The decision in choosing a focus area was not a difficult task for Shirley as she had already been working on the development of an idea. In the previous year she had worked with and assisted colleagues at another school in initiating and developing an ongoing progress-reporting package

for each student. Having seen the developed package and heard of the positive effect it was having on the local school community, it was something she wanted to develop for her current students. The design of the package would enable parents to be more regularly informed of their child's progress than, the twice a year reporting procedure that was currently school practice. It would also provide more information on the student's development of the skills within the subjects taught in the classroom. This would result in raising parents' awareness if their child was experiencing difficulties and hopefully would encourage the parents to be more supportive of the activities being carried out in the classroom.

Shirley had experimented with the idea for the past two years but had yet to develop the type of package that would fulfil her requirements. The previous year, each student in her class had a book in which selected samples of their work were filed. Each student made a comment on how well they were working towards achieving their set goals, the teacher commented on how the student was progressing and parents could respond to all the comments. This process proved to be extremely time consuming for the teacher and provided little satisfaction for the effort that had been put into these books by the students. When the students returned their books to the classroom after taking them home to show their parents, quite often the parents did not respond positively to the work in the book. This was disappointing for the student and often resulted in them taking a negative attitude to their work.

Once Shirley had described what she had done in the past she went on to explain what changes she was currently making and where she was at with the development of her students' profile books. She was experiencing difficulties in the logistics of what the students could do with personal goal setting and self-evaluation. She realised that her expectations of the students were too high. While she was explaining what she wanted to achieve in these meetings, she expressed enthusiasm at the interest and discussion that ensued from the other members of the group. Both Matthew and Jan asked many questions to clarify the purpose of developing such a process. It became obvious that Matthew thought it was too much work and the reporting system that was in place was sufficient, while Jan was supportive of the idea and stated that if all the bugs were ironed out, she would be interested in student profile books the following year. They both offered some constructive ideas on goal setting that Shirley agreed to trial before the next meeting.

Second meeting (7 May)

One thing I have realised is that on the next [student's] sheet, the student's comment [on their work] needs to be more focused. So include questions for them to answer. At the moment they are sort of paraphrasing what I have written and then promising to do better at whatever area needs attention. That area needs some thought.(Journal Entry)

Jan responded in Shirley's journal with some suggestions for the questions on the next student sheet. "What do you feel you need more help in/ need to work harder in apart from what is written? What can you do [the child] to improve in these areas?" Another suggestion made by Matthew towards solving the problem was to brainstorm ideas during the research meeting.

During the second meeting, a long time was spent on clarifying the comments Jan and Matthew had written in Shirley's journal. Matthew was still concerned that the traditional reporting package was being replaced and that Shirley was taking on a huge responsibility. Concerns and ideas related to parent awareness and parent interest were aired, shared and discussed, until all three group members had a clear understanding of the issues that Shirley needed to resolve for the package to progress.

Shirley expressed relief that Jan and Matthew had supported her idea in the development of a reporting package. As a result she reorganised her writing up routine of the students' work. The support and a thoughtful thank you card from one of the parents inspired and encouraged Shirley to further develop her process.

Third meeting (21 May)

The three group members came up with many suggestions in the brainstorm to try to solve the problem Shirley was experiencing with the student self evaluation sheet. The students were paraphrasing the comments that the

teacher had written and promised to do better in the already mentioned subject, rather than writing what they really thought. For example, Shirley writing a comment to a student, " Emily has worked extremely well in Maths this term. She is however, experiencing some difficulty with the place value examples we have done in class." Emily's comment, "I am very sorry Miss V, I promise to try harder next time we do these sums."

Ideas were exchanged in the meeting to attempt to arrive at a solution. A combination of suggestions resulted. Firstly it was suggested the evaluation sheet be altered to ask the students what they were going to do to try to improve in a particular area and secondly, that the students be given the opportunity to practice formulating goals and plans, to assist them to respond to the sheet. It was realised within the group that there is nothing wrong with having very high expectations of the students, as long as the students are taught and then given opportunities to practice. There is no reason why they can't set goals and be involved in self-evaluation. As no one in the group had carried out an activity of this type, a plan of action was formulated for Shirley to try in her classroom over the next two weeks. Everyone shared interest and enthusiasm in the modifications for Shirley's process and was eager to find out about the outcome.

Following the brainstorm the group was relaxed and genuinely pleased with the outcomes resulting from trying to solve a colleague's problem. It was

agreed by all, that the procedure of verbalising the classroom problems and then having to clarify them in response to a question or questions, helped resolve difficulties. This session opened a door for more sharing of ideas relating to what each person does in particular subjects and in particular situations, in their classroom.

Fourth meeting (4 June)

Shirley was extremely happy with the development of the reporting package. She reported in her journal, that the refinement of the recording and reporting format with the alterations made to the student self evaluation sheet made the whole process more specific and more meaningful.

Feedback received from the group was excellent. Sheets were drawn up and trialled for a week. Having the areas set out makes recording and anecdotal notes more meaningful although I could probably use A4 instead of A3 paper.

[Student] Self-evaluation sheet was also interesting. We did it as a class exercise, section by section and 11 students still wrote about different subjects for the different sections instead of completing all of the questions and sections on the one subject. Another problem highlighted was that the students don't read what they write even when reminded about the editing strategies. More work needs to be put into

plan making so they can decide on the steps to improve on in an area.

The other thing that concerns me is that they [the students] are putting down things [on their self evaluation sheet] that they should be doing and not what they are doing in the section "When I don't understand something in class I....." The skills required to complete the sheet sensibly need to be practised and reinforced, so we will do them [the self-evaluation sheets] together (as a whole group) until the end of term.(Journal Entry)

Even though Shirley was pleased with the progress of the package, she was disappointed with the response from the students in her class. The more she refined the self-evaluation sheet, the more difficulty the students seemed to have to complete the sections designed for student interaction. It wasn't that the students were really experiencing difficulty completing the task but more to the point, they were not completing it the way Shirley expected them too. It seemed that the task Shirley had set for herself was growing too large. The other members of the group sensed Shirley's disappointment as both commented in her journal.

Matthew's comment in Shirley's journal about the self-evaluation sheet was,

"Looks useful. eg. Giving feedback on your lessons from the students' point of view."

Jan's comment was more perceptive.

We need to come up with some strategies that can help the children realise that the self evaluation sheet is for them and not for someone else's benefit and that they must re-read [what they write] and think about it carefully. By being persistent with the student input you may find that you are covering more ground than first intended. Be careful not to make a greater load for yourself.

Shirley had conducted further research relating to her data collecting process and student involvement that she thought could be improved. She made several suggestions in her journal for the other group members to consider for this meeting. The suggestions on which she sought feedback were firstly, techniques to get students to write about what they did in a particular lesson. ie. How they did it and how they knew they were getting better at it. Secondly, she sought a more streamlined method of writing anecdotal notes on students' performances during the week. The final suggestion for Jan and Matthew to consider was a selection of the learning areas to be commented upon in the next stage of reporting to parents.

An example of the layout and how to use an anecdotal recording method was also displayed in Shirley's journal for comment, followed by an updated version of the student self evaluation sheet.

Shirley's suggested ideas and how they could be refined and implemented into the reporting package stimulated a lively discussion. Each member of the group shared the process that they had in use and those they have used in their respective classes. Generally speaking, they all had experienced difficulties when attempting to keep "ongoing" anecdotal records through observation. By confiding the not so successful attempts, each person seemed to be spurred to make suggestions for the best carrying out of this different format. The ideas were mainly focussed on how to collect the relevant data on each student and on which areas should be next reported to the parents. Shirley was satisfied that this discussion reinforced her suggestions and provided additional direction.

The group agreed that parents at this school seemed to be mainly interested in how their child was progressing in the language and maths areas. It would therefore seem appropriate to continue to report on the progress in these areas. The discussion then focussed on how these anecdotal record method ideas could be incorporated into any classroom for the purpose of collecting information on the students. The remainder of Shirley's section of the meeting was spent discussing different subject recording practices each

group member used in their classroom. This flowed onto the sharing of some of the strategies each person considered successful in approaching and in achieving the more difficult outcomes. It was obviously a topic that interested everyone in the group as the discussion was lively and animated.

Fifth meeting (18 June)

The student reporting and comment sheets have worked well during these last weeks. There has been: -

less teacher time needed to complete

more meaningful information to students and parents

more specific information in the content.

The anecdotal record sheet also worked well because I only collected data – made comments 3-4 times per week. Once in a maths lesson, during a language lesson, during an activity-based lesson and a quiet time, this idea worked well.

The self-evaluation sheets are developing slowly and improvement is evident. I would now like to see another teacher's profile ideas to compare with this development.

(Journal Entry)

Shirley explained how she was feeling with the development of the package.

She shared her concern about the students still being unable to meet her

expectations and realised that she now had to spend more time resolving the problems that her process had uncovered in the students. The identification of the editing weakness in the students' writing caused her to realise that the students did not understand the concepts of self improvement and self evaluation.

Jan and Matthew realised that this was Shirley's secret story of what was going on in her class. It was exposing a flaw in her teaching strategies. This was the confident person always full of good ideas and willing to help other teachers when difficult times were being experienced. She was uncertain, questioning her abilities and recognised the need to seek assistance. This now became a group problem.

The research group immediately used the collegial process that had been established when addressing individual concerns. Both Jan and Matthew discussed where the students in their rooms were "at" in terms of editing their own writing. Each shared the strategies and resources they used in their classes and explained how they got the students to focus on capital letters, punctuation etc through proof reading their own work. As the ideas were being exchanged, other strategies were added or altered if they were thought appropriate. Jan expanded on how she kept language records, a topic of interest for everyone.

The three members wholeheartedly agreed that the ideas that arose out of problem solving were practical and this was a result of group discussion. The problem was clarified through discussion, addressed, and solutions were developed.

Shirley acknowledged that the ideas used and developed in the package were the result of group interaction and discussion and that she was grateful for the support of her colleagues in helping an idea come to fruition.

Jan's Story

Jan has been teaching in primary schools for over 25 years with experience at all levels from pre-primary to year 5. She has taught in both country and metropolitan schools and has been attached to her current school for 7 years. When Jan first heard of the proposed meetings for further study into the professional development area, she was very interested in being involved. Throughout her career she has always been keen to hear about and trial any new teaching ideas. She was fully aware of the difficulties some teachers face when a new strategy that has been explained is not successful in implementation. Jan is an extremely well organised person in and out of the classroom, and approaches the teaching of students in logical and progressive steps.

The positive experience of being involved in the year level cell meetings, prior to this research, where teachers trialled different strategies in their classroom and then reported on the implementation and appropriateness to the rest of the group, proved to be an impetus for Jan's participation.

First meeting (23 April)

My focus is really basic, I just want to use the computers in the classroom because I don't use them at all. I want to use them at an individual level, a group level and with a whole class. I just shy away, I can't even load a disk and I have been shown a million times and I just forget.

I am aiming to develop skills and more particularly confidence in incorporating computer usage into my classroom programme. The original aim was to use three aspects – whole class, small group and individual, but after discussing my plan with Matthew and Shirley, I've decided to concentrate on just having the children work as individuals on programmes that relate to current classroom activities.

Most probably I'll explore the word processing disks with an occasional maths programme.

Matthew has shown me a disk that contains mazes and has reminded me that he has produced a list of disks with

their contents and a brief comment next to each re - its relevance to year 4 that should prove invaluable.(Journal Entry)

Jan admitted in the discussion that she was not interested in computing at all and that was why she had not used them. She realised that she must change for the students' sake. " I see this as a real opportunity to make me do it. To use this professional development group and the experiences you [Shirley and Matthew] have had to help me in the implementation of computers."

When Jan mentioned the value of the PD group, the discussion shifted from the use of computers to the value of working within a group. It was suggested that being involved in a group inspires participants to complete the task and contribute to the discussion because they don't want to let the others down. Matthew commented that he knew teachers who wouldn't bother about the problems of colleagues but then conceded that those people would not be likely to get involved in a group such as this in the first place. Everyone agreed that they all knew teachers who lack this motivation but hopefully they were in the minority of the teaching population.

Concern was raised regarding each group member's focus area. Matthew said, " Yours is going to be easy Jan, learn how to use computers, I don't know how I am going to write mine up."

Jan, "But it's not easy for me, it's easy for you because you know how to do it but I've already got some good ideas for you."

Shirley, "This is the bonus of it all isn't it? What's difficult for one is a piece of cake for another. People have got good ideas for one other."

Jan had just purchased a computer for home so Matthew explained that the best way to become familiar with her computer is to painstakingly work through a disk. Jan still felt at odds with this as she knew she was competent in the classroom and had managed to teach effectively without the use of computers. So, why did she need them now? She wasn't sure where or how the computing fitted in to the lessons she already did. The one computing package that she had used and experienced success with was a Social Studies simulation disk on early discovery and Portuguese explorers. Matthew said that one was particularly difficult and seemed a little surprised that Jan had been successful using it as a whole class activity.

Jan went on to explain how she had used the computer in a whole class situation with one computer and the students sitting on the floor. At the appropriate times the game was stopped and through class discussion, a decision would be made as to what the next step would be. Shirley asked

who was operating the computer during this time and Jan admitted that she did not actually touch it and that the students took it in turns. Matthew commented that at a previous school when the computing person left, the greatest computing resource at the school was the students.

Jan explained that as part of the lesson she would ask, "Who would like to turn the computer on? Who would like to load the disk? If something goes wrong, who would like to sort this out? And they all did it so I've never learned."

Matthew and Shirley were surprised and amused at this technique though it might be considered excellent as a "hands on" approach. Shirley commented on an observation that she had made when the computers were put in a bank outside the classrooms. "It was obvious that the students did not know how to operate the computers correctly, as they were thumping the keyboards and loading the disks incorrectly. What they did know what to do was play the games." With only three BBC computers on line, she voiced interest in how Jan was going to tackle computing in the classroom, as she had not experienced success either and they would be learning from what was resolved from Jan's focus.

The discussion then focussed on the number of students that could be accommodated in front of one computer screen. It was mentioned that this

would depend on the disk being used but most of the time the students would want to be actively involved, so two to three students per screen was agreed upon as a maximum.

Shirley suggested that Jan choose the type of computing that she wanted the students to do. She questioned whether it was computer knowledge or computer-assisted learning that was to be the focus? Jan responded that what she wanted was to use the computer to develop the students' learning skills. In the past, the teacher providing support in the classroom has had computer knowledge and she has handed computing over to the support person. This year because the support programme has been reorganised, computing could not be allocated to the support person. Jan asked the group, "Do you think I should pick a small group to start with for the term? Probably this term if I got them working individually would be a good start."

Shirley responded, "If they become familiar with a package it might be easier for you to integrate it into the classroom."

Jan, "What would be a good programme to start with?"

Matthew answered her, "In my opinion, I would probably use it in the maths area which is the simplest and easiest to use. It is not difficult to match a computer activity with an area that is being covered in your programmes."

Jan added, "So just send six out at a time, two on each computer?"

Matthew explained,

The simulation games and the decision-making area could be dealt with as a whole class. With language and word processing I have an "Eddy the Expert" whom solves the problems that the others are experiencing. You will find that you will have a child who has a computer at home and who will be able to use the ones outside.

Shirley added, "The difficulty is that the computers we use at school are antiquated compared to the ones in the homes, so the students still have to be taught the different procedures appropriate for these computers."

Jan continued, "For me to get started on computers, do you think I should just stick to the maths one or try and do that and the language together?"

Matthew, "No, I'd pick one to concentrate on. I am concentrating on the language as the kids just love it."

Jan. "OK I will give it a go. Do they write their story on the computer?"

Discussion then took place on the differing ways the other teachers used computing for word processing. The main method used by the others was that students write their draft copy and then use the computer for a combination of editing and presentation of their work. To allow all the

students to write their stories directly on to the computer was too time consuming, as there were only three computers. Jan decided to start using the computers in the area of language.

Second meeting (7 May).

During the next two weeks, Jan read all the manuals connected with the types of computers that the students had access to at school. Her journal was filled with technical questions for the other participants to comment upon, but she had not tried to use a computer.

This past week has been difficult to start my exploration (into the unknown) as I've had a student teacher in the room and have been very busy with her. I did however, take the gigantic step of reading the "Master Compact Users Manual".

The introductory letter discouraged me when it said, "It is important that the Master Compact Users Manual is studied by all teachers in your school who use a Master Compact to ensure that all disk corruption problems are minimised."

I wiped out a 20 page resume in ten seconds!! I still get upset every time I think about it. It's going to take lots of help to make computers and me compatible!

Well I've learned how to spell 'disk'. The paragraph on physical damage inspired me to take a whole class lesson on

disk care. This will reinforce my newly acquired information and hopefully prolong the life of our disks. Are our disk drives covered with plastic or lint free material when not in use? – Check!

“Formatting a disk” – skipped this – belongs to a category of later.

“Making a book up” - ditto!

“Running your software” this is what I am after.

Cover the keyboards – are they covered? Check – prevents accumulation of dust.

Common problems – will be useful I’m sure, keep in the cupboard for ready access.

Additional information is way beyond me at this stage. I’m not ready to try to understand it yet.(Journal Entry)

The feedback given in her journal by others in the group suggested she was making things too difficult for herself and it was suggested that she try to tackle the use of the computers as if she were a child student. This would include the procedure needed by the students to operate the computers, eg. how to turn the computer on, how to load a disk, how to use the keyboard and how to follow the computer jargon instructions. Jan accepted the written comment and made an addition to her journal saying she did not have the

confidence to "just do it" without some knowledge. "I feel I should be confident at computer usage before I expect the children to use them."

There was a short discussion on how Jan had approached her focus topic. The other participants agreed that they would have jumped in at the "deep end", tried to carry out an activity with the students and then reported back to the PD group for improvement in techniques. They felt that, as teachers, they would have done what the students do – had a go.

Jan commented,

Well I still think I have the biggest problem of any of us because of my attitude, I do not feel confident. I know you think I went about it the hard way by reading that book, but I feel much better having read that book. It has given me something to work on. It's like giving someone a horse and telling them to get on and ride it without having been given any instructions or directions.

Matthew added,

I jotted on your journal the things you might consider. Everything I have picked up about computers is because I have been sitting down with someone or someone has said this is roughly what to do. Then I have gone away and mucked

around with it and sort have self taught by trial and error how I can do things. I am talking word processing here.

Jan, "See I am scared I am going to damage the computer."

Both Shirley and Matthew assured Jan that the only way she could physically damage the disk is by ejecting it while the light is on. The important thing in using these computers is knowing how to move around the programme. Shirley explained how tentative she felt with using the computers and how she had successfully, without knowing how, managed to destroy three computers at home by only attempting word processing and not learning how things work. This was said to reassure Jan that others also struggle with computer literacy.

The discussion led to how each group member felt about people giving instruction on using the computer. One person felt comfortable asking one staff member for assistance and yet felt intimidated by another. When something is being explained or shown on the computer, frustration was felt because the explanation was not usually explained in lay terms or demonstrated explicitly. Often, the person doing the explaining uses jargon and is not automatically aware that the participant doesn't have a clue what is being said. Every group member could identify with this.

Jan continued,

See you have both noticed my lack of confidence, I have done everything except touch a computer. I have read the book, I have tried the computer at home when someone has been trying to help me but I need to sit down and experiment. I am really scared to make that move.

Matthew added,

The curse of computers is that you will read what to do in the book and what you think you know because you have read it is actually the right thing. When you sit down at the computer sometimes something will go wrong with the computer. You are doing the right thing but the bloody thing won't work.

Jan asked what she should do next. She had already told her class that they will be writing acrostic poems on sea creatures and they will be printed out on the computer. She had created a dilemma as she had to know what to do before teaching them how to use the hardware.

Matthew then launched into the steps that Jan needed to follow to enable her to teach the students. It was clear that Jan was still not confident following Matthew's instructions even though they were written down. So Shirley volunteered to stay back after school the following day to show and

guide Jan through the necessary beginning steps for the use of the word processing programme on the computer.

Third meeting (21 May).

Stayed after school with Shirley. It only took a few minutes to go through the instructions. The next day I showed 3 children how to write their poems and then print them. Trouble with the printer made me learn about the "on line" switch.

This has made me explain [the process] very carefully to the children who have no home computer and who probably feel just like I did.

In the past few days my class has been progressively writing and printing their work and all of us are feeling pleased with ourselves. When all have completed the poems I'll move onto some maths programmes.

The most important part of my beginning to use the computer has been the help given by Matthew and Shirley. I really appreciate it and the fact that help was always there whenever I was stuck.

Now that I feel confident in this aspect of computer usage, I can see just how easy it is, but I didn't feel like that when I started. By comparison – one of my students needed to save

her work as time was up and although Shirley had shown me, I'd forgotten. I went out to see if I could work it out and another staff member said, "I'll fix it for you." After saying that I'd do it if she reminded me how, I was told again, "I'll do it." Obviously being very helpful but not for a learner. Stood my ground and now [I] know.

I had intended letting some of the students try to do a draft story on disk, but have decided that the need for the conference approach to their proofing [of their writing] would make this far too time consuming. (Journal Entry)

Jan had made another entry in her journal.

Students are now writing drafts of stories on computer. Initially there was a minor problem (now solved) with the printer so I put children into groups of three to edit their work while on the screen – most successful – probably won't work with three weak students but is worth a try – could be very successful.

I have done several computer-in-schools courses – both by outside experts brought to the school and by other staff members in a group situation. I have never used any of the information shown at any of these. By having this

arrangement [group involvement] I am actually using and even enjoying using the computer.

I've been wondering why and I think it is because I feel obliged to do it and know I have to report back. I feel confident knowing that help is available nearby.

I am surprised of how much an incentive the [using of the] computer is. The students are coming to me and asking to print out their poems in times that are usually their free times. A couple have even done their work on their home computer and proudly presented them to me. We haven't started maths seriously yet – just the odd disk for the quick workers (again the incentive aspect) as I'm interested in trying students of varying language ability in editing situations in groups. This is my next step.

At the next meeting Jan exclaimed,

I know you are going to laugh but I am really excited I can actually use a computer now and the kids are using it – they are doing it really well, so that's a major step. I can't believe how easy it is. I was so frightened about doing it!

The enthusiasm was obvious and she was very keen to discuss what could be tackled next as most of her students had completed and printed their

acrostic poems. The group discussed the pros and cons of editing techniques on the computer and explored the strategies that could be started with the students. Everyone within the group was very supportive of Jan's next computing venture and shared the strategies that they had successfully used with computers and students in their classes. The likely problems of the exercise, the major one being not enough computers for the students to use and the time that an exercise of this nature consumed, were also pointed out. These did not faze Jan and she thanked everyone for their continued support in computing.

Fourth meeting (4 June).

The children's use of the computer this fortnight has been mostly free choice – as a reward for completed work in class, as I have been too busy with testing for reports to organise anything else.

This has been interesting though as I've quickly discovered that these children have been exploring the disks and know what they contain. eg. One child said, "I've finished all my reading activities now, so can I do reading on the computer?" He had found a cloze exercise previously and was happy to use it.

What I have done though is use my (our) computer at home to make up some of the tests!! It's [the home computer]

much more complicated than our school ones but with help and experimentation I did it. Therefore PD = Professional and Personal Development. My previous personal experience with computers was in the late 70's when we bought one of the first Micro Bees on the market. We used a tape to load the programmes and it took ages and sounded like an invasion.

In my degree I did units on computing programming that I really enjoyed. As the programme was written, it was fed [typed] in[to the computer] and then checked to see if it ran. I was following my own instructions. But – this is the first time in the 90's that my fingers have voluntarily touched a keyboard.

Another development worth noting is that previous to my undertaking this PD my class never used the computers before school or in free time. I didn't prevent them – they just never asked. Now they are waiting at the door for me so they can use it and are always asking for computer time when their work is finished. (Journal Entry)

Jan stated that she continued to be very happy with her development in the use of computers. She wanted to continue using them in the classroom to explore all the different aspects and avenues that the computing programmes made available to her. Matthew commented, "With your use of

computers at the moment, you are doing more with your class and you are using the computers more effectively than me."

Jan added,

But you have done it before and you know you can do it. For me – I got really excited when the blessed printer wouldn't work last week and I solved it. But while it wasn't working, I put them [students] into groups of three and let them edit it. That was quite incidental and it turned out to be a fabulous way of doing it [editing]. I was listening to them, one would say "You need a fullstop there." And another would say, "Why do you need a fullstop? I thought to myself, "That's a good question, this is good!"

Previously when there were two children editing on the computer, one child usually dominated the other and often incorrectly edited the work. With three children editing one piece of work, there was much more discussion before a decision was made.

Matthew interjected, "Gee, I thought only two would work well at one computer!"

Jan continued,

No, it worked really well and in the next fortnight I am going to try it with some of the weaker students. These ones we were

just talking about were the three top students so let's see how it works with the others. I just want to try all these language things.

Further discussion took place relating to the students' use of their home computers and the comparison of the quality of their work compared to the quality of the computing work presented and completed at school using the BBC's. Matthew and Shirley concurred that the parents would be quite delighted that their child was utilising the computer at home to look up information on a CD ROM or to print off their work. Judging from the conversations with the students, most of their home computers were mostly used for playing games. It was generally decided within the group that it was such a pity that they only had easy access to such old equipment.

Fifth meeting (18 June).

For the next two weeks of school I am going to go through the different programmes that are there and really discover what is available. I was really impressed when the children asked if they could read on the computer. So I need to be aware of the different areas out there.

This PD has been terrific for me. For the number of years computers have been around I have very cleverly avoided

doing them. I have always given computing to the support teacher. (Journal Entry)

An entry Shirley made in Jan's journal was the catalyst for the primary discussion of the meeting. Jan began by asking Shirley to clarify a comment that she had written in her (Jan's) journal. Shirley had suggested to Jan that she might like to explore a few areas other than editing in language. One of the programmes that she might consider for her next venture was Logo. Shirley explained what type of programme it was, what the outcomes might be and she felt certain that the disks and instruction books would be in the school somewhere. Matthew joined in saying that there must be two levels of the programme as the version he had seen, he considered to be too difficult for the students at this level. Several programmes that would also suit Jan's situation were discussed. Jan decided that she would pursue these programmes as since she was feeling more comfortable, she may as well continue and learn as much as possible.

The discussion remained on the use of computers but turned in the direction of the management of the computers in the wet area and whether there was a need for a roster or timetable to be displayed. It was generally decided that there wasn't really a need but that teachers needed to be more aware of student behaviour and the treatment of the equipment. The PD group then shared strategies relating to how teachers had used the computers if, or

when, they had them in the classroom. Even though it was interesting hearing what others had done, it was not really beneficial in our situation because we could not move the computers from their locations.

Matthew's Story

Matthew has been teaching for 15 years with experience in most year levels through the primary school. He has taught in both country and metropolitan schools and has been attached to his current school for five years. When Matthew heard about this professional development research being conducted using a series of discussion meetings, he was intrigued and interested. He had experienced success at the Year 4 cell meetings and volunteered to participate.

First meeting (23 April).

Pasted to the inside cover of Matthew's journal was a photocopy of the indicators that students could do in each of the four areas of comprehension. ie. Literal – a child recognises by locating, identifying or recalling detail, main ideas, sequence, comparisons, cause and effect, character traits, factual and non factual, specific and general facts, inconsistent statements. He had written:

Focus Area – to develop strategies, programme and resources that will ensure that all students in the class cover

the elements of literal, inferential, evaluative and appreciative areas in reading comprehension

Concern that not all areas are covered/recorded.

Reasonably happy with literal comprehension and inferential is OK.

But evaluative/appreciative is WEAK. I feel that I do expose students to the evaluative appreciative BUT often DISCUSSION doesn't lead to RECORDS.

Best efforts have been tied into literature activities e.g. character ratings.

WHAT I DO USE

Basal series

Reading 360 – very good for language skills; literal and inferential. I find the teachers' book very useful.

Eureka – better for appreciative and evaluation and still good for literal and inferential.

One good idea has been to isolate the discussion questions that relate to a specific area of comprehension eg. Evaluative, and get students to write answers to those appropriate and discuss the rest.

**Idea – give a mark towards a simple comprehension item/book. The disadvantage is that the mark may be based on a solitary question. This could be appreciative, evaluative, inferential or literal.

Core Library – used as homework activity, very good questions.

At the moment I give an overall mark for their [the students] comprehension accuracy.

In addition to Core Library, have set activities that students complete over the year. Note: they do each activity only once, they can't do the same activity for every book.(Journal Entry)

Matthew's problem was not what he was teaching but that he was aware not all areas in reading were being covered and recorded adequately. He was reasonably happy with the students' literal and inferential comprehension skills but felt that the evaluative and appreciative comprehension skills were weak. The latter two areas were often dealt with in discussions and this did not lead to student records. He has an aversion to writing comprehension questions; consequently his reading records for the last two areas were inadequate.

Jan's comment in Matthew's journal explained what she did in her class. She divided the reading objectives into 4 terms. For example, literal may be covered in term 1 and there were ten activities (one per school week of the term) that highlight the main areas of literal comprehension. The students selected a book from the core library and then completed one of the ten activities on that book.

Each student was then involved in answering questions about the book they had read, based on the term's objectives and the results were recorded on a card. Parent helpers were trained at the beginning of the year to come into the class to conduct these sessions in conjunction with the teacher. When the students experienced difficulties, the problem was easily and quickly identified and consequently addressed in a whole class situation.

Referring to Jan's reading activities, Matthew commented,

I think your [Jan] recording of the activities in the different areas of reading covering the literal, main idea, sequencing and inferential aspects are more meaningful than what I have at the moment. I am using the headings from the First Steps Reading so yours and mine [headings] are fairly similar.

I like to run reading groups but I find that with my recording, I don't necessarily get a recording for all of the sections for every child. That's the thing I am worried about

and what I want to do is try to work out what to change what I do with my groups, to make sure that I cover everything. Maybe I should make a mixture of group and whole class work where I might look at my marks and find I'm not covering this [an aspect of reading] and then set up something as an activity for the whole class. Basically that's what I want to spend my term doing. It will be to do with reading and making sure I cover everything in literal, inferential, evaluative and appreciative.

One of the things I hate doing in reading (and one of the reasons I use basal series so much) is that I hate and detest reading a story and writing the questions. Most of the work I do is I photocopy the Teachers' Journal, cut and paste the activities in there and basically I end up with a shoebox full of ideas and that is pretty much what I do. But what I have to do is fit what is given to me by the journal, into my marks book. My failing is that once I get to the bottom of the pile [of ideas] there are still sections there [in the comprehension areas] that aren't done. By the end of the year, having gone through four shoeboxes full and plus some, hopefully I would have ticked everything, but it is not happening.

Second meeting (7 May).

Thought - If this is PD I feel it's of greater value because I've greater commitment. I feel accountable / duty to a group therefore I actually do some follow up. Most PD from "experts" leads to little follow up.

Firstly, I feel much happier about my recording (for reading) I am doing enough – (though I can improve) but by looking at what I do in a critical way I now realise that my perceived problem was not such a big problem...well it wasn't terminal.

Secondly, using "Comprehending Fiction" questions selectively works very well.

Thirdly, using comprehension questions from Eureka selectively works well too.

Fourthly, I've got the photocopy of Jan's Core Library activities (10 Literal), I haven't used them yet because:

my records for literal are good,

I'm happy with the way my Core Library is going even though for my records it only generates an overall mark – not specific to an area of comprehension and training/timetabling of parents a bit daunting.

Fifthly, I'm happy with the quality and variety of comprehension offered in [Reading] 360.(Journal Entry)

Jan noted in Matthew's journal that she would bring the other worksheets to the next meeting so he could see the inferential for future reference. She pointed out that she only used two parents (the same two all year) and that by the end of Term 1 they were great, usually enjoyed it and were so committed they rarely missed a session

Matthew was impressed with the types of activities Jan used in her reading sessions and eagerly accepted her offer of borrowing her file that contained the activities. He was very keen to share what he had discovered since the first meeting. He had gone through the resources that he actually used in the classroom and found that one of the comprehension books matched up all of the questions to the appropriate categories. He opened the book to the relevant section at the back and showed Jan and Shirley that question 1 for the text "The Go - Kart" had inference 1 next to it, which referred to the category of inferring supporting details. So for the next few days he used the texts from the book with the students in his class. He chose a comprehension category that he would focus on for that session and checked to see how the students performed on those particular questions. These results were then recorded in the marks book. Matthew commented, "When I started out, my problem was I felt as if I was covering everything but

I just wasn't getting marks for everything. This is my first little jackpot and it feels great."

Jan told Matthew that she thought that he was recording far too much. She didn't record any of the specific areas he was referring to. She then explained that she did use the same comprehension sheets on a weekly basis but only recorded one, once a month. Most of the sheets were categorised as inferential and she felt that if the students could understand inferential comprehension, then they could comprehend.

General discussion revolved around the reading and other language areas including the recording procedures used by other group members. It was agreed that Matthew was trying to do too much and what he really needed to do was to reorganise what he was already doing.

The PD group involvement and enthusiasm encouraged Matthew to carry out further reading into his focus area. He discovered that he already had the information needed to refine his reading records. When he revealed this to the PD group, they cited this as an indication of the amount of time a teacher requires, just to keep up with the resources one already has in their possession.

Third meeting (21 May).

Matthew's journal entry for this meeting explained how he had refined his record keeping process for the reading area and he seemed genuinely pleased with his progress. He systematically went through the reading areas he was still happy with and what he had changed and rearranged in the other sections after the other group members had thought he was recording too much information. Clarification was sought on Jan's entry in his journal related to the training of parents as assistants in the classroom. She explained the process she used at the beginning of every year to select the right parents and train them in how she wanted them to record the progress of the students. Her commitment to having parent helpers in this aspect of reading was obvious when she spoke enthusiastically about the benefits to the students and the improvement she noticed in the students' work.

Matthew decided to continue with the updated method in keeping reading records and select another school-related topic for the remaining meetings. Remembering the success he experienced when he previously visited his own resources, he chose to share the selected topic with the members of the group at the next meeting.

He confided to Jan and Shirley that the sharing of resources and the strategies used in the other classrooms, resulted in many of his problems being resolved. He combined some of the ideas discussed with members of

the PD group and then molded them to suit his own teaching style. Matthew considered the incorporation of what worked in classrooms for other group members, into his classroom, to be excellent professional development.

Fourth meeting (4 June).

To find strategies to improve the students' narrative writing.

Note – because recount writing skills are reasonable, there are few problems with Setting – Who? Where? When? Why?, Sequencing – 1st event, 2nd event etc. Conclusion – this still has a few weaknesses connecting whole story together.

Major concern is the development or even recognition of the emotion / feelings of characters.

Strategy: Students wrote 3 short stories, each having exactly the same plot line and characters. The story had 3 characters. Each story had to concentrate on the emotions / feelings of one of the characters. Aim of this exercise was to take the emphasis away from plot development so students could focus on the emotional side of the characters.

We brainstormed vocabulary for the emotions of happiness, anger and unhappiness. (Journal Entry)

Matthew was extremely enthusiastic about his new focus area, which was to attempt to improve the students' narrative writing style. He explained the process he went through to select this new area. With his first "problem" area, he delved into the resources he had access to and came up with a pathway to a solution. He was surprised at the amount of information he already had at his fingertips when he really searched, so he decided to go through more of his resources and select another area.

Matthew believed that through self-evaluation and reflection, he would be able to identify an aspect of teaching that he considered to be an area of need. He was quite adamant that only he could identify this next focus. He said he did consider seeking input from Shirley and Jan by asking them what he should do but decided that he knew his own strengths and weaknesses. He decided it was important to recognise those and do something about them himself. To assist himself in this he located all of his First Steps material and decided to read some of the books, a task he had put aside since attending the First Steps "walk through" sessions.

He reported to the PD group, that the students were reasonable at writing recounts but were experiencing difficulties with sequencing events and drawing a conclusion. His major concern was the development or even recognition of the emotions and feelings of story characters. Both Shirley and Jan agreed that this level of writing was extremely difficult for middle

primary students. As a result of his reading and in his identification of this focus, Matthew had selected strategies to begin implementation in his classroom. He related what he had done to motivate the students in the writing session and explained what task they had to carry out.

In a week the class had to write three short stories, each having exactly the same plot line and characters. The plot of the stories was revolved around two characters that were minding their own business when they find something incredible, it could have been gold or Crunchie Bars, whatever. An argument broke out and a parent entered the story and solved the problem. We brainstormed words to do with excitement, then brainstormed words that described the argument and then the parent coming in. Then they had to write the story from the perspective of the brothers (I called them brothers). One brother found it {the treasure} and they had to write the story from his point of view. Then they had to write the story from the other brother's point of view, same story but he was just tagging along with the brother that found it. He came in, then the argument, then the third time they have to write it, it is to be from the point of view of the parent.

So having done that as an exercise, I just gave them a mark as an exercise, for the amount or number of emotive words they had used in their story. The story was the same

so I wasn't going to give a mark for that, everyone did the same story. That was OK, that sort've got them going and they are currently writing their own narrative story and I've emphasised that I really want a story with the emotive / feeling type words in there. I haven't got that back yet so I don't know how I'm going. But just to make a choice, I picked this up [First Steps Narrative Module book] and wondered if it had any good ideas for a narrative. Sure enough it's got all of these activities for narrative that I have never used before. So I thought if I get a disaster back from what they [students] are currently doing, then at least I would have read this and I might be able to do some of these as activities that lead up to a narrative story.

Shirley clarified with Matthew that this narrative scenario was already taking place in the classroom and he pointed out that the students were writing a narrative with their own plot line. Jan asked if he had given the students the overview or structure of a narrative story that must have the setting, characters, and conflict resolution. Matthew was quick to reply that the students were very good at setting because of their ability to write recounts and at supplying the who, when, where, and why.

Matthew continued,

The starting problem or conflict is usually done reasonably well, it is rare that that is not done well. The problem complication in this case may not be done well because it might be problem – solution but I'm not particularly worried about that because my emphasis this time is character development. If my kids write a story that goes setting, problem, solution, then I'm not going to get too upset as long as they have the emotions that go with the problem and the emotions that go with the resolution.

Jan thought this procedure was excellent and congratulated Matthew on an innovative method of introducing narrative as she often had experienced difficulties with the students introducing characters in the solution at the end of the story. She could see by using this method, her difficulty would be alleviated. Matthew added that if he used this structure again, he would only ask the students to write two versions of the story, maybe, one from one of the brothers and the other from the parent perspective. This would reduce the task yet still allow for the emphasis to be placed on sequencing events and forming conclusions.

Discussion continued on writing techniques and the difficulties faced in trying to get a completed piece of writing from all of the students. Strategies on how to get students to finish their work were shared around the group. It

was apparent that everyone had experienced difficulties in this subject area at some time. Matthew asked both Shirley and Jan if there was anything that they did in their classrooms that made teaching the narrative form a little easier. Both admitted that they struggle with that particular genre. Matthew said that he would carry out more research in the area and report back at the next meeting in two weeks time.

Fifth meeting (18 June).

Results – fair only! When students were asked to write their own story (narrative) with emphasis on character emotion, the results were again only fair. Possibly, students are having enough trouble handling the plot structure of a story.

Perhaps students should take a recount story (provide some – maybe a student's) and go through as a class and examine the areas where it is possible to add in emotive / emotional vocabulary.

I also aim to read First Steps "Literacy Related Skills" module, section2 narrative p.32-73.

"Mastery is developmental. Recounts are mastered prior to narratives. Base narratives on real experiences. Work up to creative / imaginative writing."

Thought! Perhaps this is why we see so many stories based on videos, computer games etc. THESE ARE their experiences.

Strategy – character interview p.46-52. Generally an oral activity that is aimed more at evaluating students' reading comprehension. Still, could be useful to highlight thoughts, emotions, motives etc. Then use these in an exercise where students place them into a recount to give it a narrative feel.

Strategy – character role-play. A better idea as a direct effort is made at examining a character's make up – reasons/motives for the way he/she behaves in the play. Will have a go at this one. (Journal Entry)

Matthew reminded everyone that at the last meeting they had said what he was trying to do was a great idea. He reported that the results were really disappointing. The top four or five students had nice emotive ideas, thoughts and character development but some of the middle students only had two emotive words in their whole story. He was quite despondent with the students' efforts.

He then referred to the First Steps reference material and related the information that students' mastery of recount naturally occurs first and then they mature into narrative. He stated,

Well these kids are still fairly immature, we're just sort of plugging them in, and this is the start of their narrative. Everything before has been recount that is how they think and talk. It is not as if they should be doing it, they should perhaps be starting to do it, so that made me feel a little better.

Matthew continued to share the narrative activities he had read in the "Literacy Related Skills" book. He was surprised to find that the five activities suggested as a starting point for narrative skills were all oral activities. He thought about what would be easier, writing or doing it [narrative] orally? The decision he made was to attempt the oral activity with his students. Matthew verbalised his thoughts as to why the students experienced difficulty

Because it is so early in their [students] development of writing, maybe all they can really cope with is the recount and that when I asked them to do a narrative it was so hard and they were so overwhelmed. It seemed that they could only cope with so many things that we are really asking a lot of some kids to cope with the narrative.

To assist the students in developing narrative skills, Matthew explained that he might use a recount, and as a whole class exercise try to change it into more of a narrative story where they can get character development. He

then went on to explain the character role-play activity that he had attempted with his students.

We did "The Three Little Pigs" so we broke it down into little episodes. First we brainstormed what emotions the mother pig would have had when she told the three little pigs they had to leave. The brainstorming was really good but it didn't transfer into the role-play. It was only when I got involved that it just started the kids putting a bit of oomph into it. The whole activity was dying. I didn't really know whether it was worth persevering.

Matthew was thinking the activity through while he was speaking to Shirley and Jan and decided that if the students had more practise at role-playing and thinking about the emotions, when it came to writing about emotions it might be easier for them. He talked through his ideas and observations and even though Jan and Shirley did not contribute to the conversation, Matthew used them as a sounding board.

The group then discussed the task that Matthew had carried out and some alternate strategies that would build on to what he had attempted were suggested. He realised that he had expected far too much of the students and probably needed to rethink his approach to the whole area of narrative writing.

This class task had been a new strategy for Matthew and telling colleagues exactly what had happened had exposed a few weaknesses in his teaching. The other group members assured him that not all of their lessons had been fantastic successes and congratulated him for sharing with them his experiences. Some of the not so successful teaching stories were then shared among the group. The stories that were told were not stories that would have been shared in social situations; they were the secret stories.

Meeting 6 (2 July)

As a culmination of the meetings, Shirley, Jan and Matthew were invited to attend an extra meeting to provide them with an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings about the process in which they had been involved over the past school term. They were invited to record their thoughts and reactions in their journals and/or participate in a general discussion at the meeting. Each of the participants agreed to attend another meeting and each made a further entry in their journal.

Shirley's entry.

My thoughts and feelings about the meetings.

I have thoroughly enjoyed participating in these meetings this term for the following reasons.

Socially, I feel I have got to know my colleagues better by spending working and quality time with them out of and away from school. Is this bonding?

The development of my "profile" ideas has come along a lot quicker with the support and assistance of Jan and Matthew. Their input and criticisms have been invaluable.

I have consistently worked on the profile book because of the commitment of meeting once a fortnight and it hasn't been as burdensome as other times.

I have improved / broadened my knowledge and techniques in other areas as a result of being involved in:

Reading comprehension, recording and records.

Narrative writing

Computer use in the classroom.

My teacher and teaching resource knowledge has increased.

Not so good aspects were:

For me, leaving the writing of the journal until the last minute. I don't feel this has been detrimental as my area has not necessarily occurred or been active every day. If the focus were on a classroom technique or practice then the journal keeping would need to be done more regularly.

That our meetings are finishing but maybe we can continue next year.

Points to think about:

Would this work (PD meetings, collaborative planning, collegial support) be successful if the participants wanted to work on a classroom practice ie develop small group work, ERICA strategies, class behaviour or a different style of teaching?

Would the size of the group make a difference?

My comments on journal keeping are that the process is worthwhile as it can provide helpful feedback and provide more positive ideas.

Jan's entry.

I know that I've gained plenty of new strategies from our interaction, not just computer usage but for all the subjects and we did seem to cover most areas in our discussions.

Negative aspects of this type of PD.

At the moment I can't think of any but I'll leave the rest of the page just in case...

Positive aspects of this type of PD.

We chose our area of need.

The advice given was based on recent classroom practical application.

Follow up help was readily available and freely given.

There was no pressure to implement any suggestions, but the fact that we were following up each fortnight acted as a stimulus to organise myself and actively try things out – for which I am most grateful!

Not only did I benefit from my area but also from Matthew and Shirley's areas and I am most interested to see how their ideas work out in the future.

My classroom computer usage flowed over into home computer usage for worksheets – an added bonus.

The food was great!

We had already established a good daily working atmosphere with our cell meetings and this further developed our sharing of ideas and co-operation.

Many incidental strategies were gleaned and put into action within the next week in the various subjects.

The small group made sharing easy and could possibly work for up to 6 but no more.

Usually after school PD brings a huge groan from me but I looked forward to these.

Constant interaction (ie, I could talk sometimes and not have to continuously listen) kept me on task and interested.

Personal development was a bonus.

We determined the time required for each session – it was not imposed on us.

Matthew's entry.

I have re-read my notes.

Key factor is that what I have done in and for this PD has impacted IMMEDIATELY on my classroom practices. I strongly believe that I am doing a better job therefore STUDENTS MUST BENEFIT, therefore increased productivity.

The same procedure was followed at this last meeting whereby the journals had been passed around prior to the meeting to allow the other participants to read all of the entries and to comment on or add to, what had already been written. At the beginning of the meeting, time was given for clarification of any written comment in any of the journals. Shirley took the initiative to begin the

general discussion with the interesting points that she felt had come out of the meetings and the whole process.

Nothing bad has come out of these sessions because everything has been positive. We have all been positive even though we have criticised; it has been constructive criticism. I certainly haven't ever felt on the mat if anyone has said anything or intimated or suggested something. I have only felt that the suggestions have been for my benefit to help me improve or streamline my ideas.

I have also appreciated the opportunity to have an active role in the meetings and not to be expected to just sit and be spoken "to" and sometimes "at".

The only negative aspect of the whole thing was what I mentioned in my journal about the journal. The area I chose to work on was not classroom related so it was OK to write one entry for the fortnight in my journal. I could see, however, if a classroom focus or a change in a particular classroom practice was selected, then the journal entries would have to be written more often. If we go ahead for another lot of meetings I am keen to try to do something that will have more impact in the classroom.

Both Jan and Matthew agreed with Shirley's points and the discussion moved on to what the process might look like the next time they were involved. Matthew highlighted that the number of hours they had been involved in the meetings were far more than what was the required outside professional development hours. That in itself was not a problem for him and in fact, it might go in the group's favour if the required outside professional development hours continued to be increased. Having the meetings regularly and over one term was appreciated by everyone as they thought the consistency of the meetings kept each of them focused and on task. The next time they carried out PD of this kind, the same or similar time frame would be a good one to follow.

Matthew drew attention to the size of the group. Jan had mentioned in her journal that the group size could include up to 6 people. He thought that a group of that size would be too big. Jan explained the reason she had chosen 6 people. She had gained so much out of the areas that both Matthew and Shirley had chosen, that she thought she would gain twice as much if there were twice as many people in the group. Shirley added that she thought it would depend on who the other group members were and pointed out that it would be quite difficult for anyone to join the group now considering the dynamics of the current group and the amount of time they had already spent together.

The group was then asked if there was anything that was asked of them for or during the meetings that they considered being difficult or a hassle. Jan responded by opening her journal to the page she had left for the negative aspects of the meetings. She said she had considered all of the aspects and asked herself what didn't she like. On reflection she decided that she liked all of it and her page remained blank.

The timing of the meetings was also considered appropriate. Conducting the meetings after school could have been considered inconvenient and tiresome. Coming to someone's home and spending a short time relaxing and unwinding before starting the more formal part of the meetings worked successfully.

Jan, "I also liked the fact that we could choose our own topics and because we have all done different things and reported back, we have learned from each other."

Matthew added,

The purpose of attending the meetings was considered more important as we really became more involved with our topics, and I was surprised that we had actually attended as many hours as we did. We were getting too much out of it [the meetings] to stop just because our hours were up.

Jan,

I agree, it gives me an absolute buzz to see my kids out on the computers because before my children were never out there [wet area]. They now have all the skills that I have, which is not a lot, but they are off and running too. It's great to see.

Shirley,

That's a positive thing because you can physically see the difference that you have made. With mine [focus area], when I hand out the profile books, I can actually see their chests expand because they [the students] are quite proud of these books. I think they are so important and that is obviously being relayed through my actions to them [students]

Matthew tried to think of a positive reaction with the students in his class but as Shirley pointed out, the focus areas he had chosen were more to do with him than the students in his class. The narrative area was to do with students but it was too difficult and therefore did not have a positive result that could be reflected in the students' work.

Shirley, Jan and Matthew agreed that this process had not only developed their skills but had also highlighted the skills and expertise of their colleagues in the group. Meeting and working in a small group had allowed and indeed insisted that they all became actively involved in the process. Attending large

en masse professional development sessions was one way of gaining information but should not be considered as the best way. It was suggested in the group discussion that the giving of information is important to teachers but more important is the follow up to the given information especially if a teaching procedure is involved

Matthew was thinking aloud about how first year out and less experienced teachers would cope with this type of process and they may feel daunted with the expertise in the group. Jan allayed his concerns saying that they would benefit tremendously from all of the experiences that would be discussed, just as she has learned from having student teachers working with first year teachers and other teaching staff. Shirley added that Matthew had really answered his own query. The expertise needed to address a problem can often be found on the staff. An expert does not have to come from outside the school. Jan commented that sometimes the advice is more relevant when it comes from someone that you work with

Chapter Six: Analysis

The following set of themes was identified from the data in this research. This research focussed on conducting professional development with a group of experienced teachers. This chapter reports and discusses six key educational issues and topics that emerged from the tapes of the meetings and the individual journals.

The teachers' stories relate the process and the stages each teacher experienced within one school term whilst developing their self-selected focus areas. The stories were developed from the tape recordings of the meetings and from the journal entries. The journal entries were designed to concentrate on the individual focus areas, whereas the meeting discussions often evolved into an examination of other pertinent issues from all facets of education. This inclusion of the discussion of pertinent issues was considered relevant to the professional development of the teachers.

The purpose of the meetings was to provide the group with the opportunity to collaboratively examine, analyse and interpret the experiences, both positive and negative that had occurred during the previous two weeks. In the first meeting it became apparent that the group members wanted to broaden the scope of the meetings to include other related aspects and issues in education, rather than be restricted to the focus areas. As each of the members of the group became more confident in their focus area, they used

the meeting time to discuss important issues that were impacting on their teaching practice outside of their focus area as well as within. The need for this extension of the discussions is a clear indication of the extensive interdependence of all facets of education.

From the data six key themes emerged

The value of

- 1 working in a group.
- 2 cooperative input into collaborative planning.
- 3 sharing teacher resources.
- 4 investigating teaching disappointments.
- 5 developing conflict resolution skills and
- 6 having professional credibility

The Value of Working in a Group

It [professional development] must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 598)

At the outset, it became obvious that each of the participants was prepared to put in the effort necessary to make this collegial group work for them. The first indication came from Jan when she made this comment at the first meeting, "I see this as a real opportunity to make me do it [the tasks]. To use

the group and the experiences you [Shirley and Matthew] have had to help me in the implementation of computers [in the classroom]."

Jan's statement prompted the other two members of the group to describe the value each had experienced while working in groups previously. All agreed that the support of the group members often encouraged risk taking and experimentation with unknown or difficult areas. The knowledge that there would be a positive support group, which could be used as a "back-up" throughout the research, was encouraging to each of the participants.

A good example of the extension of the focus to include a pertinent issue occurred during the fourth meeting. Matthew was explaining how he had reorganised his reading records for the teaching of reading and Shirley asked how he fitted all of the activities he planned into such a short time span. The discussion, which followed, focussed on two issues. The procedures everyone followed in the morning session and the management of integration of language areas with the other subject areas to ensure that most of the curriculum was covered. The discussion resulted in an action plan being developed by the group, for the whole of the morning session in the classroom.

A consequence of individuals reporting back to the group on the developments in their focus area was that the other two group members

found themselves incorporating the strategies of their colleagues into their own classrooms. In some cases it transpired that all three were improving their classroom scene though they had not previously identified a problem in a specific area. The discussion of the classroom problem of one person generated valuable options that the other two might consider for their own use. Consequently, Shirley, Jan and Matthew were working on two, three or sometimes four new initiatives in their classroom. The realisation that each one of the group was doing this was enlightening, as individuals had not indicated that they were incorporating ideas from the discussion of other focus areas into their classes. To a degree, this "focus-borrowing" was a little disturbing until the individuals recognised that this was the collegial group working at its best. As individuals we often do not see, or simply do not have the time to consider, every classroom problem. Through the collegial group process the group members gained from the input they initially directed towards a problem identified by a colleague. The recognition of a particular problem, by one participant, encouraged lateral thinking by the others. The new stimulus provided by the partner's problem led others to consider whether their own handling of that particular area was as good as it could be.

Participants developed a sense of responsibility for the success of the group. They did not want to let the other members of the group down and most importantly, they did not want to be the only member of the group who had not followed up on an area discussed during a meeting. The need to make

full use of the thinking time and input of other members, became a significant responsibility as the academic term progressed. This group loyalty became a strong motivation to experiment in the classroom and to report on the influences of the experimentation. This was evidenced by the consistency and by the content in the journal entries made each fortnight.

A crucial point that was reached within this group was that it did not matter what was disclosed in a discussion. Each member often expressed their sureness that the group's confidence would not be compromised. This trust and loyalty provided bonding that strengthened the resolve of the individuals to be innovative and creative in their work place.

Important issues regarding principles of successful group features arose from these meetings. Members of groups should be responsive to the purpose of the group and be willing participants in the group activities and tasks. The opportunity for the development of loyalty to the group and trust in group members should be a priority. These aspects concur with Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves, 1991; Little, 1993; Loucks-Horsley, Harding, Arbuckle, Murray, Dubea and Williams, 1987 and Retallick and Brennan; 1995.

The Value of Co-operative Input into Collaborative Planning

In collaborative school cultures where teachers are keen to share ideas with colleagues there is likely to be more

workplace learning than in individualistic cultures. (Retallick & Brennan, 1995, p.8)

In previous professional development, Shirley, Jan and Matthew had each experienced occasions where they had been involved in what had been known as "collaborative planning" groups. In much of the previous type of "collaborative planning" one or two persons made the decisions and did the planning while the rest of the group was expected to agree and then implement the plan. As they were not directly involved in the decision-making or planning, group members were later dissatisfied and expressed reservations with the process and the proposed outcome

These previous experiences were contrary to the "collaborative planning" operations of this research group. In this research the owner of the concern area described the situation and the other two members would adopt the problem and all three would take equal roles in the discussion. The discussion assured that each person had a clear understanding of the area of concern and the expected outcomes. Clarification and restatement in several formats was often a significant feature of the examination of a concern area. Brainstorming for ideas, examination of teaching practices and resources then followed and depending on what was generated, one of two paths would be pursued. The group member with the concern would take the suggestions away and make their own decision as to what they would do. (As in Matthew's story when it was suggested he already had the information

needed to record the students' reading progress.) Alternatively the three members would jointly formulate a suggested action and work plan for the group member to follow. (As in Jan's story suggesting how to get her to start using the computer.) Again it was axiomatic that there would be a reporting back at a later meeting or through the journal, to examine the item with new insight or evidence that evolved from the application of the discussion ideas.

The individual members of the group were delighted with this style of collaborative planning where everyone was encouraged to participate, regardless of whether the discussion involved a selected focus area or a teacher- classroom related topic.

The Value of Sharing Teacher Resources

To serve teachers' needs, professional development must embrace a range of opportunities that allow teachers to share what they know and what they want to learn and to connect their learning to the contexts of their teaching. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p.599)

The meetings provided an ideal opportunity for the three group members to share their teaching resources and often "rediscover" resources already in their possession. During the discussion of a focus area, one member might suggest a teaching resource, which had been of assistance in the planning or operation of the particular area. This acted as a catalyst, bringing to the minds

of the others, similar or different linked resources. These additional resources broadened the available classroom and research resources of the individual and performed the important function of reminding individuals of resources and strategies that might have become overlooked or unused. All group members found their resource banks appreciably extended through these discussions.

The most valuable resource sharing was information pertinent to a school priority curriculum area, classroom management techniques and successful teaching strategies. At the end of the first meeting, Matthew made a significant contribution in this regard when he described a day spent with the Physical Education committee. The inservice related to keeping student achievement records in Physical Education, a school priority area. He carefully explained what the committee's decisions were and how they decided on the recommendations to be included in the school Physical Education policy. To assist in addressing the areas in the policy, the school had purchased a copy of a particular curriculum publication for each classroom teacher so this could be used as a reference and resource in planning the lessons for the year. The bonus for Jan and Shirley was that they had a clear understanding of the value of the resource and would begin using the resource book immediately. The current staff communication strategy meant the rest of the staff was not informed of the proposals until the next staff meeting, three weeks later.

The new policy and the resource book stimulated a flood of ideas relating to different games each teacher used in their fitness programmes. The enthusiasm of Matthew and Jan over a particular game that their students loved playing, motivated Matthew to make time to take Shirley and her class out the next day to show them the basic fundamentals and skills required. The cooperative process had extended beyond the meeting into the school.

The Value of Investigating Teaching Disappointments

Hargreaves (1992) analysis of teacher appraisal suggests that there are possibilities for increased sharing of problems and support amongst teachers to provide a foundation for a more collaborative culture. (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1994)

As with other aspects of this research this component became more obvious as the succession of the meetings progressed and the group members became more comfortable with one another as confidantes. Generally, teachers speak freely of their successes in the classroom but are reticent to speak of their teaching disappointments. Proven reliable support provided by other members of the group, altered this practice within this group. It encouraged individuals to openly discuss their classroom failures and frustrations together with their attempts to review these problems.

In general, the stories teachers relate are the ones they wish a listener to hear. They are the stories *they* feel comfortable with, and are not threatened by. Connelly and Clandinin (1995) described teachers' storytelling as three separate areas, sacred stories, secret stories and cover stories.

The stories teachers generally relate in social situations are the safe ones – the cover stories. In this research group, being confident in the group and having confidence in the others allowed each person to safely relate their secret stories, those that convey what really happened in their classrooms. Individuals became more confident with the group procedures and recognised the support that it provided. From this confidence in the success of the group it became a natural progression for each group member to tell of the successes and disappointments within their classroom. They moved from telling cover stories, to telling secret stories. The discussions were more in-depth and individuals went further than just telling if the work plan or strategy was or was not a success. Individuals and the group searched for reasons why some strategies were successful in the classroom and why some were not. They asked why some strategies worked for some teachers but not for others. When a group member had experienced difficulty with a strategy in the classroom, the others pursued the process used by that teacher to try to identify what had occurred. This often proved useful in the identification of the cause of the problem. Often the teacher who had experienced the problem was the one who identified the cause of the problem. Verbalising the process

to others and answering clarifying questions illuminated the area responsible for the failure of the strategy. The contribution of the three teachers in these discussions exposed the cover story and revealed the secret story.

In Shirley's second journal entry she recorded her disappointment that the students were not completing their self-evaluation sheets correctly. Jan and Matthew joined with Shirley, firstly through a searching discussion in which they questioned the events relentlessly. Then they brainstormed suggestions of teaching strategies she might consider. Finally a plan of action evolved. The discussion revealed that there were flaws in the way students had been taught to complete the self-evaluation sheets. They had not adequately covered the essential steps needed to complete the sheet and consequently they had become confused with the task. In this case Shirley had been so enthusiastic in achieving her goal, she had neglected to plan the step by step training of the students to enable them to complete the sheet.

A further example comes from Matthew's choice of a second focus area, narrative writing. His planning included innovative ideas for the lessons in which the students would write the same story from three different perspectives. The work he received from the students was not what he expected. Matthew expressed his disappointment to the group. Following discussion and analysis he realised that he had been too ambitious. He had set the activity when the students were still operating at the oral and concrete

experience level of learning. The students needed a lot more experience and exposure using those two mediums before they could be expected to operate at the abstract level he expected. He had assumed the students had a broader experience and knowledge base and this had had a negative impact on the successful implementation of the strategy.

Even though both were experienced successful teachers, Shirley and Matthew had missed basic diagnostic steps. By verbalising their disappointment within the research group they were able to recognise the misjudgment and identify what they could do to improve the process.

The Value of Developing Conflict Resolution Skills

Little (1984) reports that collaborative teams showed the potential power of people working together to learn, to support, to practice new skills and attitudes and to improve schools and the relationships among the people in them. (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1994)

Teachers often find themselves in conflict situations. The conflict can be in the classroom, with members of the school community, with colleagues, with oneself or the system. The structure of schools and indeed the system, does not readily provide classroom teachers with opportunities to resolve matters

of conflict swiftly and skillfully. Teachers are isolated and generally attempt to address such problems unsupported by colleagues. If the resolution is evasive for one reason or another, there are limited personnel with whom the problem might be confidentially discussed. This collegial group provided the support and the confidentiality that a teacher needs in such circumstances. Experienced listening by the other group members provided the best support for one who was having serious difficulty with a conflict situation.

Conflict in this group was considered to be any problematic situation in which the teacher was experiencing difficulty in forming or coming to terms with a resolution. If a member of the group was involved in a conflict, the discussion of that conflict took precedence over the "official" purpose of the meeting. This priority evolved within the group. It was not an edict from the researcher. The conflict situation would be described and explained to the other members and then a resolution would be sought. Only when the member with the problem was confident and comfortable with a suggested solution or pathway to explore, did the regular meeting procedure begin. As the research term progressed this became a more regular part of the meeting procedure. The value of its inclusion was recognised by all participants.

There were several types of conflict discussed. Situations involving other teachers on staff were minimal although when they occurred, the member involved did not wait for the designated meeting. They usually sought out the

other two of the group in a non-contact student time, the situation would be discussed and suggested resolutions were acted upon as soon as possible. On many occasions, verbalising the incident that caused distress was the catalyst for finding a solution to the problem with little significant input by the others.

On two occasions in the early meetings concerns were aired about areas of dissatisfaction being experienced at school. One of these was in a curriculum area and the other an administrative organisational and timetabling matter. In the end these concerns amalgamated into one. The problem came from Jan who expressed concern with the difficulty the students were experiencing with some of the genres in writing. The students seemed unfamiliar with various writing styles even though the previous years' teachers had expressed delight with the group's progress in all the genres. The difference in teachers' perceptions of student performance is often discussed among teachers. In this circumstance it had generated a difficult situation for Jan, the students' current teacher, as her perception of the students' abilities did not reflect the grades or comments on their previous yearly report. Jan was concerned about the parent reaction when the current student reports were issued and had begun to doubt her own assessment criteria.

The group examined samples of the work in question and agreed within the group that in general, the writing was below their expectations. There was not

an obvious quick solution for this situation so the team formulated an action plan that consisted of a timeline of when and how the writing genres were introduced. The documentation of the plan included several strategies, which had been previously shared in a discussion and had proven successful in developing the students' skills in writing. This plan would hold the teacher in good stead if there were negative reactions or queries from the parents but was not a solution to the main problem even though it did assist in addressing the concern. The problem needed to be brought to the attention of the whole school staff. Matthew suggested that this topic be added to the agenda for the next school development day to be considered as a priority for the following year.

In the ensuing research group meetings, the group members reviewed their action plan for the writing problem and through further discussion identified the need to restructure the classroom support programme. The current programme was 20 minutes per classroom per week, which was used to teach editing skills. The point was made that very little was being achieved in that designated time. The organisation and implementation of the classroom support programme was the responsibility of the administration. Alterations to that programme needed consultation with the support teacher and ratification by the administration. Following discussions it was agreed the 20 minutes per class be combined to provide each of the three classes one hour every three

weeks. This extended time would then allow an aspect of the writing concern to be addressed

Within this supportive environment, many situations were diffused through the discussion of appropriate conflict resolution strategies. Members of this group had somewhere to take their problems knowing that they would receive the support they needed.

The Value of Having Professional Credibility

The fact is that our primary value concerns our need to help ourselves change and learn, for us to feel that we are growing in our understanding of where we have been, where we are, and what we are about, and that we are enjoying what we are doing... To help others to change without this being preceded and accompanied by an exquisite awareness of the process in ourselves is "delivering a product or service" which truly has little or no significance for our personal or intellectual growth. (Sarason, 1972, p.122 cited in Fullan, 1991, p.289)

An important ingredient considered by this group, to ensure that professional development for experienced classroom teachers was successful was the professional credibility of the participants. Throughout the meetings, Shirley, Jan and Matthew often commented on how fortunate they were to be

involved in this style of professional development. They compared the different styles of professional development presentations they had attended during their respective teaching careers and assessed the relative success of the different formats. Matthew expressed the view that:

Teachers are a bad audience because they are super critical. They know where they are at and wait for the needed or new information, when it doesn't come they turn off and feel that they have wasted their time in attending the session. I feel this is worthwhile professional development because we have a process in place and we follow things up. (Meeting 2)

Matthew made another comment with which everyone agreed.

There must be credibility-if a person you know who is a good teacher says that something works-you would try it. The stranger, who comes in to tell you about something, may be a good presenter but not a good teacher. (Meeting 3)

Matthew went on to explain that the presenter may not be known to the audience as an experienced, successful teacher so other teachers would be less likely to implement a new strategy or process on their suggestion.

In this group, everyone had viewed the other group members teaching in their respective classrooms. They identified the other two members as

successful teachers and as a consequence, were more willing to implement suggested strategies from the group rather than from an outsider. Comments from the group members were:

This is the best P.D. I have ever attended because not only am I hearing what you are doing together with all the incidental things, I think – I will try that. This is terrific! (Jan, Meeting 4)

I agree, I really like this model. We are all good teachers and mutual respect helps make this work for us. It's great working in a small group because everyone can fully participate. (Matthew, Meeting 4)

There hasn't been one time that we have got together that I haven't picked something up that will enhance something I do in the classroom, make what I do better, not change necessarily or even implement – but just to do something better. (Shirley, Meeting 4)

This P.D. has been stimulating and terrific! (Jan, Meeting 5)

The professional credibility of each individual was constantly reinforced and tested. Each member of the group developed confidence in the others and in

their abilities as professional teachers. They respected the opinion of the group and had confidence in decisions made by it, when selecting the most appropriate strategies to use in the work plan. The evidence showed in the manner in which the planning, done during the meetings, was implemented in the classroom by each of the teachers in the group.

The Dual Role of the Researcher

The dual role throughout this research had been challenging but interesting and has certainly provided a great deal for me professionally. Being a participant in the group as well as the researcher meant that I experienced first hand what it was like on both sides of research. Being the practitioner engaged in systematic reflection of actions and practices assisted me to "...engage in rational critical interpretation of evidence" (Grundy, 1995, p.6). This experience provided the opportunity to utilise the inside perspective gained in the development of the group to be transferred and interpreted more effectively into the outside perspective reported by observing researchers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

The disadvantage of the dual role was that I had two major areas of interest operating simultaneously. One focus was the area chosen to allow me to participate as a group member and the other was the role of the researcher. As a consequence, difficulties arose in developing my focus area to reach its

full potential, as my energy resources were shared between that and the observing, facilitating and interpreting role of the researcher.

There are three major personal benefits of having participated in the group. Firstly, experiencing the excitement of developing something new in the classroom and knowing that there was always collegial support available when I needed it, revitalised my enthusiasm for teaching. Secondly, I now know the feeling of success in achieving a personal and professional goal in a collaborative and collegial group environment. Thirdly, from my perspective, this was the best teaching professional development I have experienced. I am able to fully support the comments made in meeting 6 by the other group members with respect to collaborative planning and collegial support.

On reflection of my participation within this research and having experienced the duality of the "insider-outsider" roles identified and explained by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), I would willingly partake in other similarly structured projects. The positives I gained through the involvement in the group outweighed the negatives from carrying out the dual role. The advantages and disadvantages mentioned pertaining to the role of participant/researcher are my personal points of view and there was no evidence from the other group members to suggest that my performance in the group was less than satisfactory.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine and investigate through an interactive process one method of providing professional development. This method would address the individual needs of experienced classroom teachers using the expertise of colleagues.

In order to discuss the findings of this research and to make sense of the three teachers' experiences it is necessary to consider what other people have reported on similar situations. For over two decades research has been carried out on teacher professional development however it is only in recent years that attention has been paid to professional development in areas other than implementation of curriculum and associated best classroom practice.

Fullan (1992), Little (1993), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) and others, have repeatedly reported on the necessities for best professional development practice and yet I believe education authorities still have not found a successful formula. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) state that for effective professional development teachers need to be involved as learners as well as teachers. To move away from the old models of "inservicing" teachers they suggest six characteristics to be considered by authorities.

- Professional development must engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation and

reflection that illuminate the processes of learning and development;

- Professional development must be grounded in inquiry, reflection and experimentation that are participant driven;
- Professional development must be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers;
- Professional development must be connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students;
- Professional development must be sustained, ongoing, intensive and supported by modelling, coaching and the collective solving of specific problems of practice;
- Professional development must be connected to other aspects of school change (p. 598).

Other researchers have reiterated the importance of the content contained in these six characteristics. My research is consistent with Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin's characteristics of effective professional development for teachers. It also supports the claims of Fullan (1991), Loucks-Horsley et. al (1987), Smyth (1992) and Stallings (1989) with regard to teacher professional development.

From the teacher research and appreciative inquiry literature, four key components were synthesised to form the framework for this research. They are an amalgamation of key ideas from the literature that I have focussed on to provide the foci for discussion of this research. These are:

- Professional development must respond to participants' professional requirements;
- The professional development structure must be flexible, dynamic and responsive to the specific and changing needs of teachers;
- Participants learn in a supportive environment with a collegial group, which utilises collaborative planning;
- Participants strive to attain excellence in a designated teaching practice.

These are the cornerstones used for this research so the data are discussed incorporating these four crucial areas.

Successful teachers are enthusiastic about their work. They are constantly striving to discover alternative ideas and successful strategies to use within the classroom. This would include seeking alternative professional development models and meeting other successful teachers. Often they pursue further qualifications in their search for new ideas or may become involved in university research projects. These teachers are rarely satisfied with what is already occurring in their immediate teaching perimeter, they want the best to ensure the students in their classroom are given every

opportunity to learn. The providers of professional development must take into account the importance of recognising the need for different areas of expertise. Professional development for these teachers must meet their professional demands for it to be effective.

Teachers in this research project were given the opportunity to pursue a particular individual area of need. Investigation, exploration and implementation in their individual area of importance with the assistance and support of a collegial group led to fulfillment for each group member. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) said of collegial groups,

They are powerful learning tools because they engage people in collective work on authentic problems that emerge out of their own efforts, allowing them to get beyond the dynamics of their own schools and classrooms and to come face to face with other people and other possibilities. (p. 599)

Each participant in this research group displayed diligence in their tasks and enthusiasm to participate in the group. All were striving to attain excellence in their designated area.

Being part of the discourse community assured teachers that their knowledge of their students and of schooling is respected. Once they know this, they become committed to

change, willing to take risks, and dedicated to self improvement (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1994, p. 674).

The group members' growth in confidence allowed each teacher's story to unfold. The cover stories were replaced with the secret stories and this led to increased sharing of more appropriate teaching strategies during the discussions. The topics in the discussions became more diverse and extended beyond the three focus topic areas. During the later meetings, the participants pointed out that not only were they developing their own focus area, but they were also incorporating into their classroom practices, strategies and ideas associated with the focus areas of the other group members. This is the strength of operating in a supportive environment with a group that utilises collaborative planning (Brennan & Retallick, 1995; Bushe, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 1991; Little, 1993; Smyth, 1992; Stalling, 1989.)

The data show the success of the collaborative group was also due to the structure of the professional development meetings. The structure of professional development is a vital element in its success. Having a flexible and dynamic structure, which responds to specific and changing participant needs, encourages full cooperation and active participation of each group member. The structure must allow each member to build on from where they are currently operating rather than retrogress to start at a common point. The

flexibility of the structure also provides occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs concerning content, pedagogy and the learners.

To serve teachers' needs, professional development must embrace a range of opportunities that allow teachers to share what they know and what they want to learn and to connect their learning to the contexts of their teaching. Professional development activities must allow teachers to engage actively in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time and to reflect on the process as well as the content of what they are learning. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p.599)

The success in each venture taken on by each of the participants in this research far exceeded their expectations at the outset of the professional development sessions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

My experience with this research suggests there are a number of major factors to keep in the forefront when planning and implementing professional development for experienced teachers.

- Collegiality can not be contrived. When forming a group, members should share an understanding of the function of the group and be willing to participate in the tasks or activities. This will form the basis for the group members to have a thread of commonality or shared interest.
- Group members must be provided with an opportunity to explore a focus of their choice that addresses their professional requirements.
- The initiator of the group must ensure the environment is supportive and conducive for cooperative learning, participant reflection and critical analysis.
- The structure must be flexible and responsive to the specific needs of the teachers.

These planning guidelines are important for any successful professional development programme. Given the opportunity, teachers can and will make significant changes in their practices and perspectives on teaching and learning. They will develop their knowledge and skills in a search to ensure students receive optimum learning opportunities.

If we are interested in teachers becoming independent and reflective professionals we must provide them with a framework for professional development that mirrors this

inspiration. The "slap and tickle"... "beggars can't be choosers" attitudes towards the provision of professional development are no longer applicable, workable or sustainable. (Retallick & Brennan, 1995, p.18)

As a result of this research, four specific areas have been identified regarding professional development for experienced teachers. These four areas reflect the four key components formulated from the literature review that provided the foci for the discussion. A question on each area has been posed in order to provide a framework for presentation.

How are the professional needs of experienced teachers met?

When an experienced teacher identifies an educational area they would like to pursue, they are willing to become involved in a group that challenges them and promotes professional growth. This group would be comprised of other teachers who are interested in exploring educational and classroom issues to enable them to increase their teaching expertise. The pursuit of improvement in respective teaching areas would provide the participants with a common interest. Within this group, areas of teaching or student learning that have surfaced as dilemmas or areas of concern for the participants, can be discussed, explored and investigated. A supportive and conducive learning environment should develop hand-in-hand with the commitment to the group from the participants. This encourages the teachers to become

active learners by being engaged in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time.

Who provides the expertise that teachers need?

Within the group of teachers there will be a collection of professional knowledge and teaching experience. The members of the group will provide the expertise required to address areas under investigation. Because of the coherence of the group and the known successful performance record of the participants, ideas and strategies suggested from members within the group are more likely to be implemented. Professional credibility of the group members and the group as an entity is recognised by all participants.

Can opportunities be provided to teachers to enable them to critically analyse their teaching methods?

The interaction of group members is the catalyst that leads to critical analysis and self-reflection. At every meeting the areas or topics are addressed within the group. Teachers have the opportunity to discuss, assess and analyse what he or she has carried out in their classroom. As they report to the group on their actions or progress, other group members ask clarifying questions, make comments and suggestions for alternate strategies or planning. The discussion and suggestions act as a springboard for future planning in the classroom.

Who provides the support to the teachers who are implementing new methods in the classroom?

Members of the collegial group provide the support necessary to the teachers who are involved with implementation. They may assist with the formulation of the plan and make alternative suggestions based on their own experiences. The collective support will decrease the difficulties likely to occur when implementing something new in the classroom. This opportunity to work, plan, share with and be supported by colleagues is invaluable (Lieberman, 1994; Little, 1993; McLaughlin, 1994; Stalling, 1989).

Given the circumstances and the people involved with this research, the results were significant. Professional development for these teachers had personal meaning through personal experience and allowed for critical reflection. The collegiality in the group allowed for collaboration, cooperation and reciprocal support. Each research member had control and ownership of their chosen focus and was responsible for the level of risktaking. Each action undertaken was practical and pragmatic. The participants in this research stated that their involvement in this professional development process provided the best professional growth and learning experience in their teaching careers.

Teachers learn by doing, reading and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they

see. This kind of learning enables teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995. p.598)

Providing professional development for experienced successful teachers is not an impossible task. Bushe (1995) continues his pursuit of the ultimate process for effective development and change. Instead of focussing on making people aware of how bad things really were, he said:

Now I am focusing on helping people become aware of how good things are, on the genius in themselves and others, on the knowledge and abilities they already have, on examples of the future in the present. (p.6)

Appendix A

Sample Data Record

Matthew (*Matthew solved his own problems by talking them through with J&S*)
Sharing ideas on new topic stimulated group on this area

Meeting Number 4

Context Chart

Referral to group member
Offer of support
Offer ideas
Offer encouragement
Offer constructive criticism
Positive response to ideas
Negative response to ideas

Jan

Shirley

///	///
/	///
///	//
/	//
	/
//	///

Descriptive Matrix

Changed focus area to Narrative. Explained the process using brainstorming for each emotion. Write a story from three perspectives ie. From each brother's and parents' point of view.	"Discovered resources we already have in the school." We all agreed!!
Matthew: Each group member needs to evaluate themselves to choose an area that boosts their performance in the classroom	Jan: I knew what my weaknesses were! Selection of a topic was easy. I feel very proud of my achievements so far.
Jan: This is the best P.D. I have ever attended because not only am I hearing what you are doing, it is all the little incidental things that we discuss and I think "I'll try that in my classroom!" This is terrific!	Matthew: I agree-if this is a model for experienced teachers – mutual respect of colleagues helps make it work. Keep the group small to ensure full participation.
Shirley: There hasn't been one time that we have got together that I haven't picked something up that will enhance something I do in my class. This makes what I do better, not change necessarily or even implement – but just do something better.	Jan: I find the discussions stimulating.

<p>Matthew:</p> <p>If this PD continues and members plateau, then maybe not meet for a while. When we meet again continue in this style on another area then share on completion with others. PD from experts often make teachers tune out -- they may already be doing a great job. There is a huge difference between imposed PD and own choice.</p>	
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