Teachers’ Learning: Experiences of Professional Learning in a West Australian Government Secondary School

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and its contents have not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore teachers’ perceptions of professional learning. For the purposes of this study the terms professional learning and professional development are synonymous. They go hand in hand in describing the processes that occur which include deliberate learning activities undertaken by individual teachers or groups of teachers to improve policy, curriculum or their own professional knowledge and skills with a view to improving the learning outcomes of students. This study aims to reveal that professional learning of teachers is a process of continuing personal and professional growth.

This study reviews a professional learning module offered by the West Australian Department of Education in 2005 in terms of its relevance to teachers; its effectiveness; its usefulness to teachers’ professional practice and its impact on teachers’ personal and their professional lives. The study was conducted in a metropolitan West Australian Government Secondary School. The findings of this study seek to add to the existing body of knowledge surrounding professional learning of teachers in particular to the knowledge surrounding the ‘traditional’ approach to professional development and in particular, professional development offered by the Department of Education.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The idea of teachers working together to improve teaching and learning seems so sensible that few would argue against it. Why then the perception that schools provide insufficient opportunities for teachers to collaborate on their practice? Many researchers argue that collaboration is better than autonomous and isolated arrangements traditionally found in schools (Supovitz & Christman, 2003). How do teachers feel when they are provided with opportunities for collaboration with their colleagues? Creating a culture of inquiry and collaboration rather than working in a culture of isolation represents a significant change within schools in Western Australia. In this study I explore teachers’ feelings, experiences and perceptions about collaboration and how collaboration impacts on their professional practice and their professional well-being.

The Researcher

My experience as an educator spans 21 years. I completed my undergraduate training as a Business Studies Secondary School teacher at the University of Natal, Durban, South Africa in 1990. I then completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Management majoring in International Education and Educational Law at Rand University, South Africa in 1997. In 2002 I went on to complete an Honours Degree in Education at the University of South Africa. I have spent eight years as a secondary school teacher, eight years
as a Business Studies Lecturer, four years as a Senior Lecturer of Business Studies and one year as a Head of Division at a Technical College in South Africa.

My Australian teaching experience spans the past eight years. My first placement was at a Government Senior High School where I taught the subject Economics to the senior school students (aged 16 and 17 years) and Society and Environment to the middle school students (aged 13, 14 and 15 years). I spent a year at this school. My next placement was at another Government Senior High School in the Society and Environment Department. During the two years I spent at this school I made a successful application to be a Teacher Consultant on Classroom Management Strategies. Both positions were temporary. I had yet to gain ‘permanency’ in the West Australian Department of Education. I applied and was successful in gaining a permanent teaching position at Summer High* through the merit selection process.

During my first year at Summer High I taught Society and Environment to the middle school. My role includes collaborative planning; participating in continuous action learning; participating in school development planning; implementing school priorities as well as assisting students with social skills development and advocacy. A fraction of my time is also committed to the District Office of Education in the role of Teacher Consultant on Classroom Management Strategies.

* A pseudonym
I have since gained a promotional position as Program Coordinator on Classroom Management Strategies in the cluster of schools which comprise Summer High and its feeder Primary Schools. My role includes visiting feeder primary schools, observing and coaching teachers on their classroom management skills. I also provide professional development workshops on classroom management strategies to the feeder Primary Schools as well as Summer High.

Curriculum Context

The Curriculum Framework in Western Australia sets out what all students need to know, understand, value and be able to do as a result of the programs they undertake in schools in Western Australia, from Kindergarten to Year 12. In July 1998, after ten months of consulting, reviewing and redrafting, the Curriculum Framework was approved by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia for implementation in 1999. The fundamental purpose of the Curriculum Framework is to provide a structure around which schools can build educational programs that ensure students achieve agreed outcomes. The Curriculum Framework identifies common learning outcomes for all students in Western Australia whether they attend a government or non-government school or receive home schooling and is intended to give schools and teachers’ flexibility and ownership over curriculum in a dynamic and rapidly-changing world environment (Curriculum Framework, 1998). The Curriculum Framework makes explicit the learning outcomes which all students’ are required to achieve throughout their schooling. This focus on outcomes represents a major shift in
school curriculum from a focus on educational inputs and time allocation toward one that emphasises the desired results of schooling. Schools and teachers use the Curriculum Framework to develop their own learning and teaching programs according to their circumstance, ethos and the needs of their students (Curriculum Framework, 1998).

The Curriculum Framework establishes learning outcomes for all students set out in the Overarching and eight Learning Areas. The Overarching Statement outlines seven key principles which underpin the Curriculum Framework and describes the Overarching learning outcomes to which all learning areas contribute. The Overarching Statement describes learning and assessment strategies that are consistent with the Curriculum Framework and which promote achievement of the outcomes. Learning areas individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of the Overarching learning outcomes. Learning Area Statements are provided for The Arts; English; Health and Physical Education; Languages Other Than English; Mathematics; Science; Society and Environment and Technology and Enterprise. These areas are a useful way of categorising the knowledge, skills and values essential for the education of students in Western Australia. They provide a structure for defining learning outcomes, for providing breadth and balance in students’ education and for ensuring attention is given to specific disciplines.

These learning outcomes comprise the mandatory element of the Curriculum Framework which all schools in Western Australia either implement or obtain an exemption from doing so from the Minister for Education. In
addition, there are reporting requirements as agreed by the Curriculum Council and the governing bodies of systems, sectors and schools. Implementing the Curriculum Framework means that when teachers and schools design and develop learning and teaching programs to suit the needs of their students, they have to ensure that these programs include learning opportunities and enriching experiences for their students aimed at achieving the outcomes set out in the Framework. How a school structures learning opportunities, in terms of time and the range of courses and programs provided, remains the school’s responsibility. This will depend on the school level or classroom level assessment of students and their particular needs (Curriculum Framework, 1998).

To assist with the implementation of the Curriculum Framework the Curriculum Improvement Program (CIP) was developed. CIP assists teachers to develop specific programs and judge the effectiveness of their teaching by the outcomes that students achieve. A second phase of CIP called CIP (2) was introduced in 2005 to help schools review their performance and plan for improvement, and also forms the basis of professional development for teachers (Curriculum Framework, 1998). CIP (2) and the Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Policy of 2005, mandates that all government schools will provide a balanced curriculum. CIP (2) states that the system endorses moderation processes to support teachers to make consistent judgements and that teachers monitor, evaluate and report on student achievement of standards specified in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (Department of Education, 2005).
Making Consistent Judgements

Making Consistent Judgements (MCJ) is a professional development experience aimed at teachers to develop their understanding of assessment strategies. MCJ is also aimed at facilitating teachers’ understanding of how information which is acquired through assessment processes can be used to modify their teaching practice. MCJ is fully funded by the State Education Authority and represents its first attempt to involve teachers in collaborative decision making as regards their task of assessing students work. MCJ is mandatory professional development across the state of Western Australia for teachers of primary and secondary schools.

Large numbers of experienced and less experienced teachers participated in the MCJ professional development which was conducted over two days throughout 2005. Teachers individually assess students’ tasks and then collaborate on assessment judgements made by discussing how each one arrived at a specific level of achievement for that piece of work. The discussion serves to ensure that the judgements made were a consensus decision. Teachers were given reflective journals in which to record their responses to a range of questions on assessment (Department of Education, 2005).

Since the implementation of the Curriculum Framework the Western Australian Department of Education (DoE) has committed to developing and supporting teacher standards which serve to enhance the quality of learning and teaching. The development of a Competency Framework for Teachers
emphasises that the teaching profession requires teachers to be life-long learners who engage in ongoing professional learning during the course of their careers (Department of Education, 2004). The Teachers’ Competency Framework is based on the premise that effective teachers draw on a body of professional knowledge in order to maximise their ability to improve student outcomes. The Framework provides teachers with descriptions of their work and roles, recognising the knowledge and skills required for teachers to achieve the best outcomes for students. The Competency Framework supports the implementation of the Western Australian Curriculum Framework.

I completed the MCJ professional development during August 2005. My initial experience of this meeting was one of curiosity coupled with feelings of fear. This was the first time I had participated in professional development where I was expected to display assessments that I had compiled. Even more challenging was the requirement that I show how I graded these assessments. It was disconcerting as the group of teachers that I was set to work with were strangers to me. The MCJ process required that each teacher bring to the table two samples of students’ work which was then circulated and marked by each one at the table. A discussion ensued thereafter on the judgement that each teacher had made as compared to my judgement. This process heightened my feeling of insecurity and loneliness. Questions were asked by the teachers in the group and I had to justify my judgement on the student’s work. This stage of the MCJ process felt to me to be an evaluative one although I have since understood that this was not the intention. Although initially feeling intimidated by the process, I felt I learned from engaging in professional dialogue with other
teachers. I also learnt that there are other ways of assessing which enable teachers to grade students’ work more accurately.

‘Pertubation’

I undertook the MCJ professional development whilst at Summer High, a school with established and mostly experienced staff. The teachers at this school who had participated in the two-day professional development were critical of the process. These teachers did not perceive a need to partake in the process and appeared to me to feel secure in setting, marking and making judgements on their own assessments. However, they cynically expressed the opinions that the MCJ professional development justified the positions of staff working at the Education District Offices. They also voiced dissatisfaction at having to leave their classes for two days.

My reflections on the MCJ professional development revealed that I valued the process. It was this tension between how I experienced the MCJ professional development and how my colleagues at my previous school had experienced the MCJ professional development that led me to research teachers’ feelings and experiences on the Making Consistent Judgements Professional Development. This research gave me the opportunity to discover how teachers perceived and experienced this professional development.

I have always been curious why teachers with whom I have previously and currently work are so disenchanted with professional development
opportunities which are offered by the Department of Education. Since I deliver professional development I was interested to note the seriousness with which some teachers participated in the process. I was also puzzled with the disdain some teachers expressed with the process. I wondered why some of the teachers who were not in favour of the process made little effort to hide their feelings. I observed the presenters’ discomfort when they were unable to answer difficult questions posed by some teachers. Many of the questions posed were based on the Curriculum Framework and teachers’ dissatisfaction with its introduction and implementation. This served to heighten my curiosity as to why these teachers were expressing these feelings when there had been a lengthy consultative process prior to the introduction of the Curriculum Framework. If this was their attitude then I wonder what impact their professional development was having on their professional well-being and practice.

**Research Questions**

I used a qualitative, interpretive approach to investigate the following research questions: (a) How does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional practice and (b) How does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional well-being? This research was conducted around the professional learning Making Consistent Judgements in the context of the Department of Education in Western Australia. I focus on how teachers’ perceived this professional learning personally and professionally. The purpose of this study is therefore to gain an insight into teachers’ understanding of
Making Consistent Judgements as a process, in order to gain an insight into teachers’ perceptions of their professional practice and well-being.

**Significance of this study**

This study explores how teachers’ professional learning impacts on their professional practice and professional well-being. It seemed to me that often teachers do not connect professional development to their classroom reality. This study provides an opportunity for educators and administrators to see the link between professional learning and classroom practice. Traditionally teachers’ decision making has been restricted to their own classrooms and there has been no system to involve teachers in collaborative processes. A tension exists amongst teachers as they struggle to come to terms with disclosing information which previously belonged only to them (Lortie, 1975). They struggle with the notion of making public information that was privy to them only and to delineate the boundary between the private and personal aspects of their lives (Lortie, 1975).

This study is conducted with the aim of identifying the experiences resulting from the MCJ professional learning that led to change in practice and growth at a professional level. This study will serve to enhance my own knowledge of MCJ as a professional development practice. The findings of the study will assist teachers and administrators in Summer High to reflect on their experiences and may inform current and future professional development
initiatives as the perspectives of selected individual teachers will be pertinent to others.

The Site

This project was conducted at a Government Senior High School in the outer metropolitan area of Perth called Summer High. Summer High was founded in the 1950’s and services a low socio-economic community. The majority of students at Summer High come from challenging backgrounds characterised by low employment, and disadvantage. Student behaviours are challenging and the Department of Education has difficulty in securing staff to teach at Summer High. An incentive offered to attract teachers to Summer High is the awarding of Permanent Teaching Status to teachers who spend two continuous years teaching at this school. The Department of Education in Western Australia has a policy that teachers will remain appointed in a temporary status until they spend two years in country or remote schools. Schools like Summer High provide an alternative to this option for teachers to gain a ‘permanent’ status. The teachers also receive a financial incentive to work at this school in the form of an allowance for travelling expenses.

Some of the teachers have been working at Summer High for more than 20 years, such as the Maths teacher, the Science head of department as well as the English head of department. However, the staff turnover at this school is extremely high as teachers suffer burnout from the difficult circumstances under which they teach. Student misbehaviour is extreme at Summer High, coupled
with many students performing below the State benchmark in literacy and numeracy.

Teachers are expected to meet the same standards as the other schools in the State of Western Australia. Teachers struggle in the challenging milieu of education at Summer High School. The school buildings are run down, dilapidated and in many instances lack the basic resources required to teach. The State Government has recognised the need for upgraded facilities and the school has been replaced in a $51 million refurbishment which resulted in a separate middle school, senior school as well as a Technical and Further Education institution. The Middle school incorporates the Year 7 students from the feeder primary schools. For many years, Summer High was the only school in this area of Perth and provided an education for many parents and grandparents of the existing students. It is viewed by the community as a school which will meet their needs regardless of the challenges it faces. This view creates more tension amongst teachers as they strive to meet the challenges of academic rigour and relevance as well as promote positive relationships with students.

This introductory chapter provides general background information, outlines the aims of my research and places it in context. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature surrounding professional learning of teachers. The review highlights the significance of policy makers in providing quality professional learning that will be embraced by all teachers and lead to improved instructional practice and achievement of learning outcomes for students.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

The Culture of Individualism

More commonly teachers work alone in a state of professional isolation; they work aside from their colleagues (Lortie, 1975). This isolation gives teachers the protection to exercise their discretion in the interests of the children they know best, but it also cuts them off from clear and meaningful feedback about the worth and effectiveness of what they do (Rudduck, 1991). Long periods of individual and isolated development seem to take place in phases and are sometimes punctuated by contexts where work with others is undertaken successfully (Lloyd, Stead & Kendrick, 2001). Isolated teachers may get some feedback from periodic formal evaluations, but these are frequently perfunctory and sporadic, they are not helpful for the ongoing improvement of performance (Hickcox, 1982). Given the conditions of constraint under which many teachers work and given the culture of isolation, conservatism and privatism which surrounds their practice, teaching is a lonely profession.

Most teachers still teach alone, behind closed doors in the insulated and isolated environment of their own classroom (Lortie, 1975. Classroom isolation offers many teachers a welcome measure of privacy, a protection from outside interference which they often value. Teachers who work alone receive little adult feedback on their value, worth and competence. In the culture of individualism, teachers rely on the bare minimum of evidence to assess one
another. In the culture of individualism teachers develop characteristic orientations to their work which Lortie (1975) calls, presentism, conservatism and individualism. He argued that teachers concentrate on short term planning in their own classrooms where their energies are more likely to make a difference. He referred to this as presentism. They avoid discussing, thinking about or committing themselves to more fundamental changes which might affect the context of what they do or about how and what they teach, this he refers to as conservatism. They also tend to shy away from collaboration with colleagues and form the feared judgements and criticisms that may come with that, individualism. Teachers within the culture of individualism, it seems stick with what they know and are reluctant to venture into the unknown even when given the opportunity (Lortie, 1975).

Research conducted by Rosenholtz (1989) led her to distinguish between ‘stuck’ and ‘moving’ schools. She found that in “stuck” schools which were not supportive of change and improvement, uncertainty and isolation went hand in hand. One of the main causes of uncertainty, Rosenholtz found, was the absence of positive feedback: “Most teachers and principals become so professionally estranged in their workplace isolation that they neglect each other. They do not often compliment, support and acknowledge each other’s positive efforts. Indeed, strong forms of self-reliance may even evoke adverse reaction to a teacher’s successful performance” (p. 107). Rosenholtz explains that isolation and uncertainty are associated with what she calls “learning impoverished settings” where teachers are able to learn little from their colleagues, and therefore are not in a strong position to experiment and improve. These findings
echo those conducted by Lortie (1975) who found that individualism was pervasive among teachers. Beyond sharing a few practical hints, resources and tricks of the trade, they rarely discussed each other’s work, almost never observed their colleagues teach and did not collectively analyse and reflect on the value, purpose and direction of their work.

Uncertainty, isolation and individualism sustain educational conservatism. Such narrowness of orientation and experience lead to “safe”, non-risk taking forms of teaching that do little to assist student achievement. Where multiple demands are being externally imposed on teachers and their schools, isolated teachers feel powerless in the face of pressures and decisions which they often do not understand and in which they are not involved. This sense of powerlessness eats away at the teacher’s sense of his or her own capacity to “make a difference” in children’s education (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

If we are to bring about successful and lasting change we need to “crack the walls of privatism”. When teachers are afraid to share their ideas and successes for fear of being perceived as less than competent; when a teacher uses the same approach year after year even though it is not working, all these tendencies point to privatism, they limit growth and improvement because they limit access to ideas and practices that might offer better ways of doing things, they institutionalize conservatism (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

As research studies show, it is privacy, individualism and isolation that remain the persistent and pervasive conditions of teaching. The two root causes
of individualism are grounded in the traditional norms and conditions of teaching. The first of these has to do with the teachers’ experiences of evaluation. Most teachers’ first experiences of having other adults in their classrooms are ones of being evaluated while feeling intensely vulnerable in the learning of their craft. In our present positions we work extensively in a professional development capacity with teachers. Frequently teachers are asked to describe and reflect upon formative experiences which they believe have made them the kinds of teacher they are today.

A common striking feature of teachers’ accounts is that of early, unpleasant encounters with evaluation, seen as infliction of humiliation by those supposed to help. Teachers therefore often associate help with evaluation, or collaboration with control. Isolation and individualism are their armour here, their protection against scrutiny and intrusion. When making moves to establish closer cooperation between teachers and their colleagues, it is recommended that help be clearly disassociated from evaluation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

This is particularly important in the design of professional development programs (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Similarly, creating a culture of collaboration rather than continuing to work in a culture of isolation represents a significant change within schools that must be supported. Systems which are successful in improving student learning are characterised by collaborative practices and de-privatisation of teaching amongst others (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996). To impact student learning, staff groups must engage in structured, sustained and supported instructional discussions that investigate the
relationships between instructional practices and student work (Supovitz & Christman, 2003).

The second root cause of individualism has to do with the impossibly high expectations many teachers set for themselves in a job with poorly defined limits. Many of the pressing demands and expectations of teaching also come from within teachers themselves. Many teachers appear to drive themselves in an attempt to meet the virtually unattainable standards of perfection they set themselves. They do not appear to need direction or pressure from above to motivate them in their quest, they drive themselves hard enough. High expectations, many of them self imposed have two consequences that reinforce individualism. First, teachers do not have time for collaboration. Since there is so much to be done, time to collaborate is taken away from time to meet pressing needs with one’s own class. So teachers retreat to the classroom and close the door to meet their obligations, even during break time when they prefer to prepare and work alone rather than plan with colleagues (Flinders, 1988).

The workplace determinants of individualism extend far beyond the facts of physical isolation. Isolation is an adaptive strategy to conserve scarce occupational resources. Flinders (1988) argues that isolation is an adaptive strategy because it protects the time and energy required to meet immediate instructional demands. Isolation is something that is self-imposed and actively worked for. It fends off the digressions and diversions involved in working with colleagues to give focus to instruction with and for one’s own students. Isolation in this view is a sensible adaptive strategy to the work environment of teaching.
Flinders (1988) argues that the rooting of isolation in workplace conditions such as these explains why attempts to eliminate teacher isolation by removing physical barriers or by developing psychological skills and qualities suitable to collaborative work, are not usually successful. They are directed at the wrong causes (Flinders, 1988).

Mc Taggart (1989) argues that the persistence of privatism is outlined by a further set of working conditions which effectively undermined the confidence and devalued the knowledge, wisdom and credibility of its best teachers. The disincentives to collaborate were rooted in a system dominated by the principles of bureaucratic rationality which stifled teacher initiative and gave teachers little to collaborate about. Systems of accountability and evaluation at the district level placed “basics” at the centre of teachers’ priorities. Curricula and textbooks were standardized too and once changes were made they then became binding. In this interpretation of individualism, individualism is a consequence of complex organizational conditions and constraints and it is these that need to be removed if individualism is to be addressed (Mc Taggart, 1989).

It is not necessary to often associate individualism with bad and weak practices it has however other meanings and connotations which are not nearly so negative in character. Teachers’ working alone is not always necessarily bad. Three determinants of individualism were identified which paralleled with Flinders’ study. They are constrained individualism, strategic individualism and elective individualism. Constrained individualism occur where teachers plan and generally work alone because of administrative or other situational constraints
which present significant barriers to their doing otherwise. Constraints included scarcity of space for adults to work together, shortages of supply teachers and difficulties of scheduling teachers to plan together due to timetabling complexities in large schools (Mc Taggart, 1989).

Strategic individualism refers to the ways in which teachers actively construct and create individualistic patterns of working as a response to the daily contingencies of their work environment. The dedication of teachers to their work, the diffuse goals of the job and the mounting external pressures and expectations for accountability and for modified programming to accommodate the growing number of special needs students in ordinary classes all tended to make teachers classroom-centred as they pursued the impossibly high standards and endless work schedules that they set for themselves and what others set for them. Individualism here is a calculated concentration of effort. It is strategic. In this context, preparation time is a scarce resource that cannot be wasted in relaxation but needs to be spent on many little things that make up the endless list of teachers’ jobs.

Elective individualism refers to the principled choice to work alone even in circumstances where there are opportunities and encouragement to work collaboratively with colleagues. Elective individualism describes a preferred way of working rather than a merely constrained or strategic response to occupational demands and contingencies. It is a form of individualism which is experienced less as a response of forces of circumstances than as a preferred form of professional action.
The second consequence of high expectations and uncertainty is that collaboration becomes risky. If teachers are trapped in pursuit of their own unending aspirations, if they cannot ever do enough in their own eyes, how could they possibly meet the expectations of others? If they have resigned themselves to accepting the status quo, they resist intrusion even more strongly. The isolated classroom is a refuge from such collegial judgement, but a refuge that provides little help in addressing the problems of uncertainty. Individualism is not just an attitude of teachers. It is rooted in the very conditions under which the teacher’s role has evolved. These traditions are now being challenged. First as we seek to eliminate individualism, we should not eradicate individuality with it. Individuality is the key to personal renewal, which in turn is the foundation for collective renewal. Individuality also generates creative disagreement and risk that is a source of dynamic group learning. While research on the iniquities of individualism has been in abundance, studies of the benefits of teacher collaboration have been scarce (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

The Power of Collaboration

Attractive concepts like collegiality and collaboration are often imbued with a global sense of virtue. Vagueness can be helpful at the beginning as people attempt to sort out the various possibilities, but it can also present disillusionment and disappointment later if the different hopes and meanings invested in it do not pan out and the meanings and benefits become less clear. It is vital that the meaning of collaboration is understood (Rosenholtz, 1989).
The term ‘collaboration’ amounts to different things in different schools. Rosenholtz (1989) emphasizes the importance of mistaking a “happy staffroom” where “teachers exchange anecdotes and provide each other with moral support” with having a collaborative school. Collaboration that leads to greater effectiveness in the school involves professional talk and serious discussions of work and its improvement. When trying to develop collaborative cultures, contentment should not be mistaken for excellence.

Little (1990) identifies four kinds of collegial relations among teachers and observes that the fourth type, ‘joint work’ is the strongest form of collaboration (e.g. team teaching, planning, observation, action research, sustained peer coaching and mentoring etc.). Joint work implies and creates stronger interdependence, shared responsibility, collective commitment and improvement, and greater readiness to participate in the difficult business of review and critique. This, according to Little (1990) is the kind of collaborative work and culture most likely to lead to significant improvement.

Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) give an insightful account of what collaborative cultures look like in practice. In collaborative cultures, failure and uncertainty are not protected and defended, but shared and discussed with a view to gaining help and support. Collaborative cultures require broad agreement on educational values, but they also tolerate disagreement and to some extent actively encourage it within these limits. Schools characterized by collaborative cultures are places of hard work, strong and common commitment, dedication, collective responsibility and of a special sense of pride in the institution.
Collaborative cultures acknowledge and give voice to the teacher's purpose. Teachers are more apt to disagree more frequently than elsewhere as purposes, values and their relationships are discussed. This disagreement is made possible by the security on which staff relationships rest, security that allows openness in discussion and temporary disagreement, in the knowledge that continuing relationships will not be threatened by it. Purposes in collaborative cultures gain much of their strength from being developed with and shared by other colleagues (Nias, Southworth & Yeomans, 1989).

Collaborative cultures also respect, celebrate and make allowances for the teacher as a person. According to Nias and her colleagues, “teaching is a personal affair, but not a private one”. Teachers here willingly reveal some of the more personal sides to themselves. In collaborative cultures as described by Nias et al. the person is not consumed by the group, but fulfilled through it. Purpose and person, the elements essential to teacher competence, are both openly declared and positively developed in the culture of collaboration.

Collaborative cultures create and sustain more satisfying and productive working environments. By empowering teachers and reducing the uncertainty of the job that must otherwise be faced in isolation, collaborative cultures facilitate commitment to change and improvement. They also create communities of teachers who no longer have the dependent relationships to externally imposed change that isolation and uncertainty tend to encourage. Dealing with change is no longer a choice between uncritical, enthusiastic acceptance or unconsidered
rejection. In collaborative cultures teachers develop the collective confidence to respond to change critically, selecting and adapting those elements that will aid improvement in their own work context, and rejecting those that will not (Nias, Southworth & Yeomans, 1989).

Similarly, previous research has found a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and teachers’ professional certainty. The collaboration reported by teachers in a junior high school in Norway reveals that what most teachers do is collaborate on planning lessons. This collaboration need not enhance professional development at all. In fact, collaboration on planning lessons may prevent teachers from experiencing personal development (Shavelson, 1983).

Research by Rosenholtz (1989) drew attention to school cultures which she referred to as “moving” or “learning enriched” schools. Rosenholtz showed that in the “moving” schools, teachers worked together more and that even the most experienced teachers believed that teaching was inherently difficult and that teachers never stopped learning to teach. As a result of this acknowledgement almost everyone recognized they sometimes needed help and that requests for help did not imply incompetence but was part of a common need for continuous improvement. Having their colleagues show support and communicating more with them about what they did led these teachers to have more confidence and more certainty about what they were trying to achieve and how well they were achieving it.
As Rosenholtz (1989) observes, in effective schools, collaboration is linked with norms and opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning: “It is assumed that improvement in teaching is a collective rather than an individual enterprise, and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve” (p. 73). As a result, teachers are more likely to trust, value, and legitimize sharing expertise, seeking advice, and giving help both inside and outside the school. They are more likely to become better and better teachers on the job. “All of this means it is far easier to learn to teach and to learn to teach better, in some schools better than in others” (p. 104).

For Rosenholtz, the most important effect of teacher collaboration is its impact on the uncertainty of the job, which, when faced alone, can otherwise so undermine a teacher’s sense of confidence. Ashton and Webb (1986) found that the main benefit of collaboration is that it can reduce teacher’s sense of powerlessness and increase their sense of efficacy. Part of Ashton and Webb’s study focussed on a comparative analysis of a rather traditionally organised junior high school and a more progressive middle school. Both schools catered for students from similar social backgrounds, the middle school secured higher student achievement scores in the basic skills. Ashton and Webb attributed this difference to the teachers’ sense of efficacy and their perceptions of their roles in the two schools.

In the junior high teachers were ‘somewhat fatalistic’ about their students academic potential. Students’ failure to comply with academic goals was
viewed as a problem of motivation; a problem with students or their backgrounds. The middle school teachers however had a stronger sense of efficacy. Middle school teachers had a higher opinion of their profession and its responsibilities. They defined their work more widely – emphasizing personal development as well as academic achievement; working with colleagues as well as working with students (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Collaboration among teachers – team teaching and shared decision making was an organizational feature of this school. Teachers talked about everything, they thrashed out issues in reaching a common focus this helped give them a common sense of accomplishment, of belief in their efficacy.

The studies of Ashton & Webb confirm a wide array of supporting educational research. In collaborative schools, “80 % of the teachers responded … their own learning is cumulative and developmental, ….. and that learning to teach is a life-long pursuit” (p. 80). Teachers in collaborative schools sought more ideas from colleagues, professional conferences and workshops. They had greater confidence and commitment to improvement. It is important to note that teacher development is inseparable to curriculum development and that these two areas should be worked together in harness, not approached in isolation (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

The Problems of Collaboration

The idea of teachers working together to improve teaching and learning seems so sensible that few would argue against it. So why don’t schools provide
regular and ample opportunities for teachers to collaborate on their practice? Some schools are hampered by the limitations of union contracts and limited resources however the most basic problem is that many have difficulty finding new ways of using existing resources, such as time and personnel (Khorsheed, 2007). In a study of five high-performing schools, Miles and Darling-Hammond, (1997, p. 42) concluded that “the biggest constraint to restructuring schools may be a limited vision of the changes in school organisation that can create a more professional organisation and improve student achievement”.

For teachers to work collaboratively, the focus must be on ongoing, targeting activities that involve engaging in practice with students and consulting with fellow teachers (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Desimone, Porter, Caret, Yoon & Birman, 2002). It is important to note that whilst schools need collaboration to promote change, the changes involved in moving toward effective collaboration are deep and complex. The existence of collaboration should not be mistaken for the culture of it. Whilst some forms of collaboration are powerful, others are a waste of time and limited in their impact. The following section outlines the forms of collaboration of which one should be more watchful (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

**Balkanization**

Some schools have what might be called a balkanized teacher culture – a culture made of up of separate and sometimes competing groups, jockeying for position and supremacy. Teachers in balkanized cultures attach their loyalties
and identities to particular groups of their colleagues. These are colleagues with which they work most closely and spend much time. Balkanized cliques are not confined to conservative teachers but also extend to innovative teachers who see themselves as ahead of their colleagues. They can segment themselves in ways that are detrimental to whole school development. Balkanization may lead to poor communication, indifference, or groups going their separate ways in a school. As Ball (1987) notes, it may generate squabbles and conflicts over space, time and resources. Balkanized cultures are a familiar feature of high-school life, mainly because of the strong subject-department structures on which high schools are based.

Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) observed that like-minded teachers often cluster in subgroups that “impede school-wide acceptance of particular practices and inhibit the open discussion that might eventually lead to the creation of a whole-school perspective”. Curriculum continuity and coordination across grades is far more likely in cultures that value individuals and their interactions with a variety of people across the school. Formal curriculum guidelines and administrative structures by themselves do not result in curriculum coherence at the level of practice. Effective continuity is secured more through human understanding, communication and agreement at an informal level and the necessary openness, trust and support that come with that. The balkanization of secondary-school teacher cultures is very closely tied up with differentiation and divisiveness in the school curriculum generally.
This echoes Ingvarson’s (2001) point that “professional development is … influenced more pervasively by administrative and contextual features of the particular educational system within which teachers work than by the particular forms of in-service education available” (p. 120). Balkanized teacher cultures and divided teacher communities result not merely from principals or head teachers failing to develop their teachers by valuing them. They result from failing to value many of the things that they do, the things for which they stand. For educational leaders, balkanization may appear to be an issue of who you value and how well you value them. Teacher development rests on more than generosity of spirit, it rests on breadth of educational vision too (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

**Comfortable Collaboration**

Given the scarcity of collaborative cultures across school systems generally, their successful creation in at least some settings is a substantial achievement. Collaboration often takes what is called bounded rather than extended forms (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). It can be bounded in the sense of not extending to classroom settings where teachers might be involved in joint teaching, mutual observation of one another’s work or action research. Even where teachers work together in preparation time, for instance, it is unusual for them to spend it in each other’s classrooms. This restricts the extent to which teachers can inquire into and advise one another about their practice. It keeps some of the tougher questions about their work and how to improve it off the
agenda. A major challenge for schools is how to extend their collaborative work in this action-centred, classroom-based sense (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992).

Bounded collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) is collaboration which focuses on the immediate, short-term and the practical to the exclusion of longer-term planning concerns. It is collaboration which does not embrace the principles of systematic reflective practice. Research on site-based management also shows little evidence that this sort of collaboration results in instructional improvement in classrooms (Levine & Eubanks, 1989). It often remains at ‘the comfortable’ level. Effective collaboration is not always easy it brings with it a measure of difficulty and even of discomfort on occasion (Acker, 1989).

Contrived collegiality

The unpredictability of collaborative cultures can also lead administrators toward forms of collegiality which they can control, regulate and tame. These more controlled approaches toward collaboration we call contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1989). Contrived collegiality is characterised by a set of formal, specific bureaucratic procedures to increase the attention being given to joint teacher planning, consultation and other forms of working together. It can be seen in initiatives such as peer coaching and mentor schemes, joint planning, site-based management, formally scheduled meetings and clear job descriptions and training programs for those in consultative roles. These sort of initiatives are administrative contrivances designed to get collegiality in schools where little existed before. They are meant to encourage greater association among teachers
and to foster more sharing, learning and improvements of skills and expertise (Hargreaves, 1989).

Contrived collegiality is also meant to assist the successful implementation of new approaches and techniques from the outside into a more responsive and supportive school culture. Contrived collegiality is double-edged. It has both positive and negative possibilities depending on how and when it is used. Contrived collegiality can be a useful preliminary phase in setting up more enduring collaborative relationships between teachers. Principals and administrators can be shrewd in setting up the circumstance whereby teachers consult with others but this does not guarantee that collaborative cultures will develop. Contrived collegiality can be reduced to a quick, slick administrative surrogate for collaborative cultures. If done badly, contrived collegiality can reduce teachers’ motivation to cooperate further. Building collaborative cultures involves a long developmental journey there are no easy short cuts (Hargreaves, 1989).

In conditions of contrived collegiality teachers’ collaborative working relationships are not spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, fixed in time and space and predictable. Contrived collegiality can be administratively regulated. This means it does not evolve spontaneously from the initiative of teachers, but is an administrative imposition that requires teachers to work together. It is also compulsory, whereby it makes working together a matter of compulsion as in mandatory peer coaching, team teaching and collaborative planning. Contrived collegiality affords little discretion to individuality.
Compulsion may be direct or indirect in terms of associated promises of promotion or veiled threats of withdrawal of support for teachers’ favoured projects. Implementation-oriented contrived collegiality requires teachers to work together to implement the mandates of others, usually those of the Principal or Head Teacher on projects such as accelerated learning programs or co-operative learning strategies. Here, collegial co-operation is closely bound up with administrative cooption (Hargreaves, 1994).

Contrived collegiality fixed in time and space takes place in particular places at particular times. This is part of its administrative regulation, when, for example, peer coaching sessions, collaborative planning sessions and mentor meetings alone constitute teachers’ joint working relationships, they amount to trying to secure cooperation by securing contrivance. Contrived collegiality is designed to have relatively high predictability in its outcomes. This cannot be guaranteed as the outcomes of contrived collegiality are sometimes perverse. Control over its purposes and regulation of its time and placement are designed to increase the safe administration of collaboration. It replaces spontaneous unpredictable and difficult to control forms of teacher-generated collaboration with forms of collaboration that are captured, contained and contrived by administrators instead (Hargreaves, 1994).

Another tension is immersed in the idea of collaboration. Collaboration in and of itself is full of contradictions in the literature. It seems collaboration for collaboration’s sake may be uncritically identified as beneficial for having an inquiry stance toward teaching. However, collaboration must also be analysed
and critiqued in order to reap the most meaningful benefits for those involved (Hargreaves, 1994). Collaborative cultures are highly sophisticated and cannot be created overnight. Many forms of collegiality are superficial, partial and even counter productive. It is not possible to have strong collaborative cultures without strong individual development. We must avoid crushing individuality in the drive to eliminate individualism. At the same time teachers should not be left completely alone or leave each other alone (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

Another constraint on the development of collaborative teacher cultures is to be found in the mandated curriculum. Heavily content-laden curriculum guidelines leave teachers little time to collaborate and the introduction of new programmes divert teachers’ energies into mastering the details of the new programme. Where collaboration does exist it is often not particularly searching or wide-ranging. There is little scope for anything more fundamental - for collaboration in relation to the curriculum of a school concerning the purpose, value and direction of what it teaches. External implementation is given priority over internal development. This leads to a form of ‘bounded collaboration’ occurring (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

Bounded collaboration is collaboration which is restricted in its depth, its scope, its frequency or persistence or a combination of these factors. It is collaboration which does not reach deep down to the grounds, the principles or the ethics of practice but which stays with routine advice-giving, trick-trading and material-sharing of a more immediate, specific and technical nature. It is collaboration which focuses on the immediate and the practical to the exclusion
of longer-term planning concerns. It is collaboration that is focussed on special
initiatives and one-shot deals. If collaboration is to triumph, not just over
individualism, but over presentism and conservatism too, teacher development,
must be reconnected to curriculum development, so that there is something
sufficiently broad and significant about which to collaborate (Hargreaves &

**Collegiality in Action**

Research on professional development sees researchers criticizing
‘traditional’ approaches and advocating newer, more collaborative models
(Collins, 1998; Scott & Weeks, 1996; Simmons et al., 2000; Stein et al., 1999).
Traditional models include one-stop workshops with a top-down approach to
disseminating knowledge, in which teachers are provided with information and
resources that they are expected to translate into action (Gersten, Vaught,
Deshler & Schiller, 1997). In contrast collaborative models emphasize the
importance of nurturing learning communities within which teachers try new
ideas, reflect on outcomes and co-construct knowledge about teaching and
learning in the context of authentic activity (Borko & Putnam, 1998; Perry,
Walton & Calder, 1999). However, although there is a clear movement towards
collaborative professional development, there exists disagreement about how to
characterize the learning spurred in collaborative contexts.

Individually or collectively, teachers try out new ideas in classrooms and
monitor the success of their efforts. They come together to review their
instruction, talk about outcomes, and critically reflect on their teaching (Ball, 1995; Englert & Tarrant, 1995). Over time, within collaborative problem-solving groups, teachers develop a shared language for talking about teaching and co-construct knowledge within a discourse community (Bos, 1995; Englert & Tarrant, 1995). A “communities of practice” (COP) framework has often been used to describe these collaborative initiatives (Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Henry et al., 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Palincsar et al., 1998; Perry et al., 1999).

Collaborative inquiry in a COP may also be beneficial for teachers by structuring opportunities for reflection not typically available to practicing teachers. It is difficult to make meaningful shifts in practice without stepping away from immediate demands or having time to reflect on teaching (Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Henry et al., 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Palincsar et al., 1998; Perry et al., 1999).

In theory, the concept of COP has been employed to better understand teacher learning. Practical advantages may also accrue when structuring professional development using a COP framework. Although a COP framework has enriched understanding about teacher learning, applying the framework to the professional development of practicing teachers presents challenges. Teacher collaboration in an American context has been conducted around the National Board of Certification Process. This research study conducted in 2006 investigated the nature of interaction among teachers and how that collegial interaction influenced teachers’ professional development.
Results indicated that teacher interactions helped one another’s professional development in several ways: enhancing reflection on teaching practice; establishing a professional discourse community; raising the standards for teaching performances and facilitating collaboration. Most of the teachers in this study reported that one of the most significant benefits from going through the NBC process was their own realization of becoming more reflective on their teaching, “[NBC] process was the best staff development that I’ve ever had…. this reflection went on almost minute-to-minute basis” (p. 14).

This participant’s statement is representative of the large number of participants who identified the quantity and detail of required reflection as central to their own change. Another participant’s statement emphasises not only the quantity of the reflection but the quality of the reflection, “I think the thing that does come with the process is a reflective quality that we always had, but now it’s more systematic and more conscious kind of reflection, and more validated somehow, the talk about what we do. We always know we talk about what we do, but now we know how much meaning is attached to talking about what we do,” (p. 15).

Research in the Norwegian context has found a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and teachers’ professional certainty. The collaboration reported by teachers in this study, reveals that what most teachers do is collaborate on planning lessons. This collaboration need not enhance professional development at all. In fact, collaboration on planning lessons may also prevent teachers from experiencing personal development. Shavelson,
(1983, p. 405), states that “planning may be counterproductive if teachers become single-minded and do not adapt their lessons to student needs”.

Collaborative planning may in fact represent more constraints that make students’ individual differences and needs even more difficult to meet. Participating in collaborative activities appears to explain more of the variance in perceived practical certainty for junior high school teachers than for elementary school teachers, and it might also be that participation varies among the teachers in the upper grades. Based on these results it is impossible to say whether collaboration helps to increase teachers’ perceptions of their own practical certainty or whether the more practically certain teachers collaborate more.

**Professional Communities**

A growing body of literature suggests that when schools become professional learning communities there are expected benefits in terms of teacher learning, school improvement and student achievement. Professional communities may create the context for teachers’ collective engagement in sustained efforts to improve teachers’ practice (Louis et al., 1996). According to Smylie (1994), teachers’ work in these communities is collaborative, coordinated, interdependent, and focused on student learning. Collective as opposed to individual professional autonomy, responsibility and accountability for student success are central features. Louis et al., (1996) emphasise the role of shared values, de-privatised practice and reflective dialogue. A willingness to
accept feedback and work towards improvement is regarded by Louis and her colleagues as a key characteristic in productive learning communities.

The process of organised and collective reflection on teaching and learning in the school context is called ‘organisational learning’ (Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Bryk et al., 1999; Marks & Louis, 1999). In their analysis of the organisations consequences of professional communities in schools Bryk et al., argue that the link between a professional community and instructional improvement is not a direct one. Professional activities and norms within a school can be directed towards a variety of purposes, with instructional improvement just being one of the options. Organisational learning resides in the school’s ability to collectively process, understand and apply new ideas about teaching and learning. Leithwood and Louis (1998) distinguish three levels in defining organisational learning in schools:

1. individual learning by teachers or school leaders within the context of the school;
2. learning in small groups or teams of teachers;
3. learning that occurs across the school organisation as a whole;

Researchers have emphasised the importance of well-functioning teacher teams for the development of innovative learning organisations (Kruse & Louis, 1997; Sleegers et al., 1997). Hargreaves (1994) emphasised the need to pay attention to the development of teachers’ collective engagement and active work within a professional group to improve practice, and to increase teachers’
commitment to complex and demanding work situations. Research by Kruse and Louis (1997), into interdisciplinary teacher teams as a mechanism for developing a school-wide community show that these teams undermined schools’ ability, to address whole-school issues. In the middle schools they studied they found that the demands of teacher empowerment within teams for example greater involvement in curriculum issues, scheduling and programme development, may minimise the opportunity that teachers have for reflection and discussion of teacher practice and for school organisation across teams. Interdisciplinary teamwork may inhibit the evolution of a broader reform agenda across the school.

Although the professional community concept is usually considered valuable in research and school improvement, Bryk et al., suggests that the notions underlying this concept may be questionable. Questions arise as to the ease of developing a shared vision on the basis of equality between teachers. However, the literature on micro-politics of the school shows that teachers within subject departments may hold varying, and sometimes even conflicting, ideas about what their subject is about. Moreover within departments there may be differences between teachers in their power and status (Ball, 1987; Imnants, 2001). These factors do not only impede the development of ‘true’ professional communities but also question to some extent whether the professional community concept is a realistic one in the context of secondary schools.

The literature has highlighted the benefits associated with collaboration toward the achievement of teaching and learning outcomes. There is scope for
further research on the link between collaboration and professional learning communities. Collaborative practices impact on professional learning communities because of the opportunities for teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they reflect on practice and revisit beliefs on teaching and learning. In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I describe the theoretical framework underpinning my research. The chapter also deals with the methodology and methods I adopted to answer my research questions.
Chapter Three
Research Design and Methodology

Chapter Two outlined the literature on professional development. Chapter Three discusses the theories underpinning the research, methods of data collection and analysis. The research methodology for this thesis is based on a qualitative framework influenced by phenomenological considerations. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for life situations because an inductive, holistic approach is used (Patton, 2001). In simple terms Qualitative inquiry is an alternative to the traditional forms of scientific and quantitative research which employ a logical-deductive approach. This chapter presents an overview of the methods used to undertake my data collection and data analysis.

Whereas quantitative inquiry often employs standardised measures in an attempt to make broad generalisations, qualitative research aims to understand people, not to measure them (Patton, 2001). Qualitative methods permit the researcher to study selected issues in depth and detail, with the intention of developing a greater understanding of the cases and situations studied, without seeking to generalise across categories. In fact, most qualitative researchers are wary of making generalisations as they are aware that each case is special and unique, and varies according to time and context (Patton, 2001; Sarantakos, 1993).

The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw data by separating
trivial information from that which is significant, identifying patterns or themes
in the data and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what
the data reveals (Patton, 2002). According to Jorgensen (1989), analysis is a
breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts,
elements, or units. It is facts broken down into manageable pieces.

In Qualitative Data Analysis the researcher sorts and sifts data, searching
for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of this
process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible
Analysis as a symphony based on three notes: Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking
about interesting things. While there is great diversity in the practice of
Qualitative Data Analysis Seidel suggests that all forms of Qualitative Data
Analysis are based on these three “notes.”

A similar idea is expressed by Charmaz (1983). For Charmaz, who works
in the ‘grounded theory’ tradition, the disassembling and reassembling occurs
through the ‘coding’ process. Codes serve to summarize, synthesize, and sort
many observations made of the data....coding becomes the fundamental means of
developing the analysis....Researchers use codes to pull together and categorize a
series of otherwise discrete events, statements, and observations which they
identify in the data (Charmaz, 1983, p. 112). At first the data may appear to be a
mass of confusing, unrelated, accounts. But by studying and coding the
researcher begins to create order (Charmaz, 1983, p. 114).
The qualitative inquiry in this study is phenomenological and naturalistic (Patton, 2001). Naturalistic in that the research has taken place in a real life setting and that the phenomenon being studied has unfolded naturally without any manipulation on the part of the researcher. Interviews were conducted in a school setting which was familiar to the interview participants. Open-ended interview questions were asked to provide for a flow of data without constraints. Naturalistic inquiry is in contrast to other forms of inquiry whereby the investigator controls conditions hence manipulating the outcomes. Naturalistic inquiry does not compare the participant group to standardized measures, instead it is a dynamic form of inquiry designed to understand the day to day realities of participants in the program (Patton, 2001).

I began my data analysis by reading each interview transcript several times and extracting the major issues. I looked for repetition of words, topics and ideas referred to as recurring regularities by Guba (1978) and grouped them together. I also looked for similarities and differences across the data called constant comparison method by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and grouped these together. The analysis and reflection upon all of the data enabled me to create narratives of teachers’ experiences of the MCJ professional development. They allow me to acknowledge what I have learned, see what has been accomplished and plan for continued professional development.

A phenomenological perspective focuses on what people experience and how they interpret the world (Patton, 2001). This study is phenomenological in that it seeks to explore teacher experiences of professional learning and attempts
to capture teacher perceptions of the MCJ professional learning.

Phenomenological inquiry is a form of qualitative inquiry that focuses on the question: “What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (Patton, 2001, p. 69). Husserl’s (1950) *lebenswelt* or ‘lifeworld’ notion of phenomenology suggests that people are active creators of their own world and have a consciousness that communicates to them everyday experience and knowledge.

Phenomenology to Husserl is the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses; in other words, phenomenology is the study of the everyday intuitive world of day-to-day experiences (Sarantakos, 1993). Thus, “phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world, and, in doing, develop a world view” (Patton, 2001, p. 69). My research is influenced by phenomenological considerations as I attempt to capture the lived experience of the participants as they tell their stories. I incorporated a phenomenological perspective in relation to my data collection and analysis as description and interpretation are intertwined and often become one and essential to one another (Patton, 2002).

Phenomenological analysis seeks to understand the meaning and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a group of people. Phenomenology aims to identify and describe the experiences of participants from their point of view and therefore shuns critical evaluation (Patton, 2002). Suspension of judgement is important in the early stage of ‘epoche’. I became aware of my role...
as a researcher and attempted to investigate the professional development experience from an open viewpoint without prejudging or imposing meaning too soon (Patton, 2002). This however, was difficult to achieve.

Following ‘epoche,’ the second step is phenomenological reduction in which the researcher holds the phenomenon up for serious inspection. It is taken apart and dissected its elements and essential structures are uncovered, defined and analysed. It is not interpreted in terms of standard meanings given to it by literature but rather confronted, as far as possible, on its own terms. All elements or aspects of the data are treated with equal value and then organized into meaningful clusters. The final stage of phenomenological analysis then involves a ‘structural description’ of the experience in which the interpretation of deeper meaning experience for the individuals is described in an attempt to reveal the essence of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Narratives permit life-like accounts which focus on experience and are influenced by phenomenology’s emphasis on understanding lived experiences and perceptions of experience (Patton, 2001). Rich insights into the experiences of participants are revealed in narrative accounts. They provide a framework and context for making meaning of life situations. Narratives reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experience (Patton, 2001). Analysing narrative text involves identifying themes and sub-themes. Throughout the process of constructing narratives ongoing reflection or ‘wakefulness’ is necessary (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Wakefulness ensures attention to what is being written and how it is being written.
In selecting a language of wakefulness rather than criticism it is possible to move forward constantly alert to the risks of simple plots and one dimensional character’s when constructing narratives. Narrative accounts were constructed to describe factual information provided by participants in addition to interview notes. Narratives are written in the active voice to explain the participant’s perspective. Each narrative is approximately 400-450 words and includes sufficient detail to describe the situation. Each narrative has a theme and was allocated a title and whilst most information is factual some information is fictional to ensure anonymity.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as “real world setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Qualitative research, broadly defined means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17) and instead is, the kind of research that produces findings arrived from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction and generalisation of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).
As I embarked on this journey of research I viewed my past experiences of professional development and question the purpose, effectiveness and worth of these experiences. Qualitative researchers have come to embrace their involvement and role within the research. Patton (2001) supports the notion of the researcher’s involvement and immersion into the research by discussing that the real world is subject to change and therefore, a qualitative researcher should be present to record before, during and after the changes. I rely on my own intelligence, experience and judgement to observe significant and meaningful data and take seriously the responses of the participants.

As a teacher who participated in the MCJ professional development I have my own stance on this professional development which I bring to bear to understand the actions, experiences and points of view of the participants. Interpreting or understanding the participants’ perceptions entails empathic identification with them (Patton, 2001). As a researcher I have to understand ‘where I am coming from’, what beliefs, desires and thoughts I bring to my research. For example, as a deliverer of professional development and a participant at MCJ I take a positive stance to professional development opportunities that provide an opportunity for teachers to collaborate. I believe that MCJ provided an invaluable opportunity for teachers to gain professional knowledge and to share their thoughts and feelings on assessment. However, I try to take a neutral stance toward the participants’ thoughts, emotions and behaviours and I attempt to be non-judgemental. Reflexivity in my enquiry reminds me of my own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of the people I have interviewed. Reflexivity also highlights the cultural
and historical influences, the personal investment of the researcher, choice of literary texts, various biases, avoidances, surprises and ‘undoings’ in the course of the research (Gergen & Gergen, 2000).

As a teacher and researcher my perspective will be communicated along with the participants in my study. An interpretive framework provides more scope for me to work together with my participants than ‘controlling’ everything that is happening (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews with participants enable me to capture and describe how they experienced MCJ, “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it and talk with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). I focused on the common experiences of MCJ as professional learning and highlight the commonalities obtained from this phenomenological study even though my experience may have been different. I used a qualitative, interpretive approach to investigate the following research questions: How does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional practice and how does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional well-being?

Data Collection

This study was conducted at the school in which I teach, Summer High (a pseudonym). Data collection was completed in two stages. Stage 1 involved designing and administering a survey to all teachers in the school. The survey questions were designed by me with the purpose of providing information on possible participants for my study. I then conducted interviews during stage 2
with the sample group I selected. These methods of data collection were chosen to ensure the trustworthiness of interpretations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). During stage 1 teacher’s were asked to complete a survey. To ensure anonymity teachers responding to the survey were not required to identify themselves on the survey.

The interviews which took place during stage 2 were in a familiar setting at a time suitable to participants. Participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences of the MCJ professional development in a non threatening manner. Researcher responsibilities and ethics remain at the forefront of the interaction at all times and it is vital no harm is caused to any participants as a consequence of the interview (Hostetler, 2005).

Stage 1 was the survey which I used to find out which teachers on the staff of the school had attended MCJ. In April 2006 a notice of intention to survey and the aims of the study were placed in each teacher’s pigeon-hole. This method of contacting teachers was chosen because teachers routinely check their pigeon-holes on a daily basis. A notice of my intention to survey teachers for my study was also placed on the school’s intranet. Daily notices are placed on the school’s intranet which ensures that teachers are informed of events taking place in the school on a regular basis and teachers routinely check this site. At the beginning of May 2006 I placed a survey in each teacher’s pigeon-hole requesting respondents to answer all questions. I was aware of teachers having pressures on their time and that they are wary of time consuming forms to complete.
I indicated that the survey would take approximately five minutes to complete. Much of a teacher’s workload is comprised of completing forms, for example, curriculum forms, student well-being. The survey gathered information on teachers’ age, gender, years of teaching experience, teaching area, position in the school and their experience of the MCJ professional development (see Appendix 3). Teachers were given 10 days in which to complete the survey. The return date was 11 May 2006.

Of the 50 teachers who were given the survey, 13 responded by returning the completed survey to me. Seven of the respondents were within the 22-34 year age group, two were in the 35-44 year age group and four were within the 45-54 year age group. Four of the respondents were male and nine were female. Respondents were from seven of the eight curriculum learning areas, namely Mathematics, Science, Technology and Enterprise, English, Society and Environment, Information Technology and Art. No respondents were from Physical Education. Three respondents were in leadership positions whilst ten were classroom teachers. Nine of the respondents had less than 10 years teaching experience whilst four of the respondents had more than 15 years experience. The survey was not designed to elicit the in-depth data needed to describe teachers’ experiences and feelings of MCJ. Interviews were conducted for this purpose.

When designing my study I decided to select The Head of the English Learning Area, the Head of the Maths Learning Area, a newly appointed English
teacher, a Languages Other Than English teacher and five teachers from other Learning Areas. I selected these teachers to participate as they represented the broad spectrum of the Curriculum and I expected them to give me in-depth information on the MCJ professional development. However, my survey data showed respondents in these learning areas had not all participated in the MCJ professional development.

I decided to select the teachers for the interviews by one primary criterion: having participated in the MCJ professional development. I then selected six teachers to form the sample group. I approached two participants who are in leadership positions; two participants who are experienced teachers and two participants who are less experienced educators. I selected participants who were both male and female, from upper and middle school and of different age categories. My selection of the participants was guided by achieving a balance of participants based on their gender, their positions in the school, their years of experience and their ages (see Table 1). I invited approached the teachers to participate in the interview by forwarding them a personal letter each (Appendix 1).
Table 1: Selection of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Categories</th>
<th>Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Interview Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Position</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at MCJ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage 2 of the study was the interview. The sample group of teachers reflected on their experiences in a standardized open ended interview. Interviews were conducted over a period of two months. I used a qualitative, interpretive approach to investigate the two research questions: how does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional practice? and how does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional well-being? In
particular I was interested in how teachers’ experience of MCJ impacts on their professional practice and professional well being.

I reviewed literature on teacher professional development and interrogated previous studies. This provided me with a framework within which to work. The interview questions were based on a review of the literature (see Table 2) of previous studies on curriculum and teacher professional development. The research questions and the interview questions were closely linked as I sought to gain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions of professional development. Each question was broad enough to allow participants the latitude to follow a particular train of thought but specific enough to address the research questions. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed teachers the opportunity to shape their responses in ways they saw fit. I conducted the interviews in October and November 2006.

Interviews took place at Summer High at a time and place convenient for interviewees. Often they took place in the school conference room when it was available and in an empty classroom when there was no other room available. All participants requested the interview take place at Summer High. I noted a reluctance to be interviewed out of school hours. The interviews lasted on average half an hour, with one interview extending to an hour in length. On the day of each interview, I brought to school a tape-recorder, two cassettes, and a consent form (Appendix 2).
Prior to conducting the interviews I had explained to the interviewees the purpose and content of the interview and why I had invited them to participate. I told them the purpose of the research interview was to gather data, and that although I had a role in the school my role here was only as a researcher. Participant A, the female teacher in a leadership position, was the only teacher who requested an explanation for the second time at the interview on the purpose of collecting the information. At the end of the interview, she asked the question: Who will use the information and how will it be used?

I found an advantage of using a structured interview was that it enabled me to gather a variety of perspectives in a relatively short period of time. The interview began with opening statements on the purpose of collecting information on MCJ. I explained who the information was for, how it would be used and the confidentiality of the information provided. The interview questions were open-ended and encouraged the respondent to talk descriptively about their experience of the MCJ professional learning. I encouraged the respondents to talk about experiences, feelings, opinions and knowledge within the context of the MCJ professional learning. “Qualitative inquiry – strategically, philosophically and therefore methodologically – aims to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data” (Patton, 2002, p. 353).

The interview questions were not provided in advance but were given to participants at the time of the interview. In view of the relatively brief time allowed for the interviews, I needed a good rapport with the participants. The
The most effective way to do this was through friendly and informal body language.

I wore comfortable clothing suitable for teachers working in a school rather than
the more formal clothes I sometimes wear when I present workshops in public
settings. All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Two participants
were nervous and asked to view the questions immediately prior to my beginning
the interview. A brief description of the study was provided for individual
participants prior to the interviews being conducted and I reassured them they
could end the interview at any time.

Interviewees were reminded that I had also undergone the MCJ
professional development. This appeared to relax the participants and they
seemed at ease sharing their experiences with a ‘colleague’ rather than a
‘researcher’. By taking this ‘practitioner as researcher’ (Glesne & Peshkin,
1992) approach, I encouraged interviewees to be candid with their responses.
Interview questions were sequenced to obtain an overview of the participant’s
knowledge of MCJ followed by interpretations of their experience. Once their
experience of the activity had been described, then opinions and feelings were
solicited, building on and probing for interpretations of the experience (Patton,
2002, p. 352). Participant A needed many prompts because she said she often
lost the focus of the question and wanted me to direct her back to the topic.
The interview questions have been placed in a 2 x 3 grid below which provide a conceptual framework for my data collection:

Table 2: Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Professional Practice</th>
<th>Professional well being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>From your perspective what was the purpose of the MCJ professional development?</td>
<td>How has MCJ contributed to your professional learning and professional well-being?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>What was the value of your involvement in the MCJ professional learning?</td>
<td>What was your experience of the MCJ professional development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>What did you learn from the MCJ professional Development?</td>
<td>What are the implications for your future professional learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What issues have arisen for you as a teacher as a result of MCJ?</td>
<td>What support do you need to address these issues?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A final question was, ‘Is there anything else you would like to add that you think would be relevant to this study?’ The purpose was to obtain a rich description of teachers’ feelings and thoughts. Interviews were tape recorded and no notes were
recorded during the interviews. No significant interruptions occurred during any of the interviews.

Data Analysis

Once data production was completed, the next step was to analyse and interpret the data. This meant establishing what the data tells, and in this respect, consciousness of the researcher’s stance is important (Ely et al., 1997). As a researcher I brought to the table my own opinions and views of the MCJ professional development. When I participated in the MCJ professional development, I appreciated that it presented an opportunity for me to collaborate with teachers in a setting outside of my own school. When I reflected on that experience I realised that collaboration amongst teachers in a setting outside of their school is a rare event which made this professional development significant for me.

In a qualitative study based on interviews, the process of analysis begins during the interviews and the researcher estimates and determines which issues raised by the informants should be amplified (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). I made my stance clear as well as my objectives for conducting the interviews in order to guard against bias and contamination of interpretation (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Ely et al., 1997). I am aware of my own bias. My bias stems from my experiences as a presenter of professional development and my life experiences as an educator and administrator within the public education domain. I am the holder of my own views and knowledge which impact on my
perception of the MCJ professional development. Participants bring to the interview their own personal histories and values.

Analysing a set of data produced from interviews implies close reading of field notes and repeated listening to the recordings in order to detect patterns or themes emerging in the data. I read each interview transcript many times. Every interview was unique as there were differences in the stories that I heard. There were many similarities which began to emerge. I underlined key phrases in the interview responses of each participant and looked for words, ideas and concepts which occurred regularly in the data and grouped them. For example, Teacher F said, “it makes you feel like you kind of on the right track and helped with my confidence”; Teacher D’s words were, “it made me feel that I am on the right track and confirms things for me…” Teacher E reported, “I guess it makes me feel more confident to a degree…” According to teacher A, “one thing they haven’t done very well is follow up sessions”. Teacher D commented, “get a whole department out once a year at least”.

Patterns in the data were organised into themes and sub-themes. Not all themes were important, some were repetitive and therefore had to be included in others. An emergent theme was that of ‘issues’. The interviews revealed a number of issues which emerged as a result of the MCJ process. At the forefront was the sub-theme ‘rubrics’ or the setting of a ‘rubric’ for each assessment. Teacher F, the graduate teacher indicated, “there needs to be a rubric for assessment. It also needs to be an ongoing process and not one off”. This was supported by Teacher, C, the female experienced teacher, “the ongoing rubric
issue, it is a shame that every teacher in the state is grappling with rubrics. Who
do we write a rubric for?” This was reiterated by Teacher B, the Leader. “I
think the writing of rubrics is a huge concern, if this is systemic then maybe the
next phase is that some of these rubrics could be developed”.

The data gathered indicated that participants had repeated themselves in
some instances. Where themes were repetitive and in some cases not so
important I grouped them together. Examples of this were in the words of
Teacher E and Teacher F. “It has changed the way I think about some of the
outcomes, it enabled me to make stronger links with the outcomes as I had to go
back and look at the aspects in order to create an assessment rubric”. “In terms
of classroom teaching it has certainly given me an idea now as to what level four
requires, it has given me an idea to where in Information, Communication and
Participation in Society & Environment your assessment should be pitched, how
you would structure your assessment to meet the framework”.

I then identified and extracted those which were most significant to my
research. I identified six themes and three sub-themes. Some of these included
consensus, knowledge, collaboration and future learning, whilst the sub-themes
were issues, support, and development. This is content analysis, the classification
and categorization of themes and meanings in the data (Patton, 2002). The
making of meaning necessitates interpretation of the emerged patterns and
themes which is referred to as ‘inductive analysis’ (Patton, 2002, p. 453). The
next step in the making of meaning involves translating these interpretations into
explicit insight and understandings to be written by the researcher (Ely et al., 1997; Lather, 1986).

**Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes identified in the data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the process of writing, I had to guard against my own bias influencing my interpretation and descriptions (Cherryholmes, 1988). As a presenter of professional development my perspective of professional development is a positive one. I had to guard against tensions that existed as a result of my training and experience in the field of professional development. This is to pay due respect to the data and to safeguard credibility against contamination. Guba & Lincoln (1989) offer the term transferability to refer to the degree of similarity between the situation studied and the situation being compared. My contextual and personal experience in the same workplace as the participants enabled me to understand their stories and gave me the motivation to pursue my research. It also gave the opportunity for my voice to be heard.
Data Representation

Qualitative analysis is grounded in ‘thick description’ and a fine balance must be achieved between description and interpretation (Patton, 2001). I report the data by using thick description. “Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. In, thick description the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (Denzin, 1989, p. 157). I will emphasise my understanding of the participants’ lived experience and perceptions of these experiences by presenting and analysing their responses to the interview questions (Patton, 2001). The participants’ responses are organised in such a way that overall patterns become clear. I emphasise the participants’ spoken word. Recurring regularities in the data were sorted into categories. Individual categories which were consistent were colour coded.

In order to make sense of my findings I have to go beyond the descriptive data. Interpretation means to make sense of the findings to attach meaning to what was discovered with a sense of offering explanations or drawing conclusions from the data gathered (Patton, 2001). Phenomenological analysis provides me with the framework to focus on how the participants experienced the MCJ professional development and their interpretations of that experience from a professional perspective as well as personal perspective. Throughout the processes of qualitative inquiry, participants were encouraged to relate the stories of MCJ in their own voices, to share and to reflect on those experiences. Participants shared their perceptions of MCJ, their concerns and their future needs amongst others.
Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns of autonomy, privacy and integrity were addressed to the best of my ability. Ethical issues included ensuring that consent was given, that the right to withdraw at any time remained with the participants; and that they had the right to remain anonymous (Tripp, 1998). The research project was granted approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Murdoch University. This study involves phenomenological research among a small group of teachers who are to speak freely about their experiences. This requires a certain level of trust between interviewees and the investigator (Tripp, 1998). Such trust was aided by giving to the informants a written assurance that their names would not be disclosed and the information they shared would be anonymous.

The Department of Education in Western Australia requires that prior to research being undertaken at a state school, permission must be obtained by the School’s Principal as well as the Department of Education. On acceptance of my Research Proposal I gained the permission of the Principal of Summer High and the Department of Education to conduct the study at this school. The Principal offered to support my study in any way he could and felt pleased that it was being undertaken at Summer High. I also made an undertaking to the participants that I would allow them to read the data reported prior to this information being made public. All participants have been offered a summary of the findings.
The interview participants were given an information letter regarding the purpose and the contents of the project as well as an explanation as to why they were invited to participate. In this research, all participants and places are referred to with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. It is important to ensure that participation in the research is not a damaging experience. For example, anonymity is paramount as revealing the identity of the individuals involved in the research could seriously affect my relationship with the participants. Audio recordings and transcripts have been secured to ensure confidentiality.

As a newcomer to Summer High School I faced the challenge of gaining sufficient trust and support of staff to engage them in this study. I tried to develop close professional relationships with staff early in the year. This was difficult as many teachers are focussed on the day-to-day activities of the school which includes instances of behaviour management on a continuous basis. To gain their trust and build a relationship I spent much time during the recess and lunch breaks in the staffroom, on the playground and along the corridors making myself known. Only then was I able to make the intentions of my study known to staff.

At the data gathering stage I lost confidence in continuing with the project as I struggled with the fact that these teachers were challenged with issues such as poorly behaved students, heavy workloads and curriculum demands amongst others, all of which seemed more important than this study. My spirit was rekindled when the surveys revealed a positive response to participate in the study. Throughout the data gathering stage negotiations were
made with teachers for a time and place in which to interview them. I offered to conduct the interviews at a time suitable to them which included the weekends and after school hours and in places and conditions which were familiar to them.

Many teachers opted for the periods of time during the day which are for duties other than teaching to conduct the interviews. This left me with a burden of guilt as I realised the full extent of the commitment of these teachers to their duties at Summer High. I felt gratitude toward them for making time available during their busy teaching lives. At this stage I was fairly well known amongst the teachers and became aware that an ethical dilemma would arise in that teachers felt quite comfortable and safe talking to me. The consequence of this would be that the interviews could become a place for teachers to talk about personal issues and internal school issues. Separating relevant information from the topics of mutual interest and concern required a good deal of skill on my part as the interviewer, especially when conducting the interviews.

**Data Quality**

In a positivist, non-interpretive framework validity, reliability and objectivity become important (Perakyla, 1997). Researchers minimize bias and attempt to ignore their voice to maximize accuracy and report impartiality. Researchers are expected to emphasize the empirical findings, not their personal perspective (Patton, 2001). Criteria for quality include the ‘value of truth’ and plausibility of findings which are credibility, impartiality, independence of judgement (Patton, 2002). While reliability is concerned with the replicating of
scientific findings, validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings. Although reliability and validity are treated separately in quantitative studies, these terms are not viewed separately in qualitative research. Instead, in a phenomenological, interpretive framework, terms like credibility, truthfulness and trustworthiness are used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The credibility of a qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher (Patton, 2001). While the credibility in quantitative research depends on instrument construction, in qualitative research “The researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2001, p. 14). My credibility as a researcher was enhanced as participants viewed me both as a colleague who had attended the MCJ professional learning with them as well as the researcher. They became willing to share their experiences and provide forthright, candid answers to interview questions. They indicated their willingness to provide information on the MCJ professional learning with the view that this information would assist in my findings. To ensure accuracy of the information gathered from the interviews, two strategies were applied. First the interviews were tape-recorded. Second, notes were taken from the recorded interviews to support the analysis of the content.

As a teacher and researcher at Summer High, I have an ‘insider’s’ view of the challenges as a researcher and to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the participants’ perspectives as an insider while describing it to, and for, outsiders (Patton, 2002). My contextual and personal experience in the same workplace as the participants also enhanced
my understanding of their stories and gave me the motivation to pursue the research. I also bring to the study my own notions and views on professional development. I have participated in MCJ as a teacher and now have the task of researching this professional development. I struggled to come to terms with conducting this study in a manner that would allow teachers to reveal their experiences without inhibition. I wanted them to view me as a researcher as well as a colleague. I needed to be satisfied that their responses to the interview questions would not compromise them in any way.

As a researcher I strive to produce reasonably accurate data on the number of perspectives which are revealed in my findings. The notion of finding ‘truth’ can be a heavy burden for a researcher so to report my findings based on my analysis and interpretations of the data collected is what I aim for (Patton, 2002). “The ‘pragmatic validation’ of findings will ensure the results of my study are judged by their relevance to, and use by, those to whom the findings are presented” (Patton, 2002, p. 579). To ensure consistency of the data I asked participants to review the findings. “Researchers and evaluators can learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded” (Patton, 2002, p. 560). This reduces the chance that questions are raised about the credibility of the findings.

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Stenbacka (2001) describes reliability as one of the quality concepts in qualitative research which “has to be solved in order to claim
the study as part of proper research” (p. 551). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that sustaining the trustworthiness of a research report depends on the issues, quantitatively discussed as validity and reliability. If the validity or trustworthiness can be maximized or tested then a more “credible and defensible result” (Johnson, 1997, p. 283) may lead to generalisability which is one of the concepts suggested by Stenbacka (2001) as the structure for both doing and documenting high quality qualitative research. Therefore, the quality of the research is related to the generalisability of the result and thereby to the testing thus increasing the validity and trustworthiness of the research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) offer the term transferability to refer to the degree of similarity between the situation studied and the situation being compared. Thus the transferability of the research account is determined by the readers rather than the researcher.

The credibility of my findings and interpretations depends upon careful attention to establishing trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness of my research findings member checking was undertaking during the interview, particularly with Participant B, who was apt to lose focus of the question. Member checking consists of the researcher restating, summarizing, or paraphrasing the information received from a respondent to ensure that what was heard or written down is in fact correct (Kuzel & Like, 1991). Time is also a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data (Patton, 2002). I was able to spend much time with participants in a formal as well as informal context.
By the time the interviews were conducted October and November 2006, sound relationships had been established with participants. “When a large amount of time is spent with your research participants, they less readily feign behaviour or feel the need to do so; moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you” (Glesne, 1999, p. 151).

True data are those that are reasonably accurate and believable rather than true in the absolute sense (Patton, 2002).

In this qualitative inquiry I present data on various perspectives, including that of myself as researcher. I have done the job of collecting, analysing and interpreting the data to the best of my ability and report my findings as truth insofar as it is revealed by the data. Throughout the process of qualitative inquiry, participants are encouraged to relate stories of their experiences in their own voices and to share and reflect on those experiences. Qualitative data describes, taking the reader into the time and place of the observation and captures and communicates someone else’s experience of the phenomenon under study in his or her own words (Patton, 2002).

This study is conducted with the aim of identifying the experiences resulting from the MCJ professional learning that led to change in practice and growth at a professional level. This study will serve to enhance my own knowledge of MCJ as a professional development practice. The findings of the study will assist teachers and administrators in Summer High to reflect on their experiences and should help inform current and future professional development initiatives as the perspectives of selected individual teachers’ will be pertinent to
others. In this chapter I provided an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology underpinning my research. Consideration was given to Qualitative research as a field of study and the interpretive framework. In the next Chapter I will present my data and narratives.
Chapter 4
Narratives

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through “collaboration between researcher and participants over time in a series of places and in social interaction milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rich insights into the experiences of participants can be revealed in narratives. Narratives permit life-like accounts which focus on experience, hence their alignment with qualitatively-oriented educational research (Pepper, 2008). Narratives are not the same as interview data or field notes. To create narratives interview data is processed to provide factual information provided by and about participants. They provide a framework and context for making meaning of life situations.

Narratives permit participants’ stories and descriptions of experience to be honoured and given status (Conle, 2003). There are several stages in the development and use of narratives in research. To begin with data must be collected. Data collected during individual interviews permit participants to describe their own experiences in an informal setting. The narrative is then ‘shaped’ from the field notes followed by narrative analysis. The way in which data are interpreted and analysed can have an effect on the participant. The deconstruction and interpretation of narratives may undermine the work being done by participants to maintain ontological security (Borland, 1991).

Ethical dilemmas are endemic in all research however interactive and relational research such as narrative intensifies the concerns. It could be argued
that it is impossible to undertake research without some ethical infringement however the researcher must in conjunction with the participants make some moral judgements about the balance between the benefits of the research (make known) and the rights of others (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). One should “balance the need to obtain valid data against the rights of groups and individuals to privacy and autonomy” (Sumner, 2006). Rather than presenting guidelines for the ethical use of research skills, Braud and Anderson (1998) refer to the need to respect the limits of the research.

They describe situations when the research is deemed culturally inappropriate, when the research is personally deemed inappropriate, and when the researcher is confronting and ineffable. Elliot (2005) suggests that the researcher enters into a personal and moral relationship with the participant during data collection, analysis and dissemination. She focuses her attention on the full research process: data collection, informed consent, the potential impact of the research process on the participant and additionally on the implications of using narrative with regard to confidentiality and anonymity during analysis and dissemination.

The relationship between researcher and participants is an important one for both ethical and practical reasons. Participants need to feel confident in what they have to offer. A trust relationship between researcher and participants has to be developed (Russell & Kelly, 2002). I informed participants of my background and interests during my initial interaction with them. The researcher and participant should develop sensitivity towards each other. This allows for
reciprocity. Reciprocity is important as researcher and participant in collaboration create narrative meaning (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). The way the researcher acts, questions and responds shapes the relationship. Interview questions guided lines of inquiry pursued during the interview encouraging participants to talk about their experiences of the MCJ professional development workshop. During the interviews I tried not to interrupt participants’ responses which would stem the flow of talk hence losing the thread of the story. Throughout the process I remained mindful that the quality of the information obtained during the interview was dependent on me, the interviewer.

The term ‘narrative’ carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by many disciplines, often synonymously with ‘story’. The narrative scholar pays analytic attention to how the facts were assembled that way, for whom? the story was constructed, how was it made and for what purpose? (Riessman, 2008). To create narratives the interview data is processed to provide factual information provided by teachers in the setting. Situating teachers as the locus of inquiry, this thematic analysis of these narratives offers glimpses into the discursive spaces within which teachers find themselves and from and through which they make meaning of their personal and professional lives. Each narrative is written in the active voice to project the participant’s perspective.

I developed a theme and selected a title for each one. Each narrative is approximately 400-450 words in length to provide sufficient detail to describe the context. Minor details are fictionalised so as to protect the identity of the school and participants. Information written about the professional development
and teachers are accurate. I allocated all participants pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

When analysing narrative data the analysis should accommodate the data as it presents itself, rather than being determined from the outset. In this way, the data can truly reveal and shape itself whilst the researcher is open to illuminating insights and breakthroughs (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). Narrative analysis requires that we focus on the narrative plot, exploring the potential and limits of each participant’s narrative and the process of its construction and social discourse that helps to maintain it (Goncalves et al., 2004). The purpose of the narrative analysis is to explain how meanings, their linkages and horizons are actively constructed within the interview environment. It is about ‘deconstructing’ the participants talk. Showing the reader, the, ‘hows’ and ‘whats’ of the narrative frames of lived experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Priest (2000) observes that narrative analysis does not have a single heritage, drawing instead on a diverse range of sources. Stories are never just representations of experience, they are also interpretations. The process of interpretation imposes an order on the experiences, making analysis and interpretation of narrative text different from the interpretation of scientific text. Events are temporally and spatially connected unlike scientific texts which are often connected using causal laws. Temporality is a central feature of Western narrative writing as events are generally thought of by locating them in time. Narratives are set in a stated time period with a sequence of events linked
through time. Thus it is the ‘sequentiality’ (temporal order of events) rather than
the truth or falsity of a story that determines the ‘plot’ (Abma, 1999).

Crafting narratives involves skill and talent (Prange, 2004) and evolves
rather than develops through established methods (Pepper, 2008). Constructing
narratives requires the recognition and selection of significant rather than trivial
information, and is described by Eisner (1985) as ‘connoisseurship’. Eisner
describes constructing narratives as ‘artistic reconstruction’ of what is observed
in order to assist the reader to experience the actions and interactions in a life-
like manner (p. 229). Field notes permit the richness and complexity of the
interview to be preserved and reconstructed into narratives. Field notes are
interpretive and constructed by the researcher at a certain point in time.
Selectivity has already taken place in choosing one aspect over another and
making other aspects less visible in the field notes (Pepper, 2008).

The narratives below represent stories of the past personal and
professional experiences of teachers and predict possible future dimensions for
narrative inquiry. The retelling of teachers’ professional stories transformed as
reconstructed narratives can help illuminate the meaningful connections between
‘learning, teaching and research.’ Important themes in the area of teaching such
as consensus, knowledge, collaboration, future learning, relevance and self-
confidence are discussed and aspects of the interviews are presented and
analysed. Roberts (2002) notes that in the process of analysis it becomes evident
that parts of the narrative are thematically connected. Aspects of the narrative
are not drawn randomly, rather they are selected thematically. This “thematic
field analysis approach involves a rigorous attention to hypothesis construction by careful reading of texts and an attempt to generate patterns” (Roberts, 2002, p. 152).

The narratives were derived from interviews with six teachers (Jane) at Summer High School conducted between June and November 2006. They invite us to reflect on the richness and importance of our experiences and stories of teaching, learning and assessment and how these stories impact on the various aspects of educational practice. The narratives accounts capture the experiences of MCJ as revealed during interviews with ‘Jane’ an experienced teacher of Society and Environment.

The first narrative, ‘Reaching Consensus’ describes a group of teachers who meet for the first time at the MCJ workshop. The group consisted of teachers from different schools and whose years of experience varied. They were faced with the daunting task of exhibiting a piece of work that they had previously marked. This proved a challenge as it was the first time in their careers that this process was undertaken.
Consensus amongst teachers is something that is rarely achieved. In our classrooms, in the staff room and the school yard we engage in lively debate on a range of educational and other issues. A consensus decision represents a reasonable decision that all members of the team can accept. It is not necessarily the optimal decision for each member. A single member can block consensus if he or she feels that is necessary. When all group members feel they have reached a reasonable decision they have reached consensus.

Achieving consensus at the MCJ workshop was a challenge. Teachers rarely agree on items that interrogate their professional judgements. It is both professionally and personally confronting. There are six teachers in a group. We looked at seven pieces of students work. Some pieces were tastefully bound, others merely loose sheets of lined paper. We looked at each other cautiously wondering what the other was thinking. Exposing students' work to other teachers was new and it invoked feelings of trepidation.

We were instructed to pass the assessment pieces to each other in a clockwise direction and then to spend a short time reading through each piece of work, assessing it. This was done in silence. Approximately half an hour was dedicated to this task. Thereafter we discussed the levels that we had allocated to the assessment pieces. 'Heated' discussion ensued when the level given to a student...
differed between teachers. This enabled everyone at the table to check their own understanding of the levels and to reflect upon phase two of the Curriculum Improvement Program.

Lively debate centred the act of 'levelling' of a students work. How does one allocate a level to an assessment piece? What does a level 4 look like or read like? The term 'rubric' was brought into the conversation. We decided that each assessment given to students should include a statement of outcome that the student should achieve. This is the rubric. Attached to each outcome should be a level ranging from 2-5 for Year 9 students. The Outcomes Standards Framework dictated that at Year 9 each student should have a level of achievement of 4.

The discussion on the compilation of a rubric brought dissatisfaction to the table. The graduate teachers complained that the language in the Outcome Statements was difficult and conceptual. They felt it would be a challenge to write the rubrics without 'dumbing' them down. Eventually consensus was reached. We completed this phase of the workshop with a sense of personal satisfaction. Knowledge on the allocation of levels was extended and consensus was achieved.

The second narrative ‘Acquisition of Knowledge’ emerged as a result of the discussion that ensued during the ‘consensus’ marking session. It describes the gains made by experienced teachers during the first session of the MCJ workshop. ‘Jane’ describes the disappointment of less experienced teachers at ‘not having learnt much’ from the session.
I attended the MCJ workshop with the words 'knowledge is power' reverberating in my mind. My culture and upbringing have taught me that as we acquire knowledge we place ourselves in a position of power. I was in awe of the knowledge that some of my fellow teachers held. My professional knowledge was enhanced as a result of the MCJ professional development. I held the belief that I knew much on student assessment however I questioned this belief when I discovered the vast body of knowledge held by fellow teachers present at the workshop.

Each teacher had survey forms to complete. This was a requirement of the workshop. The novice teachers spoke and wrote simultaneously. Their comments were strikingly different to those made by the more experienced teachers. 'I didn’t learn a lot as I was actually quite on track with it'. 'I never learnt anything it was a reinforcement of what I already knew was supposed to happen, because as a graduate it is still fresh in my mind'. I was surprised by the admission of the graduate teachers. They indicated they had not learnt much from the professional development.

I felt comforted by the many slides and handouts of information that were provided during the workshop. My knowledge was affirmed and I no longer felt nervous. Surrounded by this information I felt safe.
and secure. I was not alone. I gathered my folder of notes and handouts at the conclusion of the session. I left with the feeling I am able to tackle the task of setting an assessment confidently.

My knowledge was extended significantly and I felt secure in sharing what I knew. I saw the links with the Curriculum Framework. I have had to go back and look at the Aspects in order to create an assessment rubric and now have a clearer idea on which level to ‘pitch’ my assessment and how it should be structured to meet the requirements of the Curriculum Framework. Back at school my colleagues were eager to find out what I had to share.

During our weekly meeting I reported to my fellow teachers within the Society and Environment Department. They were interested in what I had to tell them and took copious notes as I spoke. I distributed copies of the handouts. The teachers perused the documents asking questions animatedly. We decided at our next meeting each teacher would each provide an assessment piece with a rubric attached. We would then collaborate as to which assessment piece was to be utilised. I left the meeting feeling fulfilled, my knowledge was extended and so was that of my fellow colleagues.

The narrative ‘Working Collaboratively’ describes the ‘loneliness’ of Jane in the many aspects of her professional life. Jane goes on to emphasise the feelings of ‘togetherness’ that ensued as a result of the collaborative opportunity provided by the MCJ workshop. She highlights the trepidation experienced by
Working Collaboratively

In our everyday busy school lives, we are rarely alone but we usually work in isolation. In my Learning Area workspace I am surrounded by fellow teachers. I rush from lesson to lesson and in my spare time for duties other than teaching I scramble to prepare lessons and complete marking. Fortnightly meetings are dominated by directives from the Head of Learning Area wasting a precious hour of time. For teachers, collaboration is important. I value sharing, being together in the same place and time with like-minded individuals.

At the MCJ professional development I learnt a great deal about how to collaborate. A clear process was followed when we worked together. We each had a turn. In fact we were expected to contribute and time was set aside for each contribution. It was hard to concentrate and focus on each task. We had to listen and to give feedback to each other. I had never been in an explicit collaborative group like this before in all my 12 years of teaching Society and Environment.

I did feel apprehensive, though. I was nervous, wondering whether my judgement was right. Was the standard of my student’s work high enough? I have never had an opportunity to check this out before. This was a unique experience: being with other teachers from other
schools with the time to think about our assessment practice, sharing students' work, particularly our own students' work. Working together affirmed my professional judgement about students' written work and told me I was on track and I was doing a good job.

Thirty six teachers attended the workshop, seated in tables of six each representing a different school. Two teachers were showing off. Despite these teachers being newly graduated and not having more than three years experience each they appeared confident when we were required to 'level' a piece of work. They dominated the discussion at our table and took the initiative to provide feedback on our behalf. Examples of their students' work were powerful illustrations of certain levels. They knew all the answers! I wondered why they bothered to attend the workshop when there appeared to be nothing more for them to learn.

Not only have I learnt about levelling students' work but I also feel reinvigorated in my professional identity. I now know that when I have the chance to take responsibility for working with others I will remember how good it felt to truly collaborate.

In the narrative, ‘Finding Relevance’, ‘Jane’ expresses the pride she felt at displaying her assessments for teachers in her team. She reflects on the discomfort of newly graduated teachers in having to justify their grades and expresses the feelings of the experienced teachers who found the MCJ process to be of relevance to their professional practice.
Finding Relevance

The time of the week that depicts 'weekly team meeting' time has arrived. My thoughts are pervaded with the information that I received from MCJ. I ponder 'is each piece of information that we gather of relevance to our practice?' These thought invoking questions lead me to recount my experience of the MCJ workshop.

This week's team meeting takes on a new meaning. I have a different contribution to make. I provide my assessment piece for perusal by my fellow colleagues and eagerly await my turn to discuss the task and accompanying rubric.

At the beginning of our meeting my fellow colleagues chatter as I gather my thoughts. I reflect upon the chatter at the workshop and compare it to the chatter of my colleagues at school. The novice teacher reported having disliked justifying his grades. I remember his look of disdain when a teacher at another table began to ask irrational questions of the presenter. He didn't want to discuss his student's work and he didn't want to justify his grades. He said it was too personal and did not look at the task at hand.

I smile as the thought of the experienced teachers' chatter enters my mind. Their chatter had a positive slant. They report MCJ as being relevant to their practice for a number of reasons. It was meaningful, relevant and hands on. It helped in terms of assessment across all contexts and opened their minds to the need to go back to the outcome statements as a basis.
I relate these stories to my colleagues. I confidently distributed copies of my student’s assessment. My colleagues peruse the assessment piece focussing on the rubric. They question me. I am able to answer each question confidently and feel good about it. A sense of renewal pervades the atmosphere at the team meeting. Suddenly it has all changed. I now have to display my work and share with my colleagues. This was a new experience! This was a foreign experience! The setting of a rubric seemed to have been the issue at hand during the team meeting. It was the same at the workshop.

I feel a rubric should be provided for teachers. My colleagues concur. Questions arise, ‘who do we write the rubric for?’ ‘Maybe the next phase is that some of these rubrics could be developed’. ‘How generic or specific do we make these rubrics’. I answer these questions to the best of my knowledge. They are very similar to the ones that arose at the workshop. Maybe the help of senior teachers could be enlisted to provide guidance and support for graduates hence confidence in their practice.

‘Gaining Confidence’ is an account of the gains achieved by ‘Jane’ since attending the workshop. She reveals the insecurities of teachers prior to collaborating and the gains in confidence of the teachers since attending the workshop. Jane emphasises the personal and professional gains made by teachers leading to the gains experienced in their confidence.
Gaining Confidence

As a teacher my confidence is often challenged. My belief in myself and my abilities, my self assurance and freedom from doubt is challenged by those with whom I work but mostly by my students. My confidence determines my response to the challenges I face. It is weekly recess duty. In the distance I see the Principal making his way toward me. He initially engages in small talk, eventually revealing the reason for his visit. Am I willing and able to present an overview of the MCJ professional development session to staff at a whole staff meeting? A look of surprise crosses my face but I quickly compose myself and agree. The whole staff meeting takes twice per term and consists of all teachers and administrators.

I have gained much confidence since attending the MCJ workshop. I have gained both personally and professionally. Six months ago I would have baulked at the idea of standing in front of an entire staff and speaking. I now begin to think about the most appropriate manner to present the information. Personally I feel more knowledgeable and confident and thus feel secure in sharing information. Professionally my status as a teacher has been enhanced since I have presented on MCJ at our team meetings. I no longer feel nervous and afraid that I will say the wrong thing. The knowledge that I have gained ensures that I will be able to answer questions and any insecurities that once existed have since disappeared.
I was not the only teacher to feel more confident. All the teachers who attended the workshop reported gains from the process of reflection and from seeing each others work. Both graduate and experienced teachers indicated they had gained more confidence in what they were doing with their students. They all strongly supported the collaborative aspect of the MCJ professional development and said 'it makes me feel like I am on the right track and helps with my confidence, I am more or less on the same learning experience as other teachers', 'it confirms things for me'.

This is significant. Teachers’, whose usual existence is a state of loneliness behind a classroom door reporting being confident. Teachers’ personal and professional identities have being enhanced. The impact of this professional development has been two fold. I have gained both personally and professionally. I focus on sharing these gains with the all the staff of Summer High.

In ‘Future Learning’ ‘Jane’ describes the importance of lifelong learning. She reports the opinions of teachers regarding follow-up sessions of the MCJ workshop. Most teachers agreed not enough follow-up was provided in the ‘roll out’ of Curriculum Improvement (Phase 2). Teachers were searching for a way forward after the MCJ workshop. Teachers were searching for guidance to enhance the new knowledge they had acquired.
Lifelong learning is a concept that is often discussed amongst staff. Many teachers at Summer High are engaged in further education. The MCJ professional development taught me that teachers across all education districts in the state are learning more about the way in which assessment tasks are created. The workshop provided an opportunity for teachers young and old to enter the pathway of future learning.

I exploited the opportunity of enhancing my knowledge. I strongly desired the need for the MCJ process to continue until I felt more secure with the Curriculum Improvement (Phase 2). The need for further focus on the implementation of Curriculum Improvement (Phase 2), in the future was apparent. Teachers felt that follow-up sessions of MCJ were not done very well. All learning areas were not given the opportunity to attend follow-up sessions. I was aware that some new staff had attended MCJ whilst others had not. Why was there this lack of consistency? Why could a whole department of teachers not go out at least once a year and attend MCJ sessions? These questions were asked by many teachers at the follow-up session.

It was clear that teachers were at different stages in their understanding of MCJ as well as their self development. There was a need for the implementation of MCJ to be focussed more at an internal or school level. Discussions at the follow-up session on MCJ
revealed that experienced and less experienced teachers needed to continue with group sessions as many teachers continued to feel uncomfortable with setting an assessment task. Follow up MCJ sessions would ensure that all teachers reached a similar level of understanding and would become more consistent in their approach to student achievement.

MCJ has been a positive experience for everyone. All teachers agreed that it was important to focus on the implementation of MCJ and there was a genuine need for ongoing professional development in this regard. Many questions arose at the conclusion of the workshop. Should teachers form their own informal groups to exchange information on assessments? Should teachers meet within their own schools to moderate student’s work? Should teachers canvas the Department of Education to provide follow-up MCJ sessions?

I question myself. ‘Is it within my role to ask these questions? Should the answer to these questions be encompassed in existing policy? These questions however remained unanswered and bring about a sense of frustration. I become frustrated by the extra workload created as a result of MCJ and so do my colleagues. ‘You throw in student portfolios and no end of other innovations it can be stressful’. This for me was but one of the issues that emanated from the workshop.

In ‘Resulting Issues’ Jane describes the frustration of teachers at the extra workload associated with the implementation of MCJ. Jane articulates the
views of the teachers in response to the workload associated with new policy implementation. She mentions the challenges faced by teachers having recently undergone the process of implementation for the New Curriculum Framework and having to undergo MCJ.

**Resulting Issues**

Teacher workload! An issue that is often discussed at all levels of education. There were a number of teachers who complained about the workload associated with MCJ. Fresh in their minds were the memories of the workload that Outcomes Based Education had created. I did not disagree with the discussion on increased workload. I identified with my colleagues. Teachers are always time poor and changes in policy almost always add to our already busy work lives.

I sympathised with the graduate teacher. She was still grappling with Outcomes and was now faced with MCJ. I understood her feelings of frustration and the stress associated with this innovation. We were required to complete a survey at the final MCJ session. I understood the views espoused by some of the experienced teachers particularly Teacher C. Her attendance at professional developments over the years has left her feeling annoyed at yet again being 'spoken to'. 'I do not enjoy being patronised, I do not enjoy wasting time, I can read and do not need to be told what to do'.
A sense of dependency emerges as teachers request exemplars for quick reference. Who would provide these exemplars? Should teachers be using their initiative rather than requesting exemplars? I sense the need for these questions to be addressed but that is not happening right now. I am grappling with the reality of not having ongoing support from the Curriculum Council and so are my colleagues. I feel comforted by the teacher in leadership.

She assures us that the Curriculum Council would be providing Curriculum Guides which would provide us with a sense of direction. However we are faced with the dilemma of there being no definitive framework for the subjects we teach. My discussion with Teacher F, the graduate, was serious. He was not sure who would support him once back at school. I indicated that I would be having a similar conversation with my principal and he was not alone. I left the workshop feeling that I was part of the crowd. I did not feel alone in my thoughts. My thoughts were echoed by my colleagues.

Negative comments arose at the final session of the workshop. Closure required teachers to share their views on the professional development. Comments such as ‘it was too fragmented to allow for reflection and change’ emanated from this session. The huge workload associated with the implementation of the Curriculum Framework was uppermost in our minds. We envisaged the same with the implementation of MCJ. I synthesise the information gained at the MCJ workshop. It is clear to me and my colleagues that our workload has increased due to this innovation, ’MCJ’.
It is important that researchers are open about the analytical process reporting their responses to the story as well (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). Reflexivity in my role as a researcher was acknowledged as I analysed and interpreted text and subsequently reported it. I am aware of my own experiences as an educator and participant at the MCJ professional development during the research process. Narrative accounts were used in an attempt to get others to read and share the participants’ stories. In analysing the interview data it became evident there were recurring regularities in the data. I grouped these and named them according to the phenomena they represented.

Further inductive analysis enabled me to identify further patterns or categories. Each of these conceptual categories, were named according to the phenomena they represented. These were organised into major themes (see Figure 2). Each theme is then presented below with specific examples from the interview. Figure 2 is based on the 2 x 3 grid which provided a conceptual framework for my data collection. This model is modified in an attempt to organise themes which were identified in my data analysis.
Table 3: Emerging Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers</th>
<th>Professional Practice</th>
<th>Professional Well Being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Future Learning</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays the themes as identified by my data analysis. There is strong evidence of these themes across each narrative account. A sub-theme, Resulting Issues was less evident in data analysis. It encompasses the issues teachers faced in the implementation of MCJ for example, the need for ongoing support; dependency on external educational authorities and the negative comments purported by some teachers. Resulting Issues is closely linked to the over-arching themes identified in Table 3. I make use of the themes synthesised in Table 3 to begin my next chapter, Discussion and Findings. The emergent themes are elaborated upon in Chapter 5 with their implications for policy, practice and future research considered.
Chapter 5

Summary of findings and conclusions

The purpose of this study has been to examine teachers’ feelings, experiences and perceptions of a professional learning program and how this professional learning impacts on their professional practice and professional well-being. This chapter begins with a statement of the research questions and is followed by a revision of the conceptual model presented previously. This concluding chapter will therefore present a summary of the study; a summary of the findings and how they relate to the research questions; the significance and implications of the study; the value of the research; and areas for future research.

The research questions guiding this qualitative study are:

(a) How does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional practice? and
(b) How does teachers’ professional learning impact on their professional well-being?

This research was conducted around the professional learning Making Consistent Judgements in the context of the Department of Education in Western Australia, with a focus on how teachers’ perceived this professional learning both personally and professionally. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to gain an insight of teachers’ understanding of Making Consistent Judgements as a
process, in order to understand teachers’ perceptions of their professional practice and professional well-being.

The research has indicated that:

- teachers interviewed were satisfied with the MCJ professional development;
- teachers interviewed were satisfied with what they gained professionally and personally;
- not all teachers interviewed were satisfied with all of the Department of Education Professional Development;

Historically, professional development consists of many providers, formats, underlying philosophies and content (Hill, 2007). The duration of professional development activities ranges from brief ‘one-shot’ workshops or meetings to multiyear endeavours (Little, 1993), with the structure of activities varying, including workshops, conferences, study groups, professional networks or collaborative groups, and peer coaching (Garet et al., 2001). I had expected to find that teachers would be less satisfied with Department of Education professional development than this research has indicated. My own experience as a presenter of professional development indicated that teachers were disinterested in professional development.

More interesting is that the findings fit soundly into the current literature surrounding professional learning, particularly the literature surrounding ‘collaboration’ as a means of support (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1997). Interesting
as well as that despite my expectation that teachers would complain as they often do about professional development, this did not appear to happen.

According to Hargreaves, (1996) professional learning that is imposed often results in resistance, rejection, the selection of segments of learning or the delay to implement until the innovation has been superseded.

Several studies have been conducted over the past several years that have explored the relationship between particular characteristics of professional development and changes in teacher attitudes and practices (Garet et al., 2001). During the interviews, the teachers expressed their opinions about the MCJ professional development. The continuum of these opinions stretched from gaining much on a professional level to little or no gain on a personal level. Others who saw the professional and personal aspects of this professional program as being entwined reported a positive effect on their personal lives as well. All six teachers interviewed acknowledged the good aspects of the professional development and reported gains from this process of reflection and from seeing other teachers’ work. Teachers suggested the professional learning deepened their theoretical understandings about the Curriculum Improvement Program and enabled them to see ‘much best practice’.

In earlier years teacher professional development was dominated by single-session workshops, where teachers would receive instruction in a particular tool, strategy or technique (Little, 1993). However, this is often believed to be a weak form of professional development because it is a ‘fragmented’ approach, with limited duration and lack of connection to a
teacher’s own work (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers interviewed felt MCJ contributed to their professional knowledge and pedagogy. Participants reported overwhelmingly a positive experience of professional development in attending the MCJ. Professional well-being was enhanced throughout the professional development with teachers reporting: “it made me feel good”. Teachers reported the experience to having been ‘brilliant, hands on and meaningful’. Active, engaged, interactive learning is the hallmark of effective, applicable and transferable professional development (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Researchers have emphasized the importance of well-functioning teacher teams for the development of innovative and learning organisations (Kruse & Louis, 1997; Sleegers et al., 1997). Also stressed is the need to pay attention to the development of teachers’ collective engagement and active work in a professional group to improve practice, and to increase teachers’ commitment to complex and demanding work situations (Hargreaves, 1994). Reform efforts in middle schools in the USA to promote collaboration among teachers by introducing interdisciplinary teams at the expense of departments revealed that departmentalisation can lead to fragmentation of both school staff and curriculum, thus impeding communication and collaboration between all teachers.

In the middle schools studied Kruse & Louis, (1997) found that the demands of teacher empowerment within teams may minimise the opportunities that teachers have for reflection and discussion of teacher practice. The implications of professional collaborations are profound. Teachers become interested in what other teachers are doing. Thus schools need to honour
collaboration in all professional interactions, including the practice of sending teachers to conferences in teams of two or more to foster conversations about purposeful applications (Fogarty & Pete, 2006).

The Collegial Self

Collaborative practices have been defined as central to professional development because they further opportunities for teachers to establish networks of relationships through which they may reflectively share their practice, revisit beliefs on teaching and learning and co-construct knowledge (Achinstein, 2002; Chang & Pang, 2006; Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Hargreaves & Dawe, 1998; Little, 1987). All of the six teachers interviewed acknowledged positive aspects of the MCJ professional development with all reflecting on the collaborative nature of the professional development. They found collaborating with colleagues from other schools an important part of developing professionally.

Teacher E strongly supported the collaborative aspect of the MCJ professional development. His words were: “I guess personally it gives you a chance to talk to other teachers and get different ideas and different views and hear from their perspective as to where the direction is headed, where it is going”. The opportunity for collaboration provided by this professional development gave Teacher E a feeling of being ‘on track’ and becoming more confident when he found he was on track.
Professional learning is most likely to succeed when it takes place as close to the teacher’s own working environment as possible, provides opportunities for reflection and feedback and involves a conscious commitment by the teacher (Lovitt & Clarke, 1988). Professional development should be anchored in teachers’ reality, sustained over time, and aimed at creating peer collaboration (Chang & Pang, 2006). The three most experienced teachers, Teachers A, B and C, indicated that MCJ was a vital forum to discuss and talk with other teachers.

Since the introduction of the Outcome Standards Framework, teachers have had little opportunity to collaborate on a District basis. Collaboration was undertaken mostly within the teacher’s school environment. Teacher C reported that getting together in small groups was crucial. According to Teacher C, this was supposed to happen outside of school time but never does hence making MCJ “fantastic and hands on”.

In their national study, Garet et al. (2001) found professional development that involved teachers in these kinds of activities had a greater impact on self-reported teacher knowledge and skills, and self-reported changes to classroom practice, than professional development that did not provide active learning opportunities. Teachers A, B, C and E who were the most experienced of the teachers interviewed reported the professional development was valuable to them in that it provided them with the opportunity to collaborate with teachers from other schools in a relaxed setting and to compare pieces of student’s work
in a non-judgemental way. The interactive nature of the professional development contributed to their enthusiastic approach to MCJ.

The importance of active learning is supported by research that shows teachers are more likely to adopt new practices when they have had opportunities to practice as well as receive feedback (Banilower & Shimkus, 2004; Lieberman, 1996). Up this point of the implementation of the Curriculum Framework, teachers of Year 9 students’ typically worked in isolation. The MCJ activities of collaboration, marking and comparing of students’ assessments was an extremely valuable exercise for these teachers. MCJ was the first formal opportunity which teachers were given to do this.

These findings are echoed in the work of Rosenholtz (1989) who found that isolation and uncertainty are associated with what she calls ‘learning impoverished settings’ where teachers learn little from their colleagues and are not in a strong position to experiment and improve. Lortie (1975) found that ‘individualism’ was pervasive among teachers. Prior to the MCJ professional development there was no opportunity for teachers in this setting to compare and discuss the assessment of students’ work.

It is the teacher’s voice that must be heard to speak throughout the action and report of the action (Day, 1999). When support is visible, available and accessible the rate of success for implementing new initiatives increases. When learners find they can find someone with the time and commitment to talk things through and when there is consistent help, the learner’s efforts become more
deliberate and more focussed (Fogarty & Pete, 2006). Conversations in the staffroom and on the playground enable teachers to discuss with their peers thereby allowing personal reflection on practice. Teacher participants experienced the professional development as being relevant in terms of their professional practice as it provided an opportunity for professional dialogue or ‘professional conversations’ to occur outside of the workplace.

These findings are in keeping with those of Rosenholtz (1989) who emphasizes that collaboration that leads to greater effectiveness in a school involves professional talk and serious discussions of work and its improvements. Teacher E, however, made an observation which impacted on the Curriculum Framework and its implementation. His words were: “I learnt that on the whole the outcomes situation in schools is still very confused. It is difficult to get consensus but it is important that we have a forum to do it, sit down and talk about it”. Prior to MCJ teachers were being left to their own devices when it came to assessing students. MCJ was regarded by teachers as being ‘valuable’. According to Teacher C, “my involvement in the dialogue with teachers from other schools, some very different from Summer High, some very similar, was important to my teaching practice”.

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Adult learners do not want theoretical or hypothetical learning: they want hands-on learning (Knowles et al. 1998; Zemke & Zemke 1981). All the teachers interviewed found that MCJ was relevant to their practice and reported the experience meaningful, relevant and hands-on. MCJ was relevant as it enabled teachers to reflect on the outcome statements and assessment across all contexts. The recently graduated teacher, Teacher D, reported that MCJ enabled her to convert the theory into practice and “get my head around the levels”. It is one thing to say that the focus of professional learning is relevant; it is quite another thing to demonstrate the relevance to each person (Knowles et al. 1998; Zemke & Zemke 1981). Teacher C indicated MCJ helped her in terms of marking of assessments and opened her mind up to the need to go back to the outcome statements as a basis for all assessments.

The drive for the development of knowledge is linked to the issue of professionalism which involves education and practice (Jeeawody, 1997). Optimum effectiveness is gained when education enhances the standard of practice. Alternatively professionalism may suffer if a group of professionals undertaking a professional learning program asks how they will personally benefit from the program (Jeeawody, 1997). Three of the six teachers indicated that they had not gained anything from the professional development on a personal level. The experienced female teacher reported that it has not contributed to her personal development at all.
Personal development gains were reported as being little to none as most teachers saw their professional lives as separate from their personal lives. This is in contrast to the findings of Woods et al (1997) who believe teachers’ do not see their personal lives as being separate to their professional lives. They see teaching as being a part of who a teacher is (1997). Collaborative cultures make allowances for the teacher as a person. According to Nias et al (1989), “teaching is a personal affair, but not a private one; the person is not consumed by the group, but fulfilled through it in a culture of collaboration” (p. 105).

Self interest dominates many professions today (Jeeawody, 1997). Within the context of professional practice professionalism continues to be more about ‘self serving’ the profession than meeting the needs of the clients (Jeeawody, 1997). On the other hand attitudes such as commitment to one’s work and an orientation toward service rather than personal profit are often observed among professionals (Jarvis, 1983). The male teacher in a leadership position, Teacher A, reported gaining more professionally than personally. He felt he could use his involvement in MCJ to motivate the staff in his team and his involvement with MCJ on a higher level would help him professionally in advancing his career. One problem may be that many practitioners are not committed to practice as a self-regulating profession. According to Iverson-Iverson (1981, p. 37) ‘true professionalism is not about being well paid or climbing the hierarchical tree but about controlling one’s own practice and making one’s own decisions’.
Teacher growth does not happen in isolation (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Current professional development seeks to create learning communities where participants engage in meaningful activities collaborating with peers to co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning. Professional development is anchored in teachers’ reality, sustained over time, and aimed at creating peer collaboration (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In this study professional well-being was extended by teachers’ gains in knowledge. During the interviews teachers expressed that they learned much from the professional development. The most common response was “we now know what a Level is”. Teachers A, B, C and E, the four most experienced, reported having learnt much from the process due to its collaborative nature.

For teachers to work collaboratively, an ongoing focus on targeted activities that involves teachers engaging in practice with students and consulting fellow teachers has to occur, (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Desimone, Porter, Caret, Yoon & Birman, 2002). Teacher knowledge has been the focus of extensive research, some of which has concentrated on exploring teachers’ knowledge of self as central to the profession.

Teachers’ decision-making and actions are affected by their knowledge about themselves, their interpretations of who and how they are as teachers, and their experiences as learners (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1994). In my study newly graduated teacher participants were more reluctant to engage fully with this form of professional development as they were reportedly more knowledgeable having recently completed their qualifications. The graduate teacher, Teacher D,
reported not having “learnt anything”. He reported it was a reinforcement of what he knew was supposed to happen. As a graduate it was still fresh in his mind.

Graduate teachers lacked the insight into ‘continuing professional learning’. Continuing professional learning is about preparing professional practitioners for, and supporting them, in their practice (Palmer, Burns & Shulman, 1994). Jarvis (1983) suggests that continuing professional learning should facilitate the development of a professional ideology, and provide practitioners with opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills required for competent practice.

Continual professional learning is the aim of developing professional practitioners who are competent and who can respond to changing needs in the world of practice (Jeeawody, 1997). It is incumbent upon any profession to ensure that its practising members are accountable, responsible and knowledgeable practitioners (Jeeawody, 1997). Analysis of the interview data revealed a group of teachers who were eager to undergo a sustained professional development program and regularly scheduled collaborative time. The experienced teachers reported the professional development to be positive and reiterated the importance of there being more focus in the future on the implementation of the Curriculum Improvement Program Phase 2.

The interviews revealed a desire for ongoing professional development in terms of the process of MCJ. Teacher A, the male teacher leader, reported that
the Department of Education had not done very well with follow up sessions. He felt they had rushed through the professional development sessions without regard for new staff entering the profession. Teacher D, the less experienced teacher, commented on the Department of Education providing MCJ sessions for an entire Learning Area. He felt this should occur at least once a year. Teacher D acknowledged the cost of this but felt it very important in order to keep teachers on track. Teacher F concurred: MCJ needed to be an ongoing process and not an isolated event. It needed to take place at least once a term within each school and on an ongoing basis systemically.

Continuing professional learning is a future-oriented field of practice that is designed to assist professional practitioners face the future (Macara, 1996). An improved knowledge base will lead to the educational development of the individual practitioner, which in turn will lead to professional and personal development, and hence, within the context of professionalism, enhance standards of professional practice (Crotty & Bignell, 1987). Teachers viewed the Department of Education as lacking in not providing this professional development on a regular basis and during school time. Teachers valued the interactions with others in their learning areas and valued the knowledge gained by this collaboration. This was evident when they returned to their schools and continued the process at the school level and within the school district. They were however reluctant to give up their personal time.
The Leading Self

For success and sustainability, effective professional development programs require leadership (Teitel, 2003). Teacher leadership is important to education because principals need teacher-leaders in order to keep a school moving forward (Danielson, 2006). Teacher leadership tends to be collaborative rather than a host of individual initiatives that take place unseen behind closed classroom doors. In my study, the female teacher in a leadership position, Teacher B, indicated she had gained twofold from the MCJ professional development. As a leader she guided the teachers in her department; as a facilitator she developed her professional knowledge across all the learning areas.

Teacher B reported MCJ had developed her professional knowledge in that she has gained knowledge across the whole curriculum, specifically in the subject areas of English and Society and Environment. MCJ had added to her own professional development and made her aware that she was at two different levels. At one level she taught herself and at another level she guided teachers. She reported no gains on a personal level.

Developing teacher-leaders is professional development that impacts on the whole school and not just one classroom (Gemo, Meskel & Rieckhoff, 2003). MCJ enabled teacher leaders to extend themselves in two ways: having the opportunity to train people on how to assess moderate and grade tasks; as well as deliver professional development. Teachers grow into teacher-leaders when their
own professional learning reaches higher levels (Danielson, 2006). When teachers engage in these levels of learning it is often accompanied by teacher collaboration and sharing, especially in a professional development setting (Gemo, Meskel & Rieckhoff, 2003).

Success in developing a whole-school approach relies significantly on outstanding leadership of the school and ‘energetic’ teachers who are committed to ‘innovative’ philosophy (Hargreaves, 1996). Teacher leadership is necessary for sustained and substantial school change (Danielson, 2006). In his study, Kennedy (2008) emphasises a key element of the change process was the nature of the relationship between the facilitator (a teacher educator) and the participants. It was established as a collaborative venture whereby the ‘funds of knowledge’ (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) of both parties was considered of equal value and vital to the professional learning program.

This is in contrast to the findings of this study. Teacher A, a leader at Summer High who was also a facilitator of this professional development, reported being disillusioned by the behaviour of a minority of experienced teachers who attended the professional development. She reported having to deal with many negative teachers. Teachers, who complained, were cynical and questioned their participation in the professional development. Teachers also complained about the workload associated with the implementation of MCJ.

The pressure of teachers to do more work than previously in the same time is called ‘intensification’ (Campbell & Neill, 1994). They discuss the
impact of the National Curriculum and its assessment regime in Britain in relation to enhanced teacher workload. Similarly, teachers in this study concur with the notion of ‘intensification’. Teacher E noted that the workload in setting a task to meet the requirements of Level 4 is difficult and involved much effort. Schools can be more mindful on the demands they place on teachers in terms of additional workload. Teacher E felt the need for much more effort from the Department of Education in terms of ongoing support. He emphasized the need to have follow-up sessions and to continue with the professional development sessions. He also emphasized the importance for the Curriculum Council to lead MCJ.

The Confident yet Reflective Self

Self-confidence encourages employees to be engaged in the processes of learning, to experiment even though this carries the risk of failure, the risk of damaging one’s self-esteem (Holliday, 1994). These findings concur with teachers’ reports of feeling more confident. Confidence within their professional practice enabled a positive effect in their person. As with the other five teachers interviewed, Teacher F reiterated the confidence building that the MCJ process provided for him.

In this study, both experienced and less experienced teachers indicated that they gained more confidence in what they were doing. They both strongly supported the collaborative aspect of the MCJ professional development. Teachers felt more secure and confident when they had the opportunity to share
and arrive at these judgments in collaboration with their colleagues. It is important that the teachers’ experience is positive and become more confident if they are to undertake new learning (Holliday, 1994).

As part of professional development, the transfer, applications, and uses of learning are targeted explicitly. Clear expectations and understanding of the authentic transfer and application of learning are outlined and every session must include time to allow participants to make real-world connections to their everyday work (Fogarty & Pete, 2006). Teachers reported that the MCJ workshop gave them the opportunity to check their own understanding of the levels and to reflect upon phase 2 of the Curriculum Improvement Program. Through reflection, teachers refine their own classroom practice (Danielson, 2006).

Overall, teachers indicated that MCJ provided them with the opportunity to achieve consistency when grading students work; gain consensus when allocating student’s levels in terms of the Outcomes Standards Framework and to obtain comparability across the school Districts. Reflective practice is data driven, making it a valid way to evaluate knowledge and skills (Wagner, 2006). Through the process of reflection teachers identify strengths as well as the weaknesses in their instructional practice.

The professional development sessions provided teachers with an opportunity to reflect upon their practices of assessing their students’ work. They reviewed the consistency in terms of how each piece of work was graded.
In order to reflect one has to collect information and data from multiple sources (Wagner, 2006). If schools are to replace ineffective practices with research based, teacher-tested proven best practices, the results are evident. When student learning is successfully influenced, we know, because the data tells us so.

Professional learning at its best is data driven (Schmoker, 1996). In my study I found that teachers who were placed at a secondary school and who were teachers of Year 9 students were the only teachers who were exposed to the MCJ professional development. Thereafter MCJ took place on an intermittent basis implemented at the school or within the school District. This led to a number of current teachers of Year 9 students attending internal moderation sessions although they had not attended the initial session.

Teachers were therefore at different stages in terms of their understanding of MCJ. This illustrates a lack of consistency in the implementation of MCJ resulting in teachers failing to take ownership of the process. If teachers’ professional learning is limited to remembering and understanding little teacher growth in classroom practice is actually seen, however when teachers apply their learning in their classrooms some improvement is usually noticed (Gemo, Meskel & Rieckhoff, 2003).

The Dependent Self

An issue in relation to dissatisfaction among teachers is the phenomenon of ‘de-professionalisation’ or ‘de-skilling’. Campbell and Neill (1994, p. 159)
describe these terms as relating to the removal of the professional autonomy of
teachers to plan their own curriculum and practice, and putting in its place the
imperative ‘to implement the ideas of others’. Most teachers approached the
current educational reform with an open mind which allows them to evaluate
both the positives and the negatives however interviews revealed a number of
issues which have arisen as a result of the MCJ process. At the forefront was the
setting of a rubric for each assessment in order to meet the requirements of the
Outcomes Standards Framework.

Implicit in the term ‘de-skilling’ is the re-routing of some skills
traditionally carried out by teachers to other adults or organisations (Wood et al.
1997). The findings in this study reveal that ‘de-professionalisation’ or ‘de-
skilling’ of teachers has resulted in a sense of ‘dependency’ among teachers. In
this case, teachers became dependent on the Curriculum Council to provide
guidance and support on an ongoing basis. Interviews revealed teachers’
understanding of the writing of an assessment rubric a major issue. There was an
expectation of support from the Curriculum Council as to the provision of an
assessment rubric as teachers were confused with many aspects in this regard.
The need for the Department of Education to address this issue by providing
further professional development was apparent. Support is an important factor in
maintaining sustained efforts necessary for lasting change. Sustained support
ddictates that there be long term professional learning and guidance provided for
teachers (Fogarty & Pete, 2006).
The potential for teachers either to derive satisfaction or alternatively to be prey to dissatisfaction was evident in this study. Interviews revealed further issues. Consensus on assessment rubrics and teacher knowledge and experience and workload emerged as secondary issues in this study. The interviews gave rise to aspects which stemmed from OBE and had a flow-on effect to MCJ. One aspect was the language of the Outcome Statements. The language of the Outcome Statements was confusing to both experienced and less experienced teachers. Teachers required the Curriculum Council to provide exemplars or samples of assessment tasks as a form of reference. When support is visible, available and accessible the rate of success for implementing new initiatives increases phenomenally (Fogarty & Pete, 2006). Although there was criticism of the Curriculum Council and aspects of the New Curriculum Framework, many teachers were satisfied with the benefits gained.

The Changing Self

The purpose of educational change is to assist schools in achieving their goals more effectively by replacing existing structures, programs and/or practices with better ones (Fullan, 1991). There are different types of curriculum changes with each level of change more difficult to implement. Teacher characteristics such as age and the number of years teaching are expected to influence teacher perceptions. Older and more experienced teachers are expected to be less receptive to change (Marker & Mehlinger, 1992, Dartnow, 2000). The contrary was revealed as the experienced teachers were more enthusiastic to the changes the MCJ professional development brought to them. The teachers attributed this
to the fact that the professional development exposed different approaches to teaching from an outcomes perspective. Adult learners are pragmatic learners. They want to know that what they are learning is going to help them do their job (Guskey, 2000).

Teacher responses to change are influenced by past experiences and current circumstances (Kemmis & Mc Taggart, 1993). This was evident by the varied responses received from experienced and less experienced teachers in response to the MCJ professional development. Teacher C displayed frustration mainly emanating from her attendance of professional development over the years. She did not want to be patronised or ‘spoken to’ or her time wasted by ‘listening to presenters’. More often than not teachers “practice themselves into change” (Guskey, 2000, p. 95). They come to believe in the change when they realize it helps them to do their job more effectively. Once they know that the new practice works, they are willing to give up the old one (Guskey, 2000).

Teachers reported the MCJ professional development contributed to their knowledge and pedagogy and enhanced their understanding of the Curriculum Improvement Program.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions have been drawn from this study:

1) Teachers value time to interact with one another and report gains from reflection and sharing of each others work.
2) Most teachers were satisfied with the MCJ professional development and mainly valued the time in which it gave them to collaborate; Teachers felt the most useful professional development is that which allows them to collaborate.

3) Teacher experience did not make much difference in terms of their views to the professional development but did make a difference in their understanding of the Curriculum Improvement Program;

4) Most teachers are positive to curriculum improvement, however workload and time are significant contributors in forming a barrier to changes;

5) Teachers felt the need for ongoing professional development in terms of the process of MCJ with regularly scheduled collaborations that would bring peers together to discuss, evaluate, compare and plan;

6) Teachers asked for more professional development activities that were coordinated across the district to establish a sense of interconnectedness;

7) Teacher leaders were developed professionally with gains in professional knowledge across the curriculum;
8) A lack of consistency in the implementation of MCJ resulted in teachers being at different stages in their understanding of MCJ;

9) Collaboration and consensus judgements led to teachers feeling more secure and confident and

10) A sense of ‘dependency’ emerged as experienced and graduate teachers required guidance and support on an ongoing basis in terms of the writing of assessments.

**Implications for Future Research**

Based on the current findings recommendations for future research are included.

An area that came out of my study and requires further attention is that of teacher collaboration in government secondary schools. Grounded in the assumption that teacher growth does not happen in isolation, current professional development should seek to create learning communities where participants engage in meaningful activities collaborating with peers to co-construct knowledge about teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

Research literature on effective professional development indicates that teachers who experience collaborative approaches to professional development
involving hands on learning and feedback have stronger beliefs in themselves and their power to change things compared to those who have experienced learning in a supervisory context and have not received feedback (Cordingley, Bell, Rundell & Evans, 2003). Nevertheless, there is still a need for more research that explores the complexities of teacher learning in these redefined professional development contexts (Borko, 2004).

Research is needed to find ways of making school assessment processes collaborative and therefore supportive to teachers. Assessment policies in schools with challenging circumstances like Summer High requires further investigation. Successful schools focus on monitoring student achievement to ensure standards are being met. Students and staff at schools with challenging circumstances will benefit from investigation of ways to bring about conditions for improvement in areas such as student assessment, student achievement and teacher self-efficacy.

Improved student achievement depends in large part on the quality of teachers and teaching; the impact of a high quality teacher has been found to play a larger role in student achievement than any other school based factor (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). However, although there is reasonable consensus on several features of effective professional development (Desimone, 2009), there is still much to learn about optimal structures and content for facilitating large-scale improvements to student achievement and about how professional development programs can be effective when delivered across a range of settings and by a range of providers (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen & Garet, 2008).
More information is needed on teachers as leaders. Additional research involving teachers leading moderation and assessment processes in secondary schools as well as school districts would add to existing research in these areas. Teacher leadership is not necessarily a track to administrative leadership. Teacher leadership stands on its own as a powerful leadership force and schools and school districts would be wise to create professional paths for people to excel as teacher leaders (Kinney, 2008).

Often school districts expect leaders to be curriculum experts and instructional leaders as well as assessment savvy while creating a culture of professional learning for teachers (Vandiver, 2008). Developing teacher leaders is professional development that impacts on the whole school especially when the whole school is committed to professional development and when there are specific structures in place for this collaboration and sharing to occur (Gemo, Meskel & Rieckhoff, 2003).

**Implications for Policy**

The development of policy that would serve to enhance teachers’ ability to make consistent judgements on assessment is desirable. This has implications for further professional development of teachers in the monitoring of assessment. Responses to Curriculum Council initiatives on assessment vary from district to district and from school to school. In most schools the interpretation and implementation of policy is usually the role of the administrative team. Schools
need to guide teachers in this respect by formulating whole school policies on assessment for example assessment policy for middle school and senior school. Assessment policy is likely to provide guidance for all teachers at the school and lead to the development of a culture of improvement.

**Implications for Practice**

The creation of a professional development plan for teachers that would enable them to identify their strengths and weaknesses in instructional practice and give them time to self-reflect would benefit teachers. Structures are to be put in place to ensure that collaboration and sharing occur. Professional learning communities may create the context for teachers’ collective engagement in efforts to improve teachers’ practice (Louis et al, 1996). A willingness to accept feedback and work towards improvement is regarded by Louis and her colleagues as a key characteristic in professional learning communities. Opportunities for teacher collaboration to occur are desirable. The links between effective teacher professional learning and improvement of practice and student learning outcomes are well documented in research literature (Borko, 2004).

**Limitations of Study**

The study is a snapshot of professional development conducted at one school at one point in time. It included six selected teachers. While all teachers were surveyed not all were interviewed. This will limit the data gathered to the perspectives and experiences of MCJ of those teachers only and not to professional development in
general. This study reveals the attitudes and experience of the six selected teachers to the professional development MCJ so the findings cannot be applied to all professional development offered by the Department of Education. It is not a study of teachers' uptake of MCJ but rather their experience of MCJ as a professional development module. What the teachers revealed to me was my best estimate thus emphasizing caution on my part as a researcher.

Since my research a number of changes have occurred in Western Australian schools. Curriculum and assessment are no longer being wholly monitored by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia. The Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority has since been introduced by the Federal Government in a move toward a National Curriculum. Schools reporting on student achievement no longer report in ‘levels’ as these have since been converted into ‘Grades’. A dichotomy exists in the conversion of ‘levels’ to ‘grades’ as the Curriculum Council did not provide descriptors for every level of student achievement.

Final Statement of Findings

The most useful type of professional development for teachers involves teachers interacting with one another. As a result opportunities need to be created for more collaboration. Teachers need time to discuss issues and share success stories. Opportunities to observe colleagues in other classrooms and other schools need to be provided. More team and whole school collaboration time needs to be created for staff. This can be achieved by limiting the time
spent on ‘operational issues’. These can be addressed by whole staff emails or announcements on the school ‘portal’.

Education policy makers and school administration staff need to acknowledge that most teachers are positive to change however huge teacher workload proves a barrier to collaborative initiatives. The challenge of managing student behaviour in a school such as Summer High consumes a large portion of teachers time, leaving teachers drained and devoid of energy or motivation for initiatives regarding curriculum.

Schools that are challenging in nature like Summer High will benefit from additional curriculum support. Experts should be allocated to schools to work with teachers in this regard. This will assist teachers in focussing on their core business of teaching and learning. Professional development to expose teachers to what is considered ‘best practice’ in education should be available to teachers. It is important that the school environment be seen as supportive of teachers to reduce uncertainty. If teachers feel there is a risk of failure they will be reluctant to take on new initiatives or embrace change. The potential for teachers to derive more satisfaction or alternatively to be dissatisfied with an increased workload as a result of professional development merits further investigation.

If schools are to be successful in providing quality education for students the challenge of curriculum change or improvement must be taken on at ‘grass roots’ or classroom level. This will only occur if teachers co-operate. By
acknowledging the professionalism of teachers and providing for professional growth and development the goal of quality and effective education will go a long way to be achieved.

**Epilogue**

Since the inception of this study in 2006 there have been a number of changes on the educational forefront on a macro and micro level. First and foremost has been a name change in 2009. The Department of Education and Training has since become known as the Department of Education as referred to throughout this study. The Curriculum Framework is in its final stages of implementation with the National Curriculum currently in draft phase for implementation in 2011. Directly linked to the Curriculum Framework was the achievement of Outcomes which were assessed and reported in Levels. In 2010 reporting of achievement will be in Grades ‘A to E’.

School Districts have implemented MCJ via a ‘cluster’ or ‘cell’ approach. Making Consistent Judgements of Maths, English, Society and Environment and Science assessments takes place on a regular basis amongst teachers of a particular school district. On a micro level MCJ of assessments takes place in each subject area of Summer High. Teachers meet to set common assessments and once the assessments are complete they meet again to compare marking and grading of students’ work.
In 2010 Summer High has gained access to Lead Teachers to support teaching and learning. Lead Teachers model ‘best practice’ to graduate and to teachers in need of support. Lead Teachers also provide classroom teachers with curriculum support which includes making consistent judgments when grading assessments. Summer High has also resourced Curriculum Leaders to provide ongoing support for classroom teachers to improve on the ‘rigour’ of curriculum.
Appendix 1

Dear Colleague

I am a Masters by Research student at Murdoch University investigating the professional development of teachers. My supervisors and I have discussed exploring teachers’ experiences of the Making Consistent Judgements Professional Development provided by the Department of Education and Training. The purpose of this study is to find out how teachers experienced this professional development and its impact on their personal and professional growth.

The study will include providing a profile of the school as well as reporting on the findings from the interviews conducted with teachers of that school. My supervisors, Associate Professor Helen Wildy (contact number: 9360 7476), Dr Anne Price (contact number: 9360 6632) and I, invite your to participate in this investigation by consenting to be interviewed. The interview will be tape-recorded. All information given during the interview is confidential and names will not be published to ensure anonymity.
My project is due in December 2006 and I will be glad to send you a summary of the findings of the completed project. If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the details on the attached consent form and advise me of a suitable time to contact you.

It is understood if you do no wish to participate at all and should you wish to withdraw your consent at any time it will be without prejudice. My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study will be conducted, or alternatively you may contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 08-9360 6677.

Yours sincerely

Carol Daniels                          Carol.Daniels@det.wa.edu.au
Associate Professor Helen Wildy      H.Wildy@murdoch.edu.au
Dr Anne Price                         A.Price@murdoch.edu.au
Appendix 2

CONSENT FORM

I, ________________________________, have read the information given to me and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, however, I am aware that I may change my mind and withdraw at any time and it will be without prejudice.

I understand that all the information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I agree for this interview to be taped.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published, provided my name or other information which may identify me is not used.

Participant ____________________________________________

Date _________________________________________________

Investigator __________________________________________

Supervisor ___________________________________________

Supervisor’s name ____________________________________

Supervisor (2) _________________________________________

Date _________________________________________________

Supervisor’s name _____________________________________
Appendix 3

Project Title: Teachers’ Learning: Experiences of Professional Learning in a West Australian Government Secondary School.

Dear Colleague

May 2006

I am completing a Masters by Research at Murdoch University and am investigating the professional development of teachers. My supervisors and I have discussed exploring teachers’ experiences of the Making Consistent Judgements Professional Development provided by the Department of Education and Training during term three of 2005. The purpose of this project is to find out how teachers experienced this professional development and its impact on their personal and professional growth.

You can assist me with this study by completing the attached survey. It is anticipated that the time the survey will take to complete will be no more than five minutes. Contained in this survey are questions about your age, gender, education, and other questions which may be seen as personal and private. All information given during the survey is confidential and names or other information that may identify you will not be disclosed.
Participation in this survey is on a voluntary basis and participants will in no way be disadvantaged by completing the survey. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Carol Daniels or my supervisors, Associate Professor Helen Wildy or 9360 7476 and Dr Ann Price on 9360 6632.

My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this research will be conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours sincerely

Carol Daniels

Carol.Daniels@det.wa.edu.au
Project Title: Teachers Learning: Experiences of Professional Learning in a West Australian Government Secondary School.

SURVEY

This survey will take approximately five minutes to complete. Please answer ALL questions.

1. Name ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. What is your age? (tick the appropriate box)

   22-34      35-44      45-54      Over 55

3. Sex: Male    Female

4. Your teaching experience (to the nearest year) ………………………………………

5. In what learning area do you teach? (tick the appropriate box)

   English    Mathematics    Science    Phys Ed    S&E    Technology & Enterprise

6. State your position (e.g. Teacher, HOLA) ………………………………………

7. Did you attend the Making Consistent Judgements professional development held during 2005?

   Yes        No

8. If yes, please indicate your experience of the MCJ professional development in terms of:

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References


