Supporting elementary teachers at the ‘chalk face’: A model for in-school professional development

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ABSTRACT: The voluminous literature on teacher professional development presents varied components of what constitutes meaningful professional development experiences for elementary teachers. The research reported here first identifies these components through an analysis of the literature, and then describes a research project in which those components were actualized to support elementary teachers who explored their literacy teaching in their school and classrooms. The elements of the professional development experience that contributed to success include a professional culture, investment of time, collaborative relationships, the location for professional development, the acknowledgement of external influences, and purposeful interactions.

Introduction

The professional development of teachers has been long identified as a major challenge in education (for example Hoban, 2002; Holly, & Mcloughlin, 1989). The current climate of accountability, outcome based education with standardization in assessment, demands that teachers have greater understanding of learning theories and pedagogy to develop and support their classroom practice. Many countries, including Australia, have established professional standards and milestones for teachers in the last decade. While the development of professional standards aim for "...professional enhancements which lead to improvements in both teaching and learning, and in student outcomes" (Boston, 2002, p. 11), there is a pressing need for teachers to be supported with their professional understandings and applications to classroom practice. As Cummings (2002) has noted, there are no automatic links "...between developing professional teaching standards per se, and 'living these out' in everyday learning environments" (p.3).

The 'best' and 'most appropriate' way to provide professional development for teachers is a significant challenge. Teachers have much knowledge about the nature of learning derived from their experiences as teachers, the input they receive through their tertiary training, and input from professional development opportunities undertaken. This creates, as Nicol (1997) describes, a "wealth of knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning" (p. 97). However, these beliefs, while well formed and powerful, are often resistant to responding to curriculum change. The community at large expects teachers to keep abreast of current thinking with regard to the teaching of literacy practices and accommodate for this within their classroom practice. Teacher professional development needs to be responsive to this call; however, finding a clear pathway through the literature to develop a vision for implementation requires investigation. With that in mind, this paper sets out to examine literature, the development and implementation of professional development experiences and responses offered from individual teachers, in terms of the following questions:

* What structures, activities, processes and people partnerships can be identified within professional development experiences?
* What is the nature of the relationship between these professional development experiences and the professional growth of teachers in the teaching of literacy?

A Review of Professional Development from the Literature

The literature provides many different understandings as to what professional development for teachers actually is. Fullan (1991) defines professional development as "the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one's career from pre-service teacher education to retirement" (pp. 326-327). Guskey and Huberman

(1995) further identify "professional development can also be viewed as a dynamic process that spans one's entire career in the profession, from preparation and induction to completion and retirement" (p. 133). It is undisputed that teachers' learning is continuous throughout their professional experience, with professional development and professional growth being interrelated, one unable to occur without the other. Mevarech (1995) reinforces this by writing that professional development opportunities "...are assumed to be important stimuli for teachers' professional growth" (p. 151). Further, Danielson (1996) states "continuing development is the mark of a true professional, an ongoing effort that is never completed" (p. 115).

Elliott (1991) asserts that professional development is more than just experiences teachers have-"Professional development is the individualistic and possessive process of acquiring techniques" (p. 106). Professional development opportunities often impart knowledge and various classroom techniques that may be able to be employed to support such knowledge. If we are to use this definition from Elliott, we need to consider that professional development is more than just the input component and that in fact it hasn't occurred unless the individual teacher has demonstrated 'possession' of the techniques. This relates to Whitehead's (1998) assertion that professional development needs to support teachers on their journey to self-understanding. Put simply, a teacher needs to know his/her professional development and the impact of this on his/her classroom practice. Dialogue about professional development experiences and its relationship to their classroom practice "...can influence a teacher's self-understanding and stimulate new direction for practical inquiry" (Elliott, 1991, p. 108).

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) argue that professional development "...involves more than changing teachers' behavior ... it also involves changing the person the teacher is" (p. 7). Fundamental to this is the understanding that professional development must impact upon 'teaching behavior' but also the teacher's beliefs about how this impacts upon how children learn. They argue that it must be acknowledged: "...teacher development is also a process of personal development" (p.7). Indeed, the role of the teacher has changed significantly in recent times. This changing role needs to be addressed within professional development opportunities in order to best support classroom-teaching practice.

Professional development opportunities provided for teachers are typically varied. Too often, teachers are seen as 'empty vessels' waiting to be filled with teaching knowledge through professional development opportunities. Johnson and Golombek (2002) write, "for more than a hundred years, teacher education has been based on the notion that knowledge about teaching and learning can be 'transmitted' to teachers by others" (p. 1). Teachers need to be acknowledged individually for what they bring to the profession and work from their own starting points on their individualized areas of need. Teachers need to see the value in professional development for their personal teaching practice and must be supported in its implementation by those in leadership roles and by the school community at large.

The Professional Development 'Puzzle'

Further synthesis of the various perspectives presented within the literature reveals challenges to those who offer professional development opportunities to teachers through the identification of both enabling and inhibiting components. In the analogy of professional development as a 'puzzle,' these components become the 'pieces.' However, there is little indication given as to if, and indeed how, these components fit together to establish a cohesive and interconnected approach to professional development, particularly within a school context.

Exploration and analysis of each of these 'pieces' reveals that they have three foci:
* the teacher;
* the school;
* the experience.
These three categories are not mutually exclusive and interact to support both the teacher and the professional development experience. What is interesting about these categories that emerge from analysis of the literature is the emphasis not only on the actual professional experience but also upon the individual teacher and the capacity of the school to support both the initiative and the teacher. Each of these will be explored with connection to the literature.

Focus on the Teacher

Teachers' conceptions of the profession.

The literature suggests that the way an individual teacher perceives both the teaching profession and their role within that as being important factors in their attitude towards professional development (see for example, Beck & Murphy, 1996; Danielson, 1996; Hoban, 2002; Huberman, 1992; Turbill, 2002).

Individual needs of the teachers.

Teachers are individuals and as such have individual needs. The literature identifies that it is important to acknowledge both the personal and professional backgrounds of teachers. It is, therefore, necessary for professional development opportunities to work within the knowledge base of the individual teacher while also being responsive to their professional needs at that time (see for example, Fullan, 1992; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Whitehead, 1998).

Working from what teachers already know.

The literature indicates that it is important to establish what teachers already know about an area before providing input to further their development. In this way, teachers are recognized for the knowledge they already have, and professional development opportunities can work to move the teachers from that point as they further refine their understandings and subsequent practice (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997; Turbill, 2002; Whitehead, 2000).

Teacher as learner.

Professional development should be ongoing throughout one's career. As such, it is important to acknowledge that teachers are constantly learning as their thinking and understanding changes and develops (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fullan, 1991; Guskey & Huberman, 1995).

Teacher as researcher.

Teachers have been described as researchers in their own classrooms as they consistently identify and respond to areas of need. As such, teachers need support with this process as it contributes to their professional growth (see for example, Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Danielson, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; McCutcheon & Jung, 1990; Nunan, 1989; McKernan, 1988; Shulman, 1992).

Focus on the School

School context.

The school in which the teacher is employed has potential to impact upon the teacher and their receptiveness to professional development experiences. Professional development experiences are reported to be unproductive if teachers aren't supported by the school leadership and with appropriate time and resources (see for example, Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Stallings, 1989).

Creating a community / collaborative workplace.

Traditionally teachers have been seen as working independently within the confines of their classroom. The literature encourages teachers to form professional networks to assist with professional practice, creating a community within individual schools, districts and curriculum areas. Teachers are also called upon to work together in a collaborative way (see for example, Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Edwards-Groves, 2003; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Hoban, 2002).

Feedback from 'stakeholders.'

The literature acknowledges the importance of the key 'stakeholders.' These 'stakeholders' can have a significant impact upon teaching practice. Research recognizes the importance of receiving feedback from 'stakeholders' particularly in light of changes in teaching practice (see for example, Barth, 1991; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Hoban, 2002).

Focus on the Experience

Long-term timeframe.

The literature clearly identifies that one-shot or disjointed approaches to professional development are not worthwhile. What appears to be more successful in cases presented within the literature, are those models of professional development that enable professional development opportunities to be ongoing within an extended timeframe (see for example, Danielson, 1996; Darling- Hammond, 1997; Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Hoban, 2002; Hoffman, 1998; Mevarech, 1995).

Relationship with the facilitator.

A facilitator is identified to typically lead professional development opportunities. It is important that teachers respect and trust the person who is coordinating their professional development experience (see for example, Tickell, 1990; Turbill, 2002).

Teacher as researcher.

The 'teacher-as-researcher' model of action research has been advocated as an effective model for teachers to utilize in their classrooms. The guiding principles of action research-plan, act, observe, reflect, revise plan-are useful for teachers as they organize their teaching in response to professional development. What is also important is engaging in professional dialogue forums to review and discuss this process (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kemmis, 1999; Lefever-Davis & Heller, 2003).

Providing input from sources of knowledge.

Teachers are called upon to teach in a way that is responsive to pedagogical understandings and processes. The literature suggests that it is important for professional development to address the content teachers need to know. Further, it is also suggested that sources of knowledge-text, courses, people-be made available to teachers to assist this development of knowledge (see for example, Brock, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Huberman, 1992; Stallings, 1989).

Opportunity to question.

The literature promotes teachers to challenge and question their teaching practice in view of professional development opportunities. As such, structures to encourage questioning and facilitate responses to these questions posed need to be incorporated within professional development experiences (see for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997; Stronge, 2002).

Reflection.

Reflection has been suggested to be of benefit to teachers' understanding and organization of their teaching practices. The literature suggests that reflection can occur at an individual level, with a "critical friend" or in a collaborative workplace. Opportunity and support to reflect need to be considered within professional development

experiences (see for example, Collay, Dunlap, Enloe, & Gagnon, 1998; Edwards-Groves, 2003; Hoffman, 1998; LaBoskey, 1997; Schon, 1971; Stronge, 2002; Whitehead, 2000).

The Research Project

The research reported in this paper aimed to operationalize each of the 'pieces' of the professional development puzzle in a meaningful and coherent professional development experience for a cohort of teachers working in one elementary school. This research was conducted over the course of one academic year (40 weeks) in one elementary school located in the southwest of Sydney, Australia. The school was in a low-socioeconomic area and had an enrolment of 430 students in the year of inquiry. This school has a significant turnover of staff from year to year with the average age of teachers at the time of the research being thirty years of age compared to an average within the larger geographical location of New South Wales of approximately fifty. Typically the school attracted a number of early career teachers.

The significant changes in staff, coupled with the changes in teaching, a new syllabus and support documents, and the varied interpretations of these, highlighted the need for this research. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) state, "the field of curriculum is - to put it bluntly - a maze" (p. 113). The purpose of this research was to help teachers move through this 'maze' - to help them make sense of how children best learn literacy practices and how they could support this through individual classroom practice working towards a shared goal - 'balanced literacy pedagogy'.

Prior to this research, the researcher had been employed at the school for a period of five years. During this time, the researcher taught across the grades in the infant school (Kindergarten to Grade 2), held the role of support teacher for students and staff in the area of literacy (Kindergarten to Grade 6), and was a member of the school executive with responsibility for literacy. This placed the researcher in the unique position of having awareness of previous directions the school had moved within, having established professional relationships with many of the staff, understanding of previous professional development activities, and knowledge of priority focus areas within the school. Staff saw moving to the role of facilitator for the in-school professional development experiences as a natural progression of the role the researcher had held within the school.

Each of the teachers of Early Stage One (Kindergarten) and Stage One (Grades 1 and 2) within the school were invited to be involved in the development of 'balanced literacy pedagogy' for children in these early school years. Each of these teachers expressed interest in being involved in the project, and provided the researcher with informed consent. Table 1 presents an overview of each of these participant teachers at the beginning of the school year.

Table 1: Overview of Participant Teachers

Name	*Age*	*Gender*	*Years Teaching*	*2001 Grade*	*Previous grades taught*
Natalie	23	Female	1 year casual 2 years permanent	Kindergarten	Casual (all grades), K
Kate	29	Female	1 year casual 4 x 12 month contracts	Kindergarten	Casual (K-2), Entry (Isle of Mann), K
Lee	26	Female	3 x 12 month contracts 2 years permanent	Grade 1	Casual (all grades), Grade 5, Grade 3
Amanda	23	Female	2 x 12 month contracts 1 year permanent	Grade 1	Casual (all grades), Grade 1
Cathie	24	Female	1 x 12 month contract 4 years permanent	Grade 2	Grade 5, Grade 1, Grade 2
Michael	36	Male	11 years permanent	Grade 2	Grade 6, Grade 4, Grade 3, Grade 2, Grade 1

The researcher adopted the action research approach (Kemmis, 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Stringer, 1996), housed within the qualitative research tradition, as the project methodology. It was envisioned that such an approach may bring together the puzzle pieces, empower the participant teachers, and encourage them to explore issues that came up as they worked to develop their own pedagogical understandings and to refine and develop their classroom teaching practice. Further, this process would enable teachers to explore, experiment, reflect upon, talk about, and rethink their practices so as to redesign their literacy programs and implementation of these, and to represent their increased understandings throughout the project. Opportunity to engage with this process in connection with input from current literacy theory, while at the same time recognizing previous literacy learning experiences that have impacted upon individual teachers, was incorporated within the professional development experiences. The teachers were provided with time to work within the context of a collaborative community throughout the yearlong professional experience.

Each participant teacher and the researcher engaged in sessions of classroom teaching, as well as semi-structured and structured interviews. Time was scheduled for the researcher to work with each of the classroom teachers in their individual classrooms on a weekly basis. During these classroom sessions, the action research cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) was employed: both the teachers and researcher engaged in the process of acting, observing, reflecting, and revising the teaching of literacy in the classroom. In addition, time was scheduled for each teacher to meet with the researcher to discuss what had happened in the classroom, reflect upon this, and plan for future sessions addressing individual goals. Further opportunity was made available for all the participant teachers to meet regularly as a group with the researcher to discuss what was happening throughout the classroom experiences and collaborate to develop a cohesive approach across these early grades to the teaching of literacy. Each of the teachers compiled a reflective journal in which she/he responded to issues that arose throughout the course of the professional development focus. These issues were classified (and reclassified) by the researcher through constant analysis. Table 2 represents the frequency of these interactions over the course of the year.

Table 2: Researcher and participant teacher interaction

Participant Teacher and grade taught	*Interviews (semi-structured and structured)*	*Hours spent with researcher in their classroom*	*Reflective Journal entries*
Kate (Kinder)	9	23	9
Natalie (Kinder)	7	27	12
Amanda (Grade 1)	11	26	18
Lee (Grade 1)	8	26	12
Michael (Grade 2)	9	21	19
Cathy (Grade 2)	2	6	3

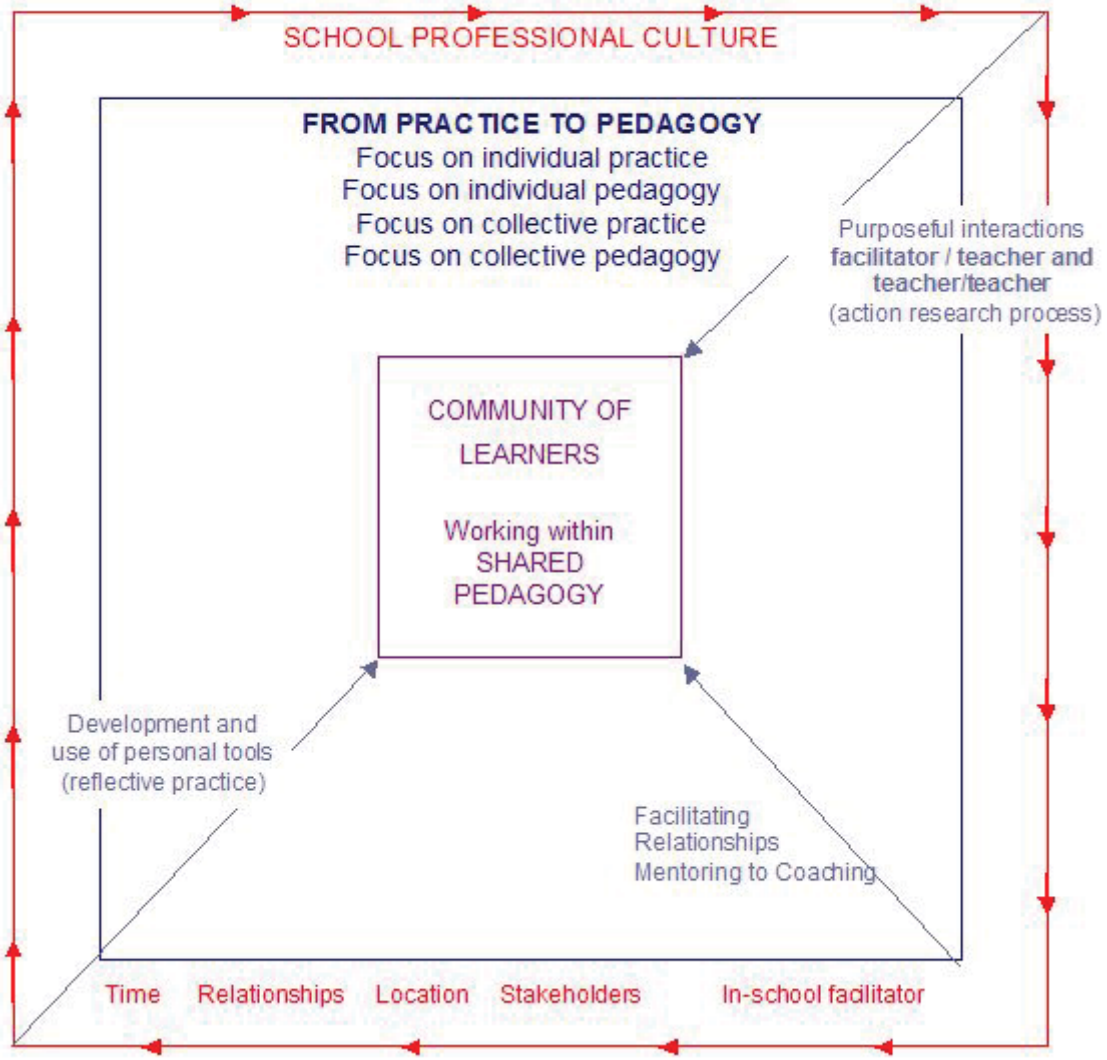
Cathy, whilst interested and involved in the direction of the inquiry, was not able to take an active role in all of the tasks due to her ever-increasing workload as a member of the school executive. The collection of data from her was irregular. Kate began teaching her Kindergarten class part way through term one when the class's original teacher went on maternity leave. The original teacher, while expressing interest in the inquiry, did not participate in any of the data collection procedures.

To ensure that the data were providing the necessary 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), data analysis was conducted as it was collected throughout the year. After each classroom visit, the researcher took time to analyze data in terms of what was working and what wasn't. This was then reported back to the participant teacher/s for cross checking to ensure the data had been accurately interpreted. This assisted in the planning of subsequent tasks and also to ensure that the data were relevant to the focus of the study. Structured and semi-structured interviews and reflective journal themes stemmed from what was happening in each teacher's classroom. The six individual classrooms, and what was happening within them, were used as the core for the inquiry.

A model for in-school professional development

This research investigated the professional journey of each participant teacher as the pieces of the professional development 'puzzle,' namely the teacher, the school, and the experiences, were brought together through the process of action research. This was then analyzed to develop a model representing this in-school professional development. Figure 1 depicts this model and description of each of the identified contributing components follows.

Figure 1: Model of In-school Teacher Professional Development



School Professional Culture

This in-school professional development project did not create the professional culture that provided background for the inquiry. But the project did highlight the critical role that the professional culture played in teacher professional learning. The principal of the school demonstrated an ability not only to recognize the potential of staff members, but also to provide them with opportunities that supported them. She demonstrated awareness of the needs of the school with regard to curriculum and her appointment of staff reflected this. The Principal and the researcher had a personal and professional relationship where they shared common visions and passions. They had worked together prior to commencing this inquiry, establishing some of the necessary grounding. This inquiry built upon these foundations and supported and extended the professional working relationships within the school.

It is reasonable to argue; therefore, that the professional culture of the school in which teachers are employed is crucial to their embracement of professional development opportunities. This inquiry demonstrated that when the participant teachers were given responsibility for their own professional decisions, were supported through the leadership of the school, and acknowledged for what they bring to the identity of the profession, they became empowered. This outcome is clearly supported in the literature, which acknowledges the importance of support from

the school leadership and the provision of time and resources to professional development (for example, Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Hoban, 2002).

Analysis of the data demonstrated that within the professional culture of the school, there were critical components. These included the importance of time and how that time was allocated and used, the relationships, the location of the professional development opportunity, the impact of 'stakeholders,' and the need for an in-school facilitator.

Purposeful Interaction: the use of Action Research

'Purposeful interactions' underpinned the professional development initiative. These purposeful interactions allowed for the participants to focus on their practice, both at the individual and collective level, and to move towards the development of both an individual and collective pedagogy. Without purposeful interactions, the data suggested, a community of learners may not have developed. These interactions could be likened to scaffolding behind the professional development enterprise.

The guiding principles of the action research spiral: plan, act, observe, reflect, and revise (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 11), characterized the purposeful interactions between the participant teachers and the researcher in her role as both facilitator and researcher. These guiding principles were constant throughout the duration of the inquiry and acted as the 'change agent,' used to refine and support the teaching practice of the participant teachers while providing opportunities for professional dialogue and critique. One participant, Kate, described how valuable it was to "...think and talk about what I was doing and why I was doing it ... it made me go back and revisit key theories and my interpretation of them."

In this inquiry, the participant teachers were able to move through the elements of action research according to their specific needs. Opportunities for demonstration and team-teaching involving the participant teachers and the researcher as the facilitator were provided for in the initial stages of the inquiry. One participant, Michael, made reference to "having a professional, well informed and supportive practitioner ... who is comfortable in letting herself be observed and critiqued" as a benefit to the professional development experience. The literature clearly identifies action research as a useful process for classroom teachers to engage in (for example, Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). However, this theory of in-school teacher professional development revealed that this process alone is not enough. It was found that teachers needed to develop their own personal 'tools' to make sense of their professional learning.

From Practice to Pedagogy

This examination of teacher professional development built upon the premise that teachers needed to be in control of their immediate classroom situation before they could engage completely with exploring and refining their respective pedagogical practices. The data supported this. As example, one participant, Kate, moved through significant shifts throughout the inquiry. She initially told the researcher she felt "teachers were in overdrive ... having to keep up with all the changes in education" and questioned the literacy expectations the school and curriculum document communicated for the students. However, after an intensive focus on her classroom practice, within her classroom, Kate's overall attitude changed. She wrote in her reflective journal, "I am a very confident teacher of literacy who thrives on modeling and passing onto the children everything I know ... it [teaching literacy] has become my passion" acknowledging that "I do have high expectations, but that's the way it should be!" The participant teachers demonstrated a need to focus on themselves as a teacher first before they could begin to work as a 'learning community' or 'team.' Too often it seemed, in previous times, the teachers were asked to work as a 'learning team' with little or no understanding of what this meant. Throughout the learning process they often needed to return to an individual focus before feeling confident to talk about their learning as a group.

Community of Learners

Another premise was that teachers needed to work towards establishing themselves within a community of learners, at an in-school level, with community members close at hand, and opportunity for continued dialogue. Establishing a community of learners was seen to involve more than having a mentor, being a facilitator, coach, or friend. However,

the data suggested that these forms of relationship were necessary foundations for the development of community. As McNiff (2000) describes, this community of learners involved actively "...transcending the diverse personal and work experiences of colleagues," encouraging teachers to move beyond their comfort zone and together "explore new epistemologies of learning" (pp. 65-66). One participant, Michael, acknowledged that it was important to be "...reflective of my own practice ... and being prepared to take on other ideas." The learning community that emerged within this school supports Senge's (1990) definition:

"an organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 77).

Stoll and Fink (1996) remind us, "the school as a workplace with its unique culture has an enormous capacity to support and enhance teachers' learning" (p. 159). The structures that were developed and supported by the professional culture in the school can be seen as enablers, which allowed the participant teachers to move forward on their professional journey. The importance of professional development initiatives being supported by the school leadership is discussed within the literature (see Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994; Barth, 1991; Fullan, 1991; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999).

It is important to recognize the role of each person in a "community of learners." Throughout this research, it became vital that everyone involved in the professional development experiences had access to time to engage with the professional development experience according to their needs, opportunity to listen to what each participant had to say, encouragement to participate fully and for feedback to be given in a thoughtful yet constructive way. The role of facilitator began with the modeling of these qualities but extended to managing such relationships amongst the participant teachers and the broader school community. This was done in the inquiry by the facilitator listening to the needs of the teachers through constant and careful analysis of all collected data. However, it seemed that the participant teachers and the facilitator taught and learnt from each other, again emphasizing the reciprocal nature of these professional relationships. One participant, Lee, described "... it was great having [the facilitator] in the classroom, but there came a time when I found I needed to get out and have a look at what was happening next door, down in Kindergarten, up in Grade Two." This supports Hargreaves and Fullan's (1992) contention that such interaction amongst the participant teachers and the facilitator provided a vital context for professional development.

Shared Pedagogy

Movement through the professional learning experiences resulted in the participant teachers developing and working within a shared pedagogy. Whilst this research stemmed from the researcher's passion and research interests, it became important that the developed 'balanced literacy pedagogy' and associated theory of in-school teacher professional development became one of shared ownership. This inquiry showed that teachers could be empowered to make decisions, provide input, and have professional development address their individual needs. To facilitate the process of critiquing individual teaching practice, during a collaborative group session the following questions were devised by the group to guide reflection and stimulate subsequent group discussion on classroom practice:

* *What did you do in your literacy session?*
* *What was good about it?*
* *What did the children learn?*
* *What could you have done to make it better?*

Each of the participant teachers moved through a professional journey over the course of the school year as they embraced some innovative and pedagogically sound teaching practices. One participant, Michael, described the professional development experience as being "professionally formative and inspirational." Another participant, Kate, described the experience as "ongoing," "challenging," and "thought provoking." Ownership of this process was crucial to the development of this theory of in-school professional development (Beck & Murphy, 1996). It seemed that empowerment of the teacher and ownership of their professional practice became critical to this form of educational change.

Darling- Hammond (1997) states,

"...an occupation becomes a profession when it assumes responsibility for developing a shared knowledge base for all its members and for transmitting that knowledge through professional education..." (p. 298).

As such, this approach to teacher professional development not only allowed the teachers to refine and articulate their individual teaching practices with regard to literacy, but also to integrate them into a shared vision, evident in each of their classrooms. The changing relationships between and among the researcher as the facilitator and participant teachers in this inquiry can be seen as evidence of the development and subsequent ownership of this shared pedagogy.

Concluding Comments

Throughout the school year, the participant teachers and the researcher worked on establishing and developing a 'balanced literacy pedagogy' in these Early Stage One and Stage One classrooms. While this was in response to initial project aims which stemmed from the observed needs of these teachers, and indeed the school, what eventuated from these interactions was so much more.

The process of responding to the specific and individual needs of the teachers enabled the inquiry not only to use the methodology of action research but also to extend it. Components necessary to support these teachers in not only refining and developing their classroom literacy practice but to also increase their individual and subsequent shared pedagogical understandings of how best to teach children literacy practices were identified. This research verifies that professional development needs a unique social interplay of professional, physical, and interpersonal influences. Moreover, it emphasizes that the location in which the professional development occurs must allow for sustained interactions between and amongst those involved-the teachers, the facilitator, school leaders, and stakeholders.

It can be surmised that teachers need to be actively engaged in their own professional learning and; therefore, need to be supported by their immediate professional situation; the classrooms within the school in which they work. A key finding from this research was the role of action research in facilitating professional development. Teachers need opportunities for focused reflection, support with their own teaching practice, observation and analysis of the teaching practice of others, professional dialogue and input, and critical thinking. Teachers also need opportunities to work independently with a facilitator (preferably a member of their immediate professional community) on their classroom practice in order to give them the confidence to participate in and engage with a learning community. This investigation indicates that bringing about positive changes in teachers' professional practice requires an investment of time by school leaders in supporting teachers as they strive to achieve their learning goals and refine their professional practices. If professional development is integrated into everyday classroom life, and supported through the provision of time and facilitating relationships, teachers will be professionally renewed and energized.

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