

**TEACHER-INITIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
A CASE STUDY**

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Abstract

This study documents four collaborative professional development initiatives carried out by the author in three different schools over the course of five years. The author looks back upon her experiences, discussing the progression through several levels of readiness--survival, coaching, action research, and reflective self-analysis. She compares and contrasts the successful and less-than-successful experiences with regards to current research in the fields of educational and organizational theory. The author postulates that the content of professional development, the collaborative process, and the context in which professional development takes place are contributing factors to the success or failure of teacher-initiated professional development.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Rationale for the Study

The last half of the twentieth century has been a period of great interest in research concerning teaching and learning. As a result, teachers have been bombarded with often-competing theories which they have been expected to apply to their classroom situations. For example, teachers have been encouraged to allow for Maslow's hierarchy of needs, make use of Skinner's classical conditioning, and plan according to Piaget's stages of development, but, too often, teachers are disappointed with the results. Hunt (1987) states, "Unless theories come from practice, they will not apply to practice" (p. 9). He suggests that developmental psychologists who conduct laboratory research and then expect it to be applicable to the classroom situation are doomed to be frustrated. Teachers attempting to apply these theories are bound to be exasperated as well. And yet, a teacher's competence is measured in part by a his or her ability to apply new theories.

Presently in Alberta there is a strong push to ensure that education dollars are being spent wisely. Schools are required to publicize results of standardized testing, and teachers are regularly evaluated to ensure that they are providing quality education to their students. Minimum standards, in the form of *educational quality indicators*, have been established which can be used to make decisions about teacher retention or promotion. Classrooms are visited by clipboard-carrying evaluators who, in the space of one or

two short visits, assess the teacher's competence in the areas of planning, presentation, interaction with colleagues and students, and assessment of student progress.

Suggesting that teaching can be reduced to a series of checklist items is insulting to professionals. Such indicators reduce teaching to its common denominator (McNeil, 1986) resulting in teacher evaluation being seen either as a threatening situation or as useless bureaucratic red tape. While bureaucratic evaluation may be adequate for decisions regarding whether or not a teacher meets certain minimum standards, it does nothing to assess higher levels of competence or to provide advice to the majority of teachers (Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1985).

Evans (1991) disputes this simplified view of the teaching profession:

We believe that teaching is more intellectually challenging than is generally recognized and that, because the complexity of teaching is underestimated, there is too little assistance provided to teachers to help them observe, think through, and deeply understand their own practice. (p. 11)

Smylie and Conyers (1991) support this notion, insisting that teaching is much more than a mere collection of mechanical, trained behaviors. Rather, they contend, it is an interactive, intellectual, and dynamic activity. Yet, professional development endeavours for teachers generally consist of one or two day workshop sessions which deal with disconnected topics, or with subjects so broad they can hardly be expected to relate directly to anyone's current teaching conditions.

Clearly, Alberta's teacher professional development and

evaluation model must shift to one which deals directly with each teacher's specific situation if these kinds of beliefs about teaching are to be incorporated into practice. Ellefson (1994) makes the point that ". . . it is often forgotten that teachers are reflective, self-directing life-centred learners with idiosyncratic needs and drives functioning in circumstances as unique as each of the students in their classrooms" (p. 26).

Gitlin and Smyth (1989) advocate the use of an "educative" view of teacher evaluation:

teacher evaluation approaches that fit within the framework of an educative model would take into account the relationship between teacher ideology and practice; encourage participants to form dialogical relations which critically assess this relation; and make attempts to shift the dialogue beyond individual teachers so that as many members of the community as possible become actively involved in assessing educational aims and practices. (p. 5)

These same authors suggest that the educative model of teacher evaluation would be more relevant to the teacher and thus result in improved instruction within the school. Additional positive effects of this type of professional development include furthering democratic and egalitarian ideals through teacher empowerment, an increase in educative relationships between teachers, and an improvement of school climate (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991).

The public education sector in Alberta is currently undergoing great change. In addition to greater accountability being expected of the schools, decreased funding has resulted in much less support being available from curriculum leaders in central offices. Decentralization of funding requires that all schools set their own

professional development agendas (within a centralized framework), and allocate their own funds accordingly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to document one teacher's personally-initiated professional development experiences over more than five years and three different teaching situations. Four separate initiatives are described, then compared and contrasted in an attempt to determine positive and negative influences upon professional development.

Through documentation, the factors which facilitate or hinder the implementation of alternate professional activities can be determined. Therefore, the primary research questions of this study are: 1) **What happens when teachers have the opportunity to choose their own professional development processes?** and 2) **What are the factors which hinder or facilitate personalized professional development?**

Design of the Study

Given the broad, open-ended nature of the study questions, I chose a qualitative research method for this study. As a member of the staff of each school, and as one of the initiators of each research project, I undertook the role of an action researcher. McKay (1992) defines action research as "a cyclical process that involves identifying a general idea or problem, gathering related information, developing an action plan, implementing the plan,

evaluating the results, and starting over with a revised idea or problem" (p. 19). Hence, I was not only a participant in the professional development. I also took on the role of advisor, interviewer, and observer.

As an active participant in the process, I was able to react to events as they happened, and to gather qualitative data through observation and informal as well as formal interactions. In essence, I was using the action research model to gather information and draw conclusions about teacher-initiated professional development with the goal of encouraging colleagues to adopt action research as a viable and valuable professional development alternative.

Names of schools and individual staff members have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Limitations of the Study

Change requires a great deal of time, yet the Bishop School-wide project was restricted to the last six months of the 1994-1995 school year. Teachers were informed of their evaluation options in December, 1994, and fourteen of the twenty teachers on staff were required to have a completed evaluation filed in the district office by the end of June, 1995. Lack of time was a strong limitation in this study, as was the need to have an evaluation form to the district office by the end of the school year. Although teachers were given the opportunity to explore alternate avenues of evaluation, the standard district form had to be filled out and signed by an administrator in the end, regardless of the route chosen by the

teacher.

The required evaluation may have expanded the study. It may never be known if individuals volunteered to participate in alternate professional development activities and/or evaluation processes because of genuine interest, because they were being evaluated that school year, or because they wanted to help a new staff member with a project. (I undertook this project during my first year at a new school.)

Three of the four professional development initiatives described in this study involve only two or three participants. One initiative involves an entire school staff. The difference in number of participants may have played a role in the results of the study.

Statement of Value

The opportunity for teachers to give input into the methods employed in their evaluation has the potential to be an empowering process. Most teachers who participated in what became known as a Teaching in Focus group, wrote reflective journal entries to their administrator, developed their own professional portfolio, or took part in a peer consultation process would likely agree that the experience was both stimulating and enlightening. This study will give insight into how school administrators can empower their own staffs through alternate professional development activities, reducing the negative connotations which presently shroud the evaluation process.

Most of the professional development activities included in

this study required time commitments during noon hours or after school, within teacher preparation time, or while student teachers were occupied with the teacher's class. Thus, the process was very cost-effective. Ellefson (1994) suggests, "In a time when the demand on educational institutions to adapt to new conditions far exceeds the resources to meet the demand, there is a need to explore creative and cost-effective alternatives to meet the professional development needs of teachers" (p. 8). This study will provide some insight into alternative evaluation methods which provide more meaningful, cost-effective professional development experiences for teachers.

Chapter Two: Successful Collaborations

As I look back over my teaching career, I am able to see several distinct stages in my own professional development. Each stage builds upon previous experiences and each stage demands a deeper level of reflection and understanding of the art of teaching.

Stage One: Survival

My first permanent job required me to work closely with another teacher in order to set up a new program in a large elementary school. The person hired to collaborate with me in this venture was a fellow classmate from my undergraduate degree.

Nancy and I, both relatively new to teaching, relied on each other a great deal. Our principal freely admitted that he knew little about the new program that was being set up in his school, and he gave a lot of the decision-making power to us. Over the next five years, a strong friendship grew out of that situation and Nancy and I became very much a team. We planned together, proof-read one another's report cards, held joint parent meetings, and continually relied upon one another's professional opinions. Often when one of us came up with an idea, the other would add to it and free wheeling exchanges would result. We were each other's sounding board. If I was sick, Nancy would get something together for my substitute to

do the next day so I would not have to drag myself out of bed and to the school in the evening to plan. I would do the same for her. My students would join hers for storytime so that I could do some individual testing, or provide extra help to a struggling student. Another day, I would reciprocate.

At the time, we viewed this as simply helping each other out. We had no idea that most other teachers were not involved in the same types of relationships. Parents were pleased, our program had a good reputation, we got along well with the other staff members, Nancy and I were happy in our jobs and, best of all, the students were learning! As the years went by, Nancy and I could see how we had moved beyond the "survival stage" as we used our classrooms as places for innovation and experimentation with our students. We went so far as to combine our grade one and two classes and team-teach a thematic, child-centred French Immersion program. We experimented with multilevel groupings, journal-writing, reader's and writer's workshop, and the use of manipulatives and problem-solving to teach mathematics.

Unfortunately, our collaboration came to an abrupt halt when we were transferred to another school where we found ourselves working not only in different grades but also in different buildings. We were devastated. No, we would not be able to work together

anymore, said the director of personnel, but we could still be "pals." We are still pals, but the teamwork, the camaraderie, the encouragement, the most rewarding years of my teaching career to date ended abruptly.

I was then in a school in which I had not chosen to teach. My new principal did not allow me the autonomy that I had taken for granted in my previous position. However, I was determined to do my best to teach the way I believed I should teach. I closed my door and "did my own thing." No one bothered me, and I did not make waves, but I was very lonely.

The following spring I enrolled in a masters' level course at the local university. This is where I met my next collaborator. I walked into class one evening and Tanya was talking to the woman next to her. "Oh, how I miss being in the classroom! I just want to teach art again, but no one will let me!" she lamented. I overheard the conversation and retorted lightheartedly, "You can come and teach my art if you want!" I expected a laugh from Tanya. Instead, she responded, "When shall I be there?" And so it began.

Stage Two: Coaching

The collaboration with Tanya was quite different from that which I had undertaken with Nancy. I was at a very different stage

in my teaching career for I had been teaching the same grade for five and a half years, and felt that I had my program well in hand. I had never been very pleased with my art program, however, and had been hoping to improve that area of my teaching. I was ready for a new challenge.

Tanya informed me that she had been quite serious about her offer to teach my art. She had been an art department head in Ontario when her husband was transferred to Alberta. In part because of Tanya's many years of experience, local school boards considered her too expensive to hire. Tanya was heartbroken that she was no longer allowed to teach.

The graduate course in which we were both enrolled encouraged us to get involved in one another's classrooms and we modeled our collaboration on the coaching techniques advocated by Showers (1985), among others. Tanya would be the "coach" and I would be the "protege." Tanya needed to get back into the classroom; I needed help with art instruction. The main purpose of the collaboration would be for me to improve my skills in one area of teaching art, but Tanya's career would be enhanced as well. The potential was there for a mutually beneficial professional relationship.

We considered developing and presenting a unit on clay to my

grade one students. This was one area of art which had always scared me. My attitude was based on my experience with clay when I was in elementary school--it was messy, and I never ended up with anything that was recognizable anyway. Years later, as a teacher, I had always avoided teaching this unit, rationalizing that six year olds were too young to work with clay, their hand and arm muscles not yet well enough developed. We modeled with playdough instead.

Tanya was appalled by my attitude, but very gently informed me that grade one students certainly could work with clay. In fact, how were they to strengthen their little hands if teachers did not allow them to use those muscles? Tanya also assured me that with a few timely management techniques clay work needn't be a messy endeavor at all. It didn't sound so bad when Tanya described it, so we decided to move ahead.

The collaboration began with Tanya's visit to my school to observe the facilities and to become acquainted with my classroom set-up and routines. Tanya brought with her that day several books on clay and pottery with the instructions to "read these" before our next meeting. I did so, and when we met a week later I had enough background to discuss plans intelligently. We discussed the abilities of grade one students, the make-up of my class, parental support and assistant time, as well as the physical set-up of the

school. We searched through the books Tanya had brought and decided upon projects through which Tanya and I believed my students could learn techniques (at Tanya's insistence) and create a recognizable product (at my insistence). It was easy to tell we were coming at this from two different points of view. We were, however, willing to compromise.

We decided to try to complete the unit in five or six one-hour, weekly lessons. Tanya came to the school after hours and showed me how to prepare the clay. We talked through the lesson to come, and decided that she would present the lesson with me serving as her assistant. This proved to be very effective.

The first one-hour lesson served many purposes, some planned and some unplanned. Firstly, Tanya modeled to me presentation and management techniques while I learned along with the students. I circulated among them, following Tanya's lead, allowing them to discover and experiment with the clay. I found myself parroting Tanya's language with the students.

This first lesson allayed all my fears about working with clay. Tanya was right. My students were not only successful at creating wonderful works of art and learning new techniques, they were also so enthralled with the process that none of them was at all inclined to misbehave. For me, misbehavior is probably the last thing I want

when there is "a visitor" in the classroom.

Prior to this first lesson, I considered Tanya a visitor to my classroom, someone I needed to impress. I obviously could not impress her with my knowledge of art, so I spoke at length to my students about behavioral expectations. I tidied the classroom and shoveled off my desk. At least I could impress her with my organizational skills and perfect classroom management, I thought. During that first lesson, however, a trust relationship began to grow. Tanya obviously knew what she was doing when it came to art and dealing with young children. She also didn't care if my room was messy, and she understood that sometimes classroom management is not perfect because people are not perfect. We quickly learned that we shared similar philosophies about children's learning, both strongly believing that children must be allowed to explore and to make decisions about their work.

The one small problem which arose during our first lesson was that an adult helper in the classroom, likely in an attempt to be useful, continually worked on the students' projects. It was interesting to note that, as soon as she began to "help" them, they would sit back in their chairs with a dismal look on their faces and allow her to change the work they had been so proud of only minutes before. Tanya and I discussed this problem after the class and

decided that something would have to be done. We could not allow someone in the class to stifle the children's creativity. As I was this person's supervisor, it fell on my shoulders to confront the problem. I called the assistant over a few days later and showed her the vast array of pinch pots, coil pots, and medallions the students had created during the first lesson. I pointed out how each child's personality came through in the work and how it was vital that, as adults, we do our very best not to squelch their creativity. During the next lesson, I ensured that she overheard as Tanya and I explained to the class that these were their projects and that we were there only to make sure things ran smoothly. Their projects were their own creations and we would not be touching them. This seemed to be very hard for the teacher assistant, and I often saw her reaching for a child's work and then stopping herself. Though not completely solved, the situation had certainly improved!

Throughout our collaboration, Tanya and I met weekly, each time planning the next week's lesson. We also attended our night class and presented our work to the other graduate students. Support from the administrators at my school was almost non-existent. Even though I had not asked for support from my principal, I had informed him that Tanya was being invited into my classroom as a resource person and I introduced the two of them before we

began our collaboration. That is where his interest ended. Thus, the support from our night class was crucial. Tanya and I would talk things over between ourselves, but the input and questions from others forced us to verbalize the process and the underlying philosophies behind our interactions with each other and with the students. Tanya's husband came into the classroom to videotape the students at work and we showed the tape to the graduate students in our night class. They asked questions which required us to formulate and reiterate our beliefs about children's learning, about teaching art, and about working together.

As the collaboration continued, I learned how to have children create slab jewelry, coil pots, pinch pots, relief sculptures, and three dimensional sculptures. I learned how to prepare the clay, dry it properly, glaze it, and fire it. My students learned all of these processes as well. As the students created their projects I found the time to make one of each project of my own as well. These were all put in a box as examples for future years, along with the unit plan which Tanya and I wrote together, outlining our pottery lessons.

Tanya's energy seemed unlimited and her enthusiasm for teaching art was passed on to me. I, in turn, passed on this enthusiasm to my fellow grade one teachers. My "close the door and do my own thing" policy was weakening. The ECS teachers caught

wind of our projects, and before the year was finished, I found that I, in turn, had mentored four other teachers on staff. The pottery coming out of my school that spring was incredible. I have since moved on to yet another school where I continue to teach this unit each year. Not only did my skills improve as a result of this collaboration, but so did the skills of several other teachers. What more can we ask of a coaching situation?

Stage Three: Action Research

Once again, a university course provided me with a chance to engage in collaboration with another teacher. Rose was working on her masters' degree from another university, but wanted to take some courses here and apply them to her degree. She ended up in the same night class in which I was enrolled, and we agreed to meet for supper at her home, which was close to the university, before class each week. This proved to be very helpful as we ended up as partners in the course.

Whereas Tanya and I were virtually strangers when we began to work together, Rose and I had known each other for several years. We had worked together on the same staff for four years and kept in touch even after I was transferred.

Rose and I discovered that we shared similar dismal stories of

evaluation experiences, and we were encouraged by our professor to experiment with another form of professional development which he felt might prove more affirming and useful. Our professor suggested that we undertake some action research in our own classrooms.

Through action research teachers "aim(s) to improve practice, improve an understanding of the practice, and improve the situation in which practice takes place." (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 165) The process draws together research and practice with the express purpose of helping teachers to become more acutely aware of what is happening within their classrooms and schools. As well, it encourages professionals to go beyond what is happening and consider why such things are happening (Sanger, 1990). Although good teachers constantly assess and reassess their performance and the performance of their students, making changes accordingly, Tripp (1990) suggests that action research is more conscious and deliberate than the day to day action/reaction process used by most teachers. In an action research approach, data is collected and analyzed in a reflective manner. Then, strategic action is taken. This is all done with the help of a trusted, nonjudgmental colleague.

Rose and I elected to go through the process of action research over a period of several weeks in each of our classrooms. We each had areas of our teaching with which we were feeling frustrated,

and we hoped that action research could help us find some answers. Rose would serve as my observer first, collecting data in my classroom as I taught. Next, the roles would be reversed with me serving as observer and Rose as the teacher.

At this stage we decided to use processes similar to those set out by Acheson (1980). First we had a planning conference, during which I suggested that I wanted to study the effectiveness of the management techniques I was using with my group of rambunctious six year olds. Rose and I jointly set up a method of gathering information about the problem. She would watch me teach a reading and writing lesson which required a whole-group lesson and some seatwork. Rose was to mark down each time I made a verbal or nonverbal reprimand to one of my students. She would also scan the room at one-minute intervals and count the number of students who were off-task. Rose visited my classroom later that week. I taught, and she made checkmarks and stars all over a piece of paper. It made me very nervous.

Because Rose and I teach in different schools on opposite sides of the city, it required some special planning to be able to observe one another during school hours. We both had the support of our vice-principals who agreed to cover our classes while we travelled and observed.

The evening after the observation, Rose and I met for a post-observation conference. She presented the data she had collected in my classroom and we attempted to talk about what I could glean from those results. All I could see was stars and checkmarks, each of them yelling out, "You're a lousy teacher! All you do is reprimand! Your students are constantly off-task!" I felt horrible. Rose and I talked it through, and came to the conclusion that it was possible that our collection techniques were inadequate. I had asked her to make judgement calls in order to collect the data. Was a shake of my head or a frown toward a student a reprimand, or was it a method of management? Was a student staring into space off-task, or was he looking at the spelling words on the wall?

I did decide from looking at the data that seatwork was a more effective method of keeping these particular students on-task than was a whole group lesson. The data showed that I reprimanded less students during seatwork than I did during whole group lessons, and that there was less off-task behavior at those times. Apparently my students could not sit still for as long as I expected.

This feedback conference turned into the pre-observation conference for the next round of classroom action. We changed the data collection techniques, and I asked Rose to mark down only reprimands because they seemed more clear cut than did on- or off-

task behavior. We defined reprimand as any verbal or non-verbal cue by the teacher intended to curb a child's actions.

Rose observed my class two more times to collect data, and each time we met later to discuss the findings. Rose asked probing questions, curbing her desire to judge, give suggestions, or tell stories, and forced me to think about my actions and reactions. During each post-observation conference we redefined my "compelling question," and that led to the next pre-observation conference.

Had time permitted, Rose and I would probably have continued the process in my classroom beyond the three cycles. I was not yet satisfied that we had arrived at answers to my question. In fact, we had yet to nail down my question satisfactorily.

This is not to say that the process undergone in my classroom was useless. To the contrary, Rose and I both learned a great deal about the processes of peer consultation and action research. We learned how important it was to focus on a question for which concrete data can be collected, at least when first developing skills of observation and conferencing. We realized the great time commitment required of those involved in action research, and we gained a greater appreciation for the importance of trust in each other. I was nervous having Rose in my classroom, although I had

known her for years and I knew she was not there to make judgements. I can imagine how intimidating it would have been had my observer been a stranger or an evaluator.

The limited time frame under which we operated forced us to cut short our action research in my classroom as we felt that for the purposes of our course we should both have an opportunity to be observer and observed. Once again, Rose and I met for pre-observation conferences, observations, and post-observation conferences, this time using her classroom for these purposes. Because of what we had learned during our previous cycles of action research, we found the process much less frustrating and time-consuming. Rose chose a question which was more straightforward, so data collection was easy. Our previous struggle with probing questions gave me a repertoire from which to draw and Rose and I felt very positive about the action research and the peer consultation processes after using them in her classroom. Rose experienced affirmation in her teaching and, in particular, learned some things about dealing more productively with students during transitions, a management challenge for most teachers.

During the course of our collaboration, there were times when Rose and I might have given up our attempts had we not had the support of our university professor. Each week we could discuss

with him our problems and be assured that the struggle was a normal part of learning the process. Others within the class were also learning the process and it was wonderful to discuss common setbacks and successes with them. Without this kind of support, I would likely have dismissed action research after that first fateful post-observation conference.

Chapter Three: A Less-than-Successful Collaboration

Getting Started

Just as I was finishing my project with Rose in December, 1994, my administrators announced that fourteen of our staff members would be evaluated that school year. My administrators suggested that they would be open to teachers investigating alternative methods of evaluation, suggesting peer supervision as an option. I was excited by this prospect, even though I was not one of the individuals to be evaluated. To me, this meant that my administrators were on the cutting edge of professional development, ready to help teachers reflect upon their practice, effecting change in our school from within.

I also saw in this an opportunity to be involved once again in the process of action research. In discussions with my professor at the university, he and I agreed that the implementation of alternative methods of evaluation within a school staff would make an interesting research project. As a member of the staff, I would be able to undertake some action research, using the process to investigate change in professional development practices within the school. I presented a proposal to my principal, and he agreed that I could begin such a project with the Bishop staff.

Action research, as previously described in Chapter Two, is a method of educational enquiry in which teachers become researchers into their own practices in an attempt to understand more fully their situations and their craft. It stems from a perceived dissatisfaction and is aimed at solving a certain problem or, at the very least, improving the situation for the participant (Fay, 1977). Carr and Kemmis (1986) suggest that this improvement should be evident in three areas: in practice, in the understanding of that practice by its practitioners, and in the situation within which the practice takes place.

The dissatisfaction in this case relates to the evaluation requirement for teachers and support staff in our school district every four years. As I discussed informally their impending evaluations with those to be evaluated, I heard many less-than-favourable comments.

None of the fourteen participants was looking forward to the evaluation and most of them viewed it as an evil to be endured rather than an opportunity for learning or improvement. Lena stated that she did not wish to be evaluated this year because she had just switched grades, and therefore she would not feel comfortable being observed when she was teaching a new curriculum. Helen said, "Evaluations have been so useless in my career . . . I'd prefer to just

have the administrator come and write something up so I can have it over with." Helen also said that she did not intend to teach that grade much longer, so she could see no reason why she should bother to improve her teaching of that grade. Sarah, an early elementary teacher who is well-known in the teaching community for her effective program, surmised that she must not be competent if every four years someone has to come into her classroom to tell her whether or not she is competent. Neena agreed with her, also saying that she had taught her grade for over fifteen years with a great deal of success. What, then, could an evaluation have to offer? Juan complained that his evaluator had never taught the grade Juan teaches and that it had been so long since the administrator had homeroom responsibilities that he questioned the principal's right to judge Juan's performance at all. Scott lamented that our profession keeps us so busy that we have no time to just sit and ponder.

It is obvious that the evaluation policy designed by our school district to "ensure that every teacher has the opportunity to continue to learn and grow as a professional educator" (1990, n.p.) was not seen by these teachers as a positive, helpful process. Perhaps the problem was now more clearly delineated. I now saw my task as having to introduce to the staff some methods of evaluation which might prove more meaningful and useful to them.

Action research and reflection upon my own practice had been such positive experiences for me in the preceding years that I really wanted to involve my colleagues in such experiences as well. I wanted my colleagues to be as enthused about professional development through reflection as I was. Therefore, I was willing to take some initiative and do some organizing to introduce action research groups into Bishop School. It was my hope that others on staff would become interested in the action research process as it is described by Carr and Kemmis (1986):

Those involved in the practice . . . are to be involved in the action research process in all its phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. As an action research project develops, it is expected that a widening circle of those affected by the practice will become involved in the research process (p. 165).

Thus, I set out to involve as many individuals as possible in the action research process--teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, custodians.

David Townsend, known to our staff because he had spoken at our staff retreat just three months before, agreed to meet once more with the entire staff of Bishop to discuss the concepts of action research as well as various alternate methods of professional development. David attended our January, 1995 staff meeting. I described my project, and he gave some background information

about action research, teaching-in-focus groups, portfolios, and peer supervision.

This meeting was not without controversy. The principal allowed David to come to the "professional" part of the staff meeting, after the support staff had already left. However, I had encouraged *all* staff to consider being involved. When I approached Reg about this, he suggested that the support staff were welcome to stay for the second half of the meeting if they were interested in being involved in the project. Darlene, a personal friend and teacher assistant at the school, informed me that the support staff would not likely stay for the second half of the meeting. Staff meetings are all on their own time, and the teacher assistants were not willing to put in any extra time. Apparently the assistants were angry with Reg because he had refused to pay them overtime for helping their classroom teachers with Christmas concerts during the evening hours. Darlene talked a few of the assistants into staying for the staff meeting, encouraging them to get involved in these methods of professional development and also to support me in my project. In the end, however, only one support staff member (Darlene) remained for the entire staff meeting.

The staff meeting visit led to a noon-hour meeting for all interested individuals a week later. In the meantime, I agreed to

place several articles concerning peer supervision and portfolios in the staff room so that others could familiarize themselves with the research in these areas.

Fifteen teachers, two teacher assistants and one administrator attended the noon-hour meeting the following week. David Townsend talked about the portfolios that he had brought to show, and answered questions concerning peer supervision, action research, and a group he started at the university called "teaching-in-focus."

Sanger (1990) speaks of such a group which he calls an "action research support group." According to Sanger, as teachers, we tend to surround ourselves with people and practices which confirm our innermost, deepest attitudes and beliefs about schools, colleagues, parents, students, and curriculum. Sanger holds that every teacher possesses an educational theory, known or unknown. He says, "The problem we face as teachers, teacher trainers, or action research facilitators, is how to disturb these deeper layers of calcified experience in order to enable meaningful deep change to take place and new kinds of structure to develop." (p. 175) This can be traumatic, even career-threatening to teachers, so many teachers would rather avoid having to face their beliefs.

It may be easier for teachers to be content with the

folk/common-sense knowledge categories described by Carr and Kemmis (1983, pp. 41-42). Teachers can continually add to their bag of tricks, thereby assuring themselves that they are indeed developing their professional practice, but they need never question their underlying beliefs. This is reflected in the types of professional development activities which have traditionally been supplied to teachers. Our professional organizations provide us with workshops which give us quick fixes or tricks of the trade. Sessions brag that they will provide the teacher with ideas which can be used in class on Monday morning! Teachers proclaim the practicality of the session they attended. At times, the result of two days of "professional development" may amount to a couple of worksheets which can be photocopied for use the following week. Very seldom does one hear a teacher raving in the staff room about how the workshop she attended at teachers' convention really made her think about what she believes when it comes to children, parents or colleagues, and the practices in her classroom.

Workshops and sessions are regularly evaluated by the teachers who attend them. If a workshop is not "practical" it is unlikely to get a positive recommendation and, therefore, it will probably not be presented again. Planners of conferences and workshops want attenders to be pleased, so they tend to offer the

most practical activities they can find. Accordingly, teachers' bags of tricks grow ever larger, planners and attenders are happy, but little or no change results. Teachers continue to function within their comfort zone.

Oberg (1990) stresses that teachers must go beyond the details of professional practice, the "bag of tricks" or "sharing of ideas" to the meaning of daily incidents as experienced. Smyth (1989) supports this, saying that reflective practice on the part of teachers can lead to personal and professional transformation. Smyth suggests that teachers need to continually ask themselves these consciousness-raising questions: What is it that I do? What does this mean? How did I come to be this way? How might I do things differently? Such questions force professionals to describe their practice, understand the theories upon which their practice is based, place their practice in a broader cultural environment, and adapt their practice to changing situations.

At the first noon hour meeting David talked about the importance of teachers reflecting upon their own practice, citing some of the above research. He talked about portfolios which he brought to show and then asked for questions. Support staff members wanted to know if they could do a portfolio. David encouraged them to complete a portfolio which showed evidence of

the work they do and the value that it has to the school.

Teaching staff were interested in what content needed to be submitted to the board office for the purposes of evaluation. This would include official acknowledgement of what one is doing within the classroom and the school to promote student learning. David stressed that regular conversations with the administrator are vital. He said that administrators should be involved with each evaluation.

David explained the basic premise behind a Teaching-in-Focus (TIF) group. He explained the purpose and the following guidelines: 1) no criticism is allowed, only authentic affirmation; 2) suspend all judgement; 3) talk only about the teaching which is being presented. Other TIF members are not allowed to tell their own stories, thus allowing the presenter time to reflect upon his or her own practice. When these guidelines are adhered to fairly closely the TIF meeting can be an enriching experience for the person whose teaching is "on the line."

As a result of this noon hour meeting it was decided that Bishop should begin a TIF group. I would organize and David would help us out by mediating the group on occasion until we learned the process. LeRoy, the vice principal, agreed to be the first presenter at TIF.

Underway

This noon hour meeting set the school abuzz. I received notes in my mailbox asking for more information and expressing interest. Sarah left me a note which simply stated, "I'm interested in the evaluation model." Celia wrote me, saying, ". . . I would really like to be a part of this! Let me know how I can help."

I began to be involved in conversations in the lunch room, at recess, and after school. Scott was enthused about the opportunity to reflect upon his educational practice, and assured me that he would be involved in the project. Rebekah and Neena each asked me to be on their evaluation team.

Darlene approached me about beginning her professional portfolio, and wanted advice. I suggested that she start by writing down what she believes about kids and teachers and her role as a teacher assistant. This scared her. She had already talked to LeRoy who suggested that she begin her portfolio by writing down all of the seminars and workshops she had attended since beginning work with this district. She was much more willing and felt more comfortable doing that. Perhaps Darlene was showing how most of us prefer to continue within our own comfort level rather than to stretch and question our fundamental belief systems.

Oberg and Underwood would suggest that writing down a

personal professional philosophy is vital: "When commitments and convictions are put into words, they gain an existence of their own, they take on weight and solidity. We can then hold them more firmly. We can share them with others and declare publicly the theory of our practice. We can also distance ourselves from that practice and look critically at it." (1992, p.167) Darlene wrote down her personal philosophy and was very excited about the process. She shared it with other support staff at a later date.

Not all interactions were favourable, however. One day when I walked into the staffroom, Helen was looking through the portfolios which David had left. I asked her what she thought of them. Her response was, "This is nonsense. It's busywork. . . a waste of time." I asked her if there was anything in David's presentation which interested her. She said, yes, reflection. However, that portfolio was simply a teacher's "thoughts and reflections about teaching the letter s." I had the feeling that Helen would not be easily persuaded to develop her own portfolio, and I doubted that I could persuade her to take part in any other aspects of the project either.

That same day, Lizel, Juan, Helen and I sat around the lunch table and tried to figure out the difference between supervision and evaluation. The project which David and I were advocating appeared to be based on supervision and reflection. These professional

activities were not acceptable "evaluations" according to the school board policy manual. Even if our teachers created portfolios, took part in TIF groups, or underwent the action research process with a teaching partner, they would still be required to have a form filled out and submitted to the board office by an administrator before June 30th. Therefore, the work put into peer consultation, portfolios or TIF would be negated by the need for a formal, legislated evaluation. Although alternate methods might prove to result in a more meaningful, authentic assessment, the teachers began to view them as a demand on their time which would not replace the other, less-meaningful dreaded evaluation.

Meanwhile, I was trying to select a good time for our first TIF meeting. I asked those who had expressed an interest to let me know when would be a good time to meet. Several of them suggested Wednesday at noon hour. However, that is when the Concentrating on Writing (COW) group meets. I approached Scott, who is in that group. He said that was a great idea, that we could meet for TIF instead of for COWs. When I mentioned this to Celia, also a member of the COW group, she said she didn't want to give up COWs. Friday afternoon was the most convenient time for me, but the school often clears out right after class on Friday afternoons, and that is when the teachers involved with Odyssey of the Mind meet with their student

groups. I began to be quite frustrated about meeting times, then decided that I must just set a time and go with it. I knew I would never please or accommodate everyone. I talked with LeRoy, the first presenter, and we decided upon Tuesday, February 1st at noon hour for our first TIF presentation. David Townsend would not be able to mediate, so I would take on that job. I wrote the date and time in the daybook for several days, encouraging all interested individuals to attend.

Eight teachers, one student teacher, and LeRoy showed up at the first TIF meeting. Two other teachers sent their regrets. Scott had chess club at noon, and Sarah was off work because of a family illness. Because I was serving as moderator of the TIF meeting, I began by stating the purpose (to allow LeRoy to reflect upon his teaching practice) and reviewing the three vital rules. I reminded all the participants that this was LeRoy's chance to put his teaching "on the line" and that they should be careful to ensure that their remarks were affirming and nonjudgemental. LeRoy began by telling the group that he did not consider TIF to be "putting his teaching on the line" but, rather, the sharing of ideas. Poof! In one sentence LeRoy had reduced this experience to yet another one of those "bag of tricks" workshops which did not require him to reflect.

LeRoy made an excellent presentation about a spelling program

which he had developed several years ago. While teaching in another school, he had collected commonly misspelled words and then developed these into a spelling program which consisted of a weekly story requiring the use of those words. The program had been particularly effective, and LeRoy was very proud of it. He had introduced it to teachers on this staff, and it was presently being used in grade four at Bishop. It seemed to me as if LeRoy presented a project which had already been proven through research and which he was no longer teaching. I felt there was little risk involved on LeRoy's part, and I could not see that much personal change would occur as a result of his presentation.

This is not to say, however, that the endeavour was completely useless. As moderator, I led the discussion toward how a teacher's personality and special talents are evident within the classroom and how they can be motivating factors for students. However, the participants did not have a good chance to ask probing questions, to suspend judgement, nor to see LeRoy reflecting upon his current practice.

That evening, I called Celia to get her reaction to the noon hour session. She was disappointed with the results of the meeting. She had previously taken a university course which dealt with action research and had participated in a TIF group. Celia had asked some

of the higher level, thought-provoking questions during our TIF meeting and consequently got LeRoy discussing how the students began giving input into the weekly spelling stories and how that was particularly motivating to them. We decided that we could not give up so easily and that it would take time for individuals to understand and be able to carry out the process.

The same evening, I received a phone call from Claire. She wanted to know what I thought of the TIF meeting. We agreed that the presentation and the questions asked were very superficial. Claire wanted some assurance that we would begin to delve into more meaningful issues soon. I assured her that this was my goal as well. Apparently some of the teachers who attended the TIF meeting were wondering if TIF would be a waste of time. I could imagine them saying to themselves, "I gave up a lunch hour for this?" I was saying it to myself.

Disillusionment Sets In

At this point, barely a month into my project, I felt that nothing was happening. Articles sat in a file folder on the staffroom coffee table. Though I checked daily, none of them ever seemed to be signed out. Many individuals continued to struggle with the supervision vs. evaluation issue, and many had given up on the

alternative evaluation methods because the district-prescribed form would have to be filled out anyway. Why go to the extra work? Differing views about the purpose and procedure of TIF were apparent, as were various levels of readiness in relation to reflective practice.

I was feeling pulled in all directions. As a participant in action research, hoping to effect change within the school, I felt I had to react to situations and keep track of the progress in all of these areas for 20 teachers, two administrators, and 5 teacher assistants. At the same time, I was to continue to teach my class full-time.

I was also struggling with how to collect data. Should I ask people to fill out a form at staff meeting or TIF group? Several people I talked to were negative about that. Many teachers don't like filling in forms, and that approach would simply take time away from presentations and discussions. Only five weeks into the project and I was discouraged and frazzled! However, I determined to press on.

I stayed after school one day to help Celia pin a quilt. I talked to her about my frustrations and she shared with me some anecdotes. The COW group, of which she was a founding member, had been meeting for over two years. She said that over the years they

had developed their own language and ways of dealing with disagreements between members. Apparently this had caused problems when a new person joined the group. This individual didn't know the protocol, and was offended by the group's way of interacting. This talk with Celia made me realize that I had not given our group enough time to develop its own way of interacting, and that I had not allowed for each individual's own level of readiness. I expected to carry out a TIF group and peer supervision model like that with which I had been involved in my graduate courses. What I failed to acknowledge was that I was not as experienced a leader as was my university professor. Neither were the school staff members all at the same level of inquiry as a room full of graduate students. I resolved to give the project more time.

That week, I met with Sarah and Neena one noon hour to discuss peer consultation. They wanted me to lead them through some collaborative supervision to be used as part of their evaluation. I gave them a quick lesson on the peer supervision process, outlining the basic steps. Sarah said some very interesting things about the evaluation process. She said that she often feels she is not competent, or she must not be competent, since every four years someone must come along and tell her whether or not she is competent. However, when I asked her to come up with something

she would like to work on during peer supervision, she could not pinpoint even one area on which she would like to improve. I left Sarah and Neena stewing about their "compelling question." Sarah's enthusiasm for the project was cut short, however, as her husband was admitted to the hospital with a terminal illness. She would be taking some time off school.

Our monthly staff meeting proved that professional development was not a priority. It was two hours long. We discussed Christmas concerts that were eleven months away! We talked about going on voice mail. We spent at least an hour re-discussing items which were on last week's Faculty Council agenda. However, not one word was mentioned about the professional development projects going on in our school. LeRoy did suggest that a small amount of money would be put into each grade level's budget for professional development expenses. These funds could be used if a teacher could not get funding from the ATA for a workshop, or if a session came up on the spur of the moment. I suggested that this money could also be used for a substitute should a teacher want to spend half a day in another's classroom. My principal agreed to this, saying that all he would need was a brief proposal, in writing, to approve such a request.

I continued to struggle with how to collect data. My

challenging class, special needs meetings, supervision, co-curriculars, and committee work kept me so busy! That, coupled with the fact that my classroom was so far from anyone else's, meant I seldom caught a glimpse of, let alone had time to interact with my colleagues. How could I gather information or observe what they were doing in the way of professional development?

Time was also becoming an issue when I attempted to schedule Teaching In Focus group meetings. I was supposed to present my teaching during a particular week, yet on Monday and Wednesday noon I had a computer inservice. Tuesday noon was occupied by our Valentine's Day Potluck for staff members. A Faculty Council meeting was slotted for Friday noon, and on Thursday I had a dentist appointment at noon hour. Another week gone, and nothing accomplished in the way of professional development!

I was not the only one feeling frustrated at this point. The COW group was beginning to feel pressure as well. Each teacher in the COW group had been assigned an advanced-level practicum student from the local university. The COWs had agreed to use the time when their interns were teaching to develop their own personal professional portfolio. The COWs actually found that instead of preparing for their next day's lessons they were spending their time after school discussing the day's events with their interns. Thus,

they were taking home more work than they had needed to in the past. Their time at school was being swallowed up in planning what should really go into a portfolio. Nola said that she was feeling overwhelmed. Celia felt frustrated in her efforts to set up interview questions to get feedback from her students. Tamara was taking a night class at the university, and was therefore feeling even more rushed for time. As well, in the course of their studies, these teachers decided that our school really needed a handbook on how to use Writer's Workshop. They decided to put one together, thus adding to their already high workload. None of the COWs felt as though they were going to be able to accomplish all they had set out to do. They also felt that their time would be even shorter from that point on because report card season was quickly approaching.

Amidst all this frustration, some good things were happening. They were unplanned, "seize the moment" -type activities. For example, after the Faculty Council meeting on Friday afternoon, I entered the library. There sat Helen looking very confused. She was attempting to figure out a new software package for the PowerMac. She was not having much luck. I had used it once before, so I sat down beside her and walked her through it. We got to talking about how this could be used with division one students, and decided that it would work out best as a centre. Helen suggested that we plan a

joint theme on Fairy Tales, combine our classes for centres in the library, and make use of the new software. I was floored. She had seemed so negative about any talk of collaborative efforts, yet here she was suggesting that the two of us collaborate on a joint unit! Not only would we plan it together, we would team teach it as well! I readily agreed, and we spent the next hour going through her "Fairy Tale" box, pulling out activities which would be appropriate. Things were looking up! I could hardly wait to begin!

The next week I had a conversation with Rebekah. We talked about the importance of knowing the people with whom we work. I said that I felt as though I hardly knew the people with whom I work every day. This was my first year teaching at Bishop. I had hardly made it down to the staff room, and when I did, there were few people there. We had had two staff socials all year, and less than half the staff attended either of those. We discussed how people's pasts, their home situations, and their aspirations affect how they teach, and surmised that we would certainly appreciate each other more if we really knew one another. Rebekah had taken a course at the university which required that she write down her history, her present situation, her aspirations, and her philosophy of teaching. She asked if I would like to read those papers. I readily agreed, suggesting that it would be terrific if we could share information

like this with the whole staff. Rebekah didn't seem to like that idea, and made me promise that I would not mention any of the things in those papers to anyone. I did eventually get to read her stories, and I learned a lot about Rebekah. However, none of the rest of the staff knew her any better.

When it was my turn to present at TIF, David Townsend came to moderate the session. There were eight teachers, one teacher assistant and one student teacher in attendance. I showed a video of myself teaching an introductory reading lesson to my grade one students. David used this opportunity to teach the questioning process, and often stopped the questioning to explain why a specific question was good, or how a question could be reworded to suspend judgement. This seemed to be a good learning experience for those involved, and several staff members indicated that they would like to have David preside over more sessions until we all felt more comfortable with the process. Celia volunteered to be the next presenter at TIF.

By this point, TIF had a fairly strong following. I, of course, had hoped that all staff members would gleefully participate in the action research group, but I forced myself to be realistic. We had an average of ten participants at each session, and that was almost half of the teaching staff. It was my hope that attendance would

grow as people felt more comfortable with the process and grew to see its value.

Other types of "alternative evaluation" were waning. The teachers and administrators had come to the conclusion that it would be extremely difficult to meld action research with our evaluation policy. Therefore, teachers had opted for the mandatory two or three visits by the administrator, and a write-up that they could sign and send in. I decided to focus my attempts on TIF.

I tried to arrange a time for Celia to present at TIF. She wanted to be sure that Nola would be there, and Nola would not meet on Tuesdays. On Monday and Wednesday there were computer meetings scheduled at noon, and Thursday was the day before report cards. Teachers would be frantically photocopying cards and stuffing envelopes. I guessed we wouldn't be meeting that week. We agreed to meet on the Monday after report cards went out.

Six teachers, one student teacher, and one teacher assistant were present at Celia's presentation. Once again, David Townsend presided over the meeting, and used the opportunity to teach the process and to stress questioning techniques. Scott and I agreed that we seemed to go blank when it came to asking questions. I was hesitant to ask the questions I did have because I didn't want to appear stupid in front of my new staff, especially when they were

looking to me for leadership in this area. Others mentioned that they didn't want to do it "wrong."

Nola was disappointed in the turnout at Celia's TIF meeting. She informed me that Lizel did not attend the meeting because it was Celia presenting. Apparently they had had a disagreement in the past and now refused to be on any committees or supervise any co-curricular activities together.

The next day I was involved in a noon-hour conversation in the staff room. Apparently Scott had been talking to a teacher who had headed up a TIF group at another local school. Their TIF group had recently changed its focus from a presentation/reflection format to a discussion session where teachers would bring their concerns and ideas on a predetermined topic to the group. Scott suggested that our group should change its focus as well. I disagreed, stating that the focus would then turn from an affirmation of the effectiveness of one's program to either a gripe session or a guilt-inducing meeting because each one of us is not doing all the wonderful things that others are doing. I agreed that there is nothing wrong with gleaning ideas from others, but at some point teachers need affirmation and they need to come to that realization of their own volition.

There were no volunteers after Celia's TIF session to present

next, so I discussed it with Darlene. Thus far, two teachers and one administrator had presented, so I thought it fitting that a teacher assistant be the next presenter. Darlene declined my offer, then accepted the challenge a few days later when David Townsend approached her. After the decision was made, Darlene was very enthused about presenting. She made a video of her work with a special needs student the very next day, and we set her TIF presentation date for the following week. Her enthusiasm was soon to be squelched.

I wrote the meeting time for Darlene's presentation in the day book for three days previous to the presentation. However, on the morning of Darlene's presentation, as I was reminding "regular" attenders, I was met with a myriad of excuses. Nola said that she thought the meeting had been on Wednesday, because we always meet on Wednesday. (In reality, we had only met on Wednesday once, because when we did, we were criticized by the COWs.) Nola had made other plans for this noon hour. Scott said that if it was any other day he would come, but he had something more pressing to do this lunch hour. Lizel said that she had running club at noon. Claire stated that she had made plans last week for this noon hour. If I wanted her to come, I should have let her know over a week ago. Helen said she had never been informed of the meeting. I told her it

had been in the daybook for three days in a row. Her response was, "Well, I don't read the daybook. I don't like where it's situated in the office, so I haven't signed in since September." All of this transpired in the staff room with Darlene there to hear it. She seemed very dejected. No one was coming to her presentation! It turned out that Celia, LeRoy, David Townsend and I were the only ones planning to attend. Darlene and I decided to postpone the session for two weeks and I took her out for lunch instead. I took the blame for the lack of attendance, assuring Darlene that had I given people more advance notice they would surely have made the time to come.

However, it appears that I had been very naive. I wrote a memo to be placed in everybody's mailbox. I was very tempted to write something to the effect of "For those of you who refuse to read the daybook, the system of communication agreed-upon by this school..." but I resisted. Instead, I wrote a very upbeat, positive memo in the style of a formal invitation: "You are cordially invited to attend the following Teaching in Focus sessions. . ." I went on to list the place and times of the next two TIF presentations. I photocopied it on bright pink paper, and distributed it to all staff. I had no idea that this memo would cause such consternation.

I entered the staff room that afternoon, and Helen approached

me, memo in hand. She informed me that she did not approve of Darlene presenting at TIF: "She's not a teacher. I thought this was a *Teachers In Focus* group." I explained to her that, although Darlene was not a teacher on this staff, she was involved with the education of many of our children, especially a grade four special needs student named Tiffany. I also explained that Darlene was eager to hone her skills and to grow professionally. I argued that Darlene could learn from this experience just as a "teacher" could. Helen had no answer for my arguments, but she still did not agree with Darlene presenting. "It just doesn't sit right," she concluded. I informed her that we would have to agree to disagree on this matter, and that I was still going to encourage Darlene to present. LeRoy and Scott were a part of this conversation as well, and agreed with my arguments. However, Scott believed that I had scheduled two TIF sessions too close together, and that staff members might be inclined to attend only one of them. Helen agreed with Scott's observation and left the staffroom with her memo. I assumed the issue was over. I was wrong.

The next day I was approached by Lena. She stated that "several members of the staff" (I never learned who they were) had approached her wondering why Darlene was being allowed to present at a Teaching in Focus meeting. Apparently it was acceptable for

Darlene to attend the meetings. She had attended every one, and was even working on her portfolio, and no one had uttered a complaint. However, now that Darlene was to be the presenter, suddenly her involvement was being questioned.

I explained my opinion about our school being a community of educators where everyone plays a role in a child's development, but Lena was not to be dissuaded. She was adamant that it was not Darlene's role to give us advice about teaching. I calmly explained that Darlene would not be giving out advice, but rather explaining her role in the education of Tiffany. Who better, I suggested, than Darlene to explain that to the rest of us? Darlene spent half of each day working one-on-one with Tiffany. Lena argued that the homeroom teacher should present Darlene's work with Tiffany. I tried to explain that perhaps Lena and I had different definitions of "teaching," mine being extremely broad. Lena accepted that everyone in a school (and a home) could be a vessel for learning. Therefore, I proclaimed, everyone is a teacher in some way, and anyone (students, custodians, parents, assistants) could present at TIF. Lena would not agree to that. At this point, I got frustrated and emotional, and said that I could not carry on this conversation now because I had to go *teach*. I was extremely frustrated by this time. I had honestly believed that I was simply encouraging Darlene to

challenge herself. However, I felt as though I had caused a rift in the school staff! My enthusiasm for this project had reached an all time low.

Nola's TIF presentation was two days later, and I resigned myself to just getting through the next two sessions. David Townsend was unable to come and moderate the meetings, so that job was left up to me. I was terrified that someone would begin to argue again, so I could not enjoy the experience at all. All went well at Nola's session, however, with nine teachers (including Helen and Lena), one teacher assistant, and the vice principal in attendance. The administrator was called to the telephone five minutes into the presentation, and he never returned. Nola showed a videotape of her classroom, and we did our best to ask probing questions. We had several opportunities to see why stories by non-presenters are not helpful, and how praise silences the presenter. I breathed a sigh of relief when that presentation was over.

Darlene's presentation took place the Thursday before Easter holidays. Again, I was to moderate the meeting. I faced the day with trepidation. I was worried that Helen and Lena would raise a fuss during Darlene's presentation, although neither they nor anyone else had so much as mentioned the disagreement since they first came to me to register their complaints. I had not told Darlene

about the concerns raised by Helen and Lena. What would be the point of that, I reasoned? It would have only served to hurt her feelings and she would probably have decided not to present. I had the feeling that that was exactly what Helen and Lena wanted, and I was not about to let them have their way.

Eight teachers and Darlene were at the meeting. Helen was present, but Lena was not there. Darlene showed the video of her work with Tiffany, and we proceeded to ask her questions. We were getting better at formulating quality questions, and Darlene was forced to reflect upon her practice. It was interesting to note that Helen asked several questions, addressing each one to Tiffany's home-room teacher rather than to Darlene. My efforts to redirect the questions proved fruitless. However, nothing untoward ensued, and the meeting flowed nicely.

Easter holidays came and went and were much appreciated. After the holidays, however, all my attempts to find presenters for TIF ended in failure. Each person I approached expressed an interest, yet declined because of lack of time. Our school staff had agreed to take on a brand new school-wide theme which would require a great deal of work from all of the staff until the end of May. Then, such things as Achievement Tests, outdoor education camp, end-of-the-year fieldtrips, and sports days would occupy the calendar. The

consensus seemed to be that we should disband TIF for the year and reconsider it again in the fall.

During the four-month project, Bishop School had a total of five TIF meetings with between eight and twelve people in attendance each time. Most teachers to be evaluated elected to use the traditional method, although two teachers used journal writing between themselves and an administrator as part of their evaluations. Two members of the COWs group (the two who could use their portfolio toward credit for a master's degree) managed to finish their portfolios, and one teacher assistant started a portfolio. I ended the project feeling very dejected, indeed.

Chapter Four - Why or Why Not Successful? Exploring the Literature

This project is a case study of a specific school at a specific time, yet it is easy to note phenomena in this situation which have been previously documented by authors and researchers in the field of educational and organizational research. The main themes appear to fit into the following three categories, as adapted from Guskey (1986): content, collegiality, and context.

Content

In order for any professional development activity to be successful, that activity must include content which the participants believe will lead to improvement in their students' learning. This content must be research-based, or at least have some formal or informal research evidence behind it (Guskey, 1986).

Not only must the innovation to be explored be viewed as relevant, but also the method with which it will be explored must be regarded as useful, meaningful, and interesting by the individuals who will take part in the professional development. In each of my three successful collaborative efforts, I chose areas of great interest to myself. I perceived a professional need, then set forth to find a suitable solution to that need with the help of other individuals. At Bishop, however, many of the participants were not

agreeing to take part in professional development because of any perceived need on their part. The need for professional development had been imposed upon some of them in the form of an impending evaluation. Others felt impelled to participate in professional development because of research articles distributed through the interschool mail from board office personnel.

Although Oberg and Underwood (1992) would agree that a study of current research is a professional responsibility, they warn against relying too heavily upon another's suggestions, encouraging teachers to trust their own instincts as to what will be useful in their unique teaching situations:

Insights that originate in someone else's theory are often difficult to connect to one's own everyday actions, but new perceptions of one's own situation and one's own place in it can often transform not only the way one grasps one's world but also the way one acts (p.166).

Lieberman (1995) suggests that teachers have either been told that or it has been assumed that other people's (administrators', curriculum specialists', superintendents', university professors') understandings of teaching and learning are superior to their own and that their own knowledge--gleaned from daily work with students, parents, peers, and curriculum--is of much less value. At Bishop School, Sarah personified this belief when she questioned her own competence in light of the fact that every fourth year an

external observer was required to judge her adequate or inadequate.

In order to choose an area in which they would like to grow professionally, teachers must be given the time to seriously reflect upon their present practice. In the fast-paced, hectic school lives of today's teachers, time is a precious commodity, yet, according to Oberg and Underwood (1992), it is only through reflection that teachers can change:

Each teacher's development is unique, affected by his or her history, insights, talents, and desires. To move consciously towards a fuller sense of what it means to be a teacher, this unique human story must be told. In this way, the teacher can voice his or her experience and, through recognition of the place upon which he or she stands, move beyond what is presently known (p. 163).

Because all teachers have different starting points, varying strengths and interests, and myriad goals, it is unreasonable to assume that the same professional development activity will be either useful or of interest to an entire staff. However, it is still widely accepted that staff learning should take place at a series of schoolwide workshops or at a weekend conference. Lieberman (1995) accuses teachers of contradicting themselves:

What everyone appears to want for students--a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others--is for some reason denied to teachers when they are the learners (p. 591).

A first step toward rendering professional development activities more meaningful must be to eradicate the notion that workshops and conferences attended outside the school are important but that real opportunities to learn with and from professional colleagues within the classroom situation are not.

At Bishop School, it was easy to see that this myth was still strongly believed. Although teachers were each given the opportunity of a half-day leave to visit another teacher's classroom, none of them took advantage of the offer. However, several staff members used professional development funds to attend a two-day special education conference several hours drive from town. LeRoy, when asked by Darlene what she should include in her professional portfolio, answered that she should begin with a list of all the workshops and conferences she had attended since beginning at Bishop.

As leader of and participant in the Bishop School project, I provided some articles which explained the importance of personal reflection. David Townsend led two short staff discussions concerning reflection and action research. This got some individuals thinking. However, it is evident that much more education should have been undertaken before I could be confident that the Bishop staff would embrace these new methods of professional

development.

Sparks (1987, in Rohovie, n.d.) makes some helpful suggestions which might have improved the Bishop staff receptiveness to new ideas. He suggests five steps which might ease the transition to a new way of doing things:

- 1) be sure to outline how this change is different from current practice.
- 2) outline how this change will be beneficial to the students.
- 3) allow teachers to share their positive and negative reaction in small groups.
- 4) present the theory and research surrounding the innovation.
- 5) encourage testimonials by teachers who are experienced in using the innovation (p.10).

Sparks suggests that a great deal of time should be allotted to ensuring that teachers see the new practice as worthwhile. If they see its merit, teachers are far more likely to use the innovation. Then, if the teachers are successful at implementing the innovation, they will be more likely to attempt another innovation. As well, those successful individuals can be added to the list of teachers willing to give testimonial to the innovation's value.

According to Saxl (in Asayesh, 1993):

Part of our learning process and our growth process is to look at it and say where do I think I was before, where do I think I am now, in what way has this collective experience contributed to it . . . If you don't have that kind of reflection and self-analysis, then I don't consider it an effective staff development program (p. 25).

Saxl would not be pleased with what we consider to be professional development programs in this district's schools.

Collaboration

Roland Barth (1990), in Improving Schools from Within, compared most teacher interactions with the parallel play seen in most pre-school children. Like children in the sandbox, teachers work diligently in close proximity to one another, but rarely interact or share. Their infrequent interactions manifest themselves mainly when a conflict arises. There is no formal structure in place to share concerns or successes. George and Townsend (1989) have noted the same behavior: "The physical, sociological and organizational arrangement of schools form extremely powerful barriers to the growth of effective collegial teacher relationships" (p. 8). Yet, it is only through collaborative efforts that schools can improve themselves to more effectively meet the needs of students.

Showers (1985) states that we need to strive to "build communities of teachers who continuously engage in the study of their craft" (p. 43). She suggests that school leaders must build in permanent structures to facilitate collegial mentor/protege relationships so that schools can organize themselves for improvement from within. This is, of course, more easily said than

done.

Time seems to be a roadblock to collaboration. Working together requires blocks of time for planning, discussing, and evaluating. During a school day teachers seldom have a spare moment. When teachers are not in their classrooms interacting with students, they are returning phonecalls, writing newsletters, marking, or preparing for future lessons. Time to meet with colleagues is at a premium. Outside constraints, family commitments, and co-curricular activities make meeting outside school hours difficult as well. School districts and administrators who want to encourage collaboration between their teachers must be willing to be more flexible in order to allow the much-needed extra planning time required by collaborative teams.

At Bishop, even those teachers who were sharing a classroom with an intern and were therefore teaching half of the normal teaching load found that they were pressed for time to do all that they wanted to accomplish. Because of their reduced teaching load, these teachers took on extra projects. They agreed to complete a professional portfolio as well as develop a writers' workshop manual. It seems that we teachers constantly take on more and more responsibilities because they are in the best interests of our students. Seldom do we drop an activity in order to make room for

an added responsibility. Thus, our lives become more and more hectic and we burn out.

Teachers have traditionally been assigned a classroom and a class for which they are responsible. They have little or no experience with sharing those responsibilities with others. Joyce and Showers (1988) suggest that the challenge of professional development is to acknowledge, to motivate, and to empower teachers to develop to their own potential. Each teacher has differing potential and skills. This must be accepted before true growth can occur. Evans (1991) states that educators must "assume that there is more than one way to be a good teacher and . . . avoid spending time trying to persuade others to one enlightened view" (p. 12).

When planning for staff development, Joyce and Showers (1988) implore leaders to keep in mind individual levels of growth. They suggest that there are three types of teachers when it comes to participation in professional development. Firstly, ten to twenty percent of teachers could be called "Gourmet Omnivores" (p. 134). These individuals are mature, highly intrinsically-motivated teachers who freely take part in many types of formal, peer-generated, and individual personal growth initiatives in order to better their teaching skills. These people are generally the leaders in school

change and improvement. Perhaps seventy percent of teachers are "Passive Consumers" (p. 135). These teachers are highly influenced by their peer group, and are therefore easily motivated or manipulated by others. They participate mainly in formal professional development activities such as workshops and professional days, yet seldom apply any of the new-found knowledge in their classrooms. "Reticent Consumers" (p. 136) make up the remaining ten percent of the teaching population. Such teachers readily reject--and often openly campaign against--any attempts made at change, viewing professional development as judgement, rather than opportunity for growth. Joyce and Showers state that, although it is difficult to do, a positive climate can sometimes motivate these individuals to participate in growth activities. These authors suggest that collegial groups should include one omnivore, two or three passive consumers, and one reticent consumer. In this way, the omnivore can motivate the other group members. The reticent consumer will have no allies, and will therefore be more likely to "buy into" the professional development activity.

Gehrke and Kay (1984) and Moore (1982) tell us that professional development leaders can encourage teachers to work together, but warn that the relationship must develop naturally

rather than being legislated by an administrator. They write that teachers must desire to work together. They must have mutual respect of and trust for one another. Gehrke and Kay also stress that the working relationship must be informal, interactive, and enduring.

Had I been aware of this research before I began the professional development project at Bishop, I might have been more willing to accept the differences and varied levels of readiness apparent within the Bishop staff. Looking back, it is easy to see that I am what Joyce and Showers would call a "Gourmet Omnivore." I embrace change as a challenge, and seek out opportunities to improve my skills in myriads of areas. I expected that all members of the staff should also be gourmet omnivores. When it became apparent that not all staff members were as enthused about professional development as I was, I became disillusioned and unmotivated myself. I allowed the two or three "Reticent Consumers" to sabotage my project.

Conversely, within my professional development activities with Tanya, Rose, and Nancy, there were no reticent consumers involved. In fact, it might be said that we are all gourmet omnivores. No wonder these experiences were so positive for all involved!

Context

Even if a professional development initiative has a compelling content, success can be limited by an unhealthy context. Leiberman (1995) states,

If reform plans are to be made operational--thus enabling teachers to really change the way they work--then teachers must have opportunities to discuss, think about, try out, and hone new practices. This means that they must be involved in learning about, developing, and using new ideas with their students (p. 593).

Such experimentation can only happen in the right environment. Successful professional development must be nurtured in a context which is supportive and where there is an atmosphere that is open to trying new things (Guskey, 1993). The climate and culture of a school directly affect whether or not a change process will be embraced or rejected. Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that a school which is willing to embrace change is one with a strong sense of community:

Authentic community requires us to do more than pepper our language with the word 'community', label ourselves as a community in our mission statement, and organize teachers into teams and schools into families. It requires us to think community, believe in community, and practice community--to change the basic metaphor for the school itself to community (p. xiii).

It was my observation that Bishop School was lacking in a sense of

community. Although we had an eloquent mission statement professing ourselves to be a community of learners where everyone (parents, teachers, administrators, community members, support staff) plays an important role in the education of our students, this was not demonstrated in our daily activities. For example, when Darlene expressed a desire to present at a TIF meeting, her presentation was met with disapproval by some of the teaching staff members. Darlene was not a "teacher" and therefore should not be allowed to reflect upon her work with one of our students. What does such treatment suggest about the idea of community, of "we're all in this together" at Bishop?

Trust is another element of school climate. In order for a teacher to be able to honor children, state Hord and Boyd (1995), that teacher must be honored, supported and trusted by his or her colleagues. In my collaborations with Nancy, Rose, and Tanya, there was evidence of a high level of trust either fully developed before the collaboration began or developing quickly as the collaboration unfurled. However, at Bishop, there was little trust among some of the participants. Lizel refused to attend Celia's TIF meeting because of a past disagreement. Rebekah declined to share her stories of teaching with other members of the staff, and, in fact, would only share them with me if I promised not to mention them to anyone

else. Scott and I were both hesitant to ask questions in TIF sessions because we did not want to "get it wrong" in front of our peers. Many teachers were reluctant to share at TIF, and, although they stated lack of preparation time as a reason, I cannot help but think that they were reluctant to put their teaching "on the line" in front of their colleagues.

This phenomenon may also speak to the lack of confidence that some teachers seem to have in their own ability. In my experience, teachers have traditionally had very little to say about their own careers. They have been isolated in a classroom with their charges, having very little contact with or affirmation from colleagues or superiors. Thus, they have little feeling of autonomy and are nervous about showing their abilities to others. A positive school climate could be helped along by acknowledging the efforts of individuals and empowering them as professionals (Sergiovanni, 1987).

Ost and Ost (1988) tell us that school climate must support any professional development or the changed behavior will quickly revert to the way it was before any change took place. Lieberman (1995) goes on to say that professional development must become part of the expectations for teachers' roles and form an integral part of the culture of the school. Professional development must no

longer be tacked on to the end of a staff meeting, if time permits, or allocated to two half-days per school year. It must be an ongoing, formative process seen as vital to the success of the school.

Lieberman (1995) writes that processes, practices, and policies must encourage active learning by teachers. Local school district policies made it difficult for teachers at Bishop to participate in self-initiated professional development projects. Fourteen teachers at Bishop were required to be evaluated during the school year in which I tracked the progress of professional development initiatives. This mandatory evaluation process hung over the staff like a cloud. At first, teachers embraced the idea of alternate evaluation methods, but as the process evolved, the staff quickly realized that our system's evaluation policy made it very difficult for teachers to use any alternate methods. A specific format for each evaluation was to be used, and the final product would have to be submitted to the board office before the end of June. This fact severely limited options for teachers, and many elected to have an administrator observe two or three times in their classroom and write up his report, in an attempt to "have it over with."

It appears that those individuals who opted to undergo the traditional, bureaucratic evaluation were simply jumping through

hoops to prove their competence so they could continue to teach in the same way. No change was likely to occur because of the experience. Helen personified this attitude with her statement that she was not planning to teach that grade much longer, so why should she bother to improve her teaching practices? Juan's behavior would not likely change because of his evaluation, either. After all, he viewed his evaluator as someone who had no right to be judging him at all. The administrator had never taught the grade Juan was teaching and, therefore, Juan was not willing to acknowledge that the administrator might have anything relevant to say.

Wise and Darling-Hammond (1985) have little positive to say about traditional teacher evaluation,

In many school districts, teacher evaluation is a perfunctory, routine, bureaucratic requirement that yields no help to teachers and no decision-oriented information to the school district. The process does nothing for teachers except contribute to their weariness and reinforce their skepticism of bureaucratic routine. Isolated from decision making and planning, it does little for administrators except add to their workload (pp. 28-29).

These same authors suggest that bureaucratic evaluations merely monitor the adequacy of teachers' work. The product of a bureaucratic evaluation is a document which is sent to central office and added to a teacher's file.

However, say Wise and Darling-Hammond (1985), true

professional evaluation, wherein teachers develop their own professional development plans, carry them out, and evaluate their effects, can help teachers meet specific concerns about their classroom practice. This in turn leads to the most highly valued reward in teaching--intrinsic satisfaction that comes from that teacher's sense of efficacy. These teachers have a sense that they are contributing to student growth and development (p. 31). A sense of efficacy is the product of a true professional evaluation.

In my collaborations with Rose, Nancy, and Tanya there was a continual opportunity to see the fruits of our efforts. The work we were doing was affecting the learning of the students. We could see that changes in our program were having a positive effect upon students, and that was very satisfying. This feeling of autonomy spurred us on to attempt other innovations, and to encourage others to do the same.

At Bishop, other teachers might have been willing to exert the extra effort for more meaningful professional development if it had been recognized as important. However, that was not the message being given by the school board (with its demand for bureaucratic evaluation) nor by our school administrators. With a formal evaluation looming, teachers could hardly give their priority to trying new innovations. What if an innovation failed in the year

when an administrator would be evaluating? Teachers were not willing to run that risk. Guskey (1986) gives this advice to administrators:

You have to provide opportunities for teachers to share, to work collaboratively, and to be free from oppressive demands that prevent them from experimenting. There has to be some latitude, recognizing that when teachers do something new, things may not go very well at first (p. 12).

Teachers must be afforded the time and opportunity to work together. Their professional development programs must be cooperatively planned and self-evaluated in order to be effective.

Yet another factor affecting school climate is administrative leadership. Although administrators may not be directly involved with the professional development process--professional development often being delegated to a school-based professional development committee, as was the case at Bishop--their support and influence are integral to the success of any professional development initiative. Hord and Boyd (1995) consider the school administrator to be not just a leader, but rather a "leader of leaders" (p. 11), suggesting that it is the administrator's role to orchestrate and facilitate change through professional development, supporting the teacher-leaders who initiate the professional development project.

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) write that an

administrator's leadership style will either support or suppress growth and that the administrator's involvement is positively related to the degree to which teachers are involved with the professional change. Dalellew and Martinez (1988) have shown that the key concepts in staff development are flexibility, participation, and empowerment. They go on to charge administrators with the task of creating a supportive environment which enables teachers to control their own learning.

I believe that LeRoy, the vice principal at Bishop, tried very hard to be supportive of my endeavour by volunteering to present at the first TIF meeting. However, he knew little about the process or the purpose of such a group to begin with. He began the first TIF meeting by contradicting the purpose that I had set out for the meeting although he had never before been involved in the reflective process. In retrospect, it might have been better if Celia or I had been the first presenter because we could have better modeled the desired questions and reflective answer techniques. I could not help but think that LeRoy was trying to be supportive of a staff-initiated project because it was his job, but that he was not necessarily well-versed in the professional development process. This made supporting the endeavour difficult for him.

Merely allowing teachers free reign to develop their own

professional development activities is not enough. At Bishop, the principal did not stand in the way of any innovations. In fact, in one staff meeting, he encouraged staff to try some alternatives to traditional evaluation. However, this is where his support and involvement ended. After his initial backing of the professional development project, Reg stepped back and said no more about it. He attended no TIF sessions, allowed no time during staff meetings for professional development progress reports, nor, to my knowledge, encouraged any of the participants on an individual basis. Not getting in the way is a far cry from fully supporting a project.

Why then, did my initiatives with Rose, Nancy, and Tanya prove successful when the administrators in those situations were no more involved or educated about teacher-initiated professional development? Throughout each of those successful endeavours, I was enrolled in at least one masters-level university course. I was able to discuss successes and failures with other graduate students and with professors who had vast experiences in the area of professional development. In effect, I had surrogate leaders to whom I could look for guidance. Thus, the importance of leadership at the school level was diminished. We must remember, however, that most teachers in our schools cannot count on support from beyond the walls of the schools in which they teach. School-based

leaders with strong backgrounds in the change process are vital in today's schools.

Sagor (1991) reminds us of the most important issues facing those involved in school improvement through professional development:

As powerful a tool as collaborative inquiry appears to be, it will not transform a school in the absence of leadership, collegial respect, and technical and logistical support for the professional work of teachers.

But in an atmosphere of support, trust, and collegiality, collaborative action research has great potential for focusing a school's attention on the correlates of effective schooling. Offering such a tool to school faculties may prove to^{be} one of the most promising actions we can take to improve our schools (p.10).

Teachers want to be recognized, acknowledged, and used for the expertise that they possess. Ensuring that this happens must fall on the shoulders of the school-based administrator. While teachers must be mostly responsible for the content of their professional development, school-based and district administrators must take the responsibility for creating a context in which collaborative initiatives can thrive.

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