Teachers' Stories: Insiders' Perspectives on Their Own Professional Development in Literacy Education

By
Khalida Tanvir Syed

A Thesis
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Department of Curriculum Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Manitoba
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0-612-45158-5

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was twofold: to critically review the professional development literature with respect to literacy education; and, to then hold this review of the literature up against the experiential perspectives of "insiders"—four primary teachers currently engaged in professional development studies in literacy education.

This study grew out of my own professional development needs as a primary teacher in Pakistan. In the study I have explored what it means to be a "professional teacher". I have identified seven conditions necessary for the growth and renewal of teachers, who wish to effectively respond to the complex and rapidly changing needs of today's students.

I interviewed four teachers (two from Canada, one from China, and one from South Korea), who were also M.Ed. students in literacy education, regarding their experiences and "insider" reflections on professional development. I represented each of these stories using the methodology of narrative inquiry.

In spite of the differences in their backgrounds, each of these teachers expressed similar understandings, beliefs, concerns, and hopes with respect to their own professional development in literacy education. There was strong theoretical and moral identification with the conditions I had identified in the research literature. All four of the teachers, however, had little experience with these conditions in practice. Given the contradiction between what is advocated in the literature and what was actually experienced by the teachers, I was left with a series of unanswered questions that I offer to other teachers/researchers for further study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Tanvir-ul-Haq Syed,

who valued education for his children

Chapter One: Introducing the Study

Introduction to "Professional" Development

Ongoing, worldwide, professional development in the field of literacy education is essential if teachers are to effectively respond to the complex and rapidly changing demands of today's society. I am using the term "professional" development because I understand teaching to be a professional enterprise. Professional teachers draw upon specialized knowledge to perform their duties. In the performance of their duties professional teachers hold themselves accountable to the highest possible standard— addressing their students' and their own evolving learning needs. To address these learning needs, teachers must themselves be committed to inquiry: an ongoing, lifelong learning journey. This journey may take an inquiring teacher along untrammeled and unpredictable paths.

Ron Brandt (1993) describes the present-day drive for professionalism as originating in the mid-1980s, when policy makers identified the teacher as the critical factor in students' learning: "the quality of students depends on the quality of instruction, and the quality of instruction depends on their teachers" (p. 234). According to Malcolm Knowles (1980), education must be "a lifelong process of continuing inquiry.... The most important skill of all for both children and adults is learning how to learn; the skills of self-directed inquiry" (p. 41). Not only must professional teachers be lifelong inquirers if they are to meet their own and their students' learning needs, but they must also be seen to be exemplars of active inquiry by their students.

At the outset of this study, I am defining professional literacy teachers as teachers

who participate in self-directed literacy learning and teaching inquiries leading to

improvements in their practice. While I am arguing that teachers must establish their

own professional inquiry agendas, I am not advocating that teachers (or any other

learners) learn best when they learn alone. Rather, based on my own understanding of

learning as a social enterprise and my reading of the literature on professional

development, I would anticipate that where schools foster a democratic, professional

culture, teachers have the potential to grow beyond the expectations they might have set

for themselves as individuals. In *Changing Schools from Within*, Roland Barth (1990)

stresses that "the professional growth of teachers is closely related to relationships within

schools, between teacher and principal, between teacher and teacher" (p. 51).

I also want to acknowledge at the beginning of this study that I appreciate that

teaching and learning—especially in the current, global context—are complex processes.

Darling-Hammond (1993) notes:

> There is a little room in today's society for those who can not manage complexity,
> find and use resources, and continuously learn new technologies, approaches, and
> occupations. In contrast to low skilled work on assembly lines, which was
> designed from above and implemented by means of routine procedures from
> below, tomorrow's work sites will require employees to frame problems, design
> their own tasks, plan, construct, evaluate outcomes, and cooperate in finding
> novel solutions to problems. Increasing social complexity also demands citizens
> who can understand and evaluate multidimensional problems and alternatives and
> who can manage even more demanding social systems. (pp. 753-761)

Darling-Hammond's description points to the ever-changing, complex, and multi-layered

world in which present-day teachers and their students are situated. In such a context it

would seem unfathomable that professional development could take the form of "pre-

packaged" products or training sessions to be dispensed to teachers who were passive recipients.

The Purpose of this Study

My first purpose in this study is to critically analyze the professional development literature with specific attention to literacy teaching and learning. Having done this, I intend to juxtapose my literature analysis with the experiential stories of four international teachers, who are presently engaged in formal professional development studies (an M. Ed. program) in literacy education. My hope is that this research process will lead me to provisional answers to questions about how to encourage and support professional development in literacy education, while at the same time generating new questions about the problems and promise of such professional development.

For the purpose of this study, I have narrowed the focus of my research to professional development in reading education in the early years of schooling. I appreciate that the interrelationships among reading and writing and drawing and spoken language in children's literacy development (Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1984; Tierney and Pearson, 1984; Shannon, 1984) may make it difficult to separate reading from other aspects of literacy. However, given my focus on professional development, I felt it necessary to limit the scope of my discussion of the content of this professional development.

In this study, I am specifically interested in teachers' perceptions of their own professional development needs with respect to both societal expectations and their own

assessments of students' present and future literacy needs. I am also interested in learning about what enhances or interferes with teachers' professional inquiries in literacy education.

Because I am a citizen of Pakistan, I am also interested in teachers' professional development experiences in reading education beyond strictly a Canadian context. I wish to learn about and compare the professional development of two teachers from Manitoba with two teachers from different Asian elementary school settings. Where it is appropriate I will also include my own teacher story.

Personal Background to this Study and Literature Review

"Allah increase my knowledge" (Quran)
"It is what we think we know that prevents us from learning."

(Claude Bernard)

I would like to begin my exploration of professional development by first turning inward, to my own experiences as an early years teacher and teacher educator in Pakistan:

I taught Language Arts in Kindergarten (3 sections) in a private school at Multan, Pakistan for two years. There were 30-35 students in each of my classes. I was feeling very good about the progress the students were making in my Kindergarten: "children's garden" (Froebel, 1974). The children were joyful and energetic, but unaware of the hard realities of life. I felt like a gardener-teacher taking care of these students, nurturing their growth and helping them in their experience of literacy—that is, reading, writing,

listening, speaking, drama, and art, etc. As I saw these children enjoying their learning experiences, my enthusiasm as a teacher grew.

Sadly, I suddenly had to leave my school. My father passed away, and my family members asked me to return to my home city, Bahawalpur, to take over my father's business. I was hesitant to do this because I preferred to be a teacher than a businesswoman. But ten days after my fathers' funeral, I went back to Multan to resign from my duties.

I still remember my last day at the school-"a farewell" during the school assembly time, where students, staff, and the principal prayed together. All of the children were standing in line waiting, with tearful eyes, for their turn to say goodbye. It was so hard for me to say goodbye—"Allah Hafiz." I loved them, they loved me, and they were asking "why do you have to leave?" I told them "I do not want to..."

After a year of handling my family business, I took another teaching position. This time, as a teacher educator in the public sector, I taught in the B. A., B. SC., and B. Ed. programs at the Government College for Women, affiliated with Islamia University Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The first 3-4 years of my teaching were fun and exciting. Later, I felt bored and frustrated because the curriculum and standard exams for my students (not unlike those for early years' children) were the same, year after year.

As a teacher educator, working with inflexible curriculum and assessments, I felt cut-off from professional decision-making. I was looking for something new in my teaching, I did not want to be involved in a routine exercise all of the time. I felt as if I were just part of a big machine and I realized that my enthusiasm and self-esteem were waning. There was an obvious conflict between what I knew about students' learning in

theory and the standardized test-taking practices I was required to participate in. I felt

torn between my need to build upon my students' interests and learning needs and the

prescribed, national curriculum guide and standardized exams. As a teacher, I was

interested in learning more about both the literacy understandings and the literacy

teaching understandings of my own students. I knew that some of my teaching colleagues

shared this interest.

I believe that teaching is a process that involves not only practical application of

theory, but, as well, problematizing theory and theorizing based on reflections on

practice. In his article, "Knowing, Doing, and Talking: The Oxford Years," Jerome S.

Bruner (1990) has three themes that undergird my own theoretical orientation as a

teacher. His first theme is constructivism-knowing is doing. For Bruner, learners are

constantly exploring and reshaping. They can go beyond the given information. For him,

knowledge is never ready-made, either by the mind or the world. Knowledge is created.

Human beings create their own worlds. His second theme is functionalism-knowing is

not only doing, it is doing something. Like the great American pragmatists Dewey and

Mead, Bruner emphasizes that learners learn because their learning allows them to

operate in and on the world. Bruner is interested in not only knowing how children learn

words (and other aspect of language), but also in how children learn to do things with

words. He explores the ways in which children treat language as a problem to be solved,

and the ways in which they make language their own, instead of just acquiring it.

Bruner's third theme is the social context of knowledge construction-knowing is doing

something with someone else. Bruner asserts that "... knowing is not just culture, a

construct like table manners... but knowledge requires a community, as well as a mind

and a world" (pp. 327-342). He argues that while the world "we live in is invented and constructed as symbolic construction, the constructive activities are themselves actually universal properties of mind" (pp. 66-68). He suggests that "thinking, believing, and remembering" are not only names that refer to simple processes for which we need a theory, they are part of the theory and scheme we have constructed to represent human action and interaction. Like Bruner, Boyd H. Bode (1937) also emphasizes the fact that "learning and doing are knit together in an organic relationship" (p.78). Bode considers literacy education as a form of present living and not merely a preparation for future living.

While my college students' experiences with literacy learning—reading, writing, listening, speaking and critical thinking—were already well-established before they entered the college, I felt that they had not learned, when they were children in school, how reading and writing might function as intellectual, social, and artistic tools for enhancing their own self-directed learning. In my own college classes my students were so preoccupied with doing what they had to do to fulfill external curriculum expectations and passing final examinations that these other, arguably more important literacy potentials, were lost.

One day, my principal called me into her office. She informed me that there was an opportunity for me to study abroad because there were several scholarships available for teachers who wished to earn Ph.D.'s in British or American literature. She always treated me like a younger sister or friend, although this information was offered as sincere professional advice. I replied to her that I was not interested because after getting a Ph.D. I would have to work as an administrator, and that I preferred to continue my work as a

teacher. She asked me: "What about your career?" I told her that I wanted to enhance

my knowledge of literacy learning in order to fulfill my students' needs, so that as future

teachers they might in turn fulfill the literacy needs of young children. I informed her

that I felt that at least half of our students were not interested in 1400-1800 Century

English literature. It was not relevant to their own culture, experience, and needs. For

most of my students, English was their third or fourth language. Against their wishes,

they were required to study English classics because this was compulsory for their

degrees. I explained that I felt our curriculum needed to be expanded to include current

literature as well as this limited British canon. As a teacher, I wanted to devise new ways

of exciting my students about their own reading and writing and to explore a wider choice

of literature, including the work of Pakistani writers writing in English.

During these years of college teaching, I felt myself losing touch with the current

professional literature on literacy teaching. There was such a large workload and no time

to keep up with professional reading. Neither were there opportunities to reflect on my

own classroom literacy teaching experiences or to share them with my colleagues. These

were obstacles to my professional growth. Teacher educators Frank Smith (1981) and

Judith Newman (1991) both agree that to be effective teachers—at whatever level of

teaching—we need to continually reflect upon our teaching.

I longed for the opportunity to collaboratively reflect on questions and concerns I

shared with others. Like Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1991), I believe that learning and

understanding are inherently social. I understand my knowledge to develop as my

thinking is externalized through dialogue and interaction with others. I agree with Judith

Newman (1991), that professional teachers are best served when they solve problems in

collaboration with others. As a teacher, I have always worked from the premise that cognition is not "powered by some reservoir of general ability" (Rogoff, p. 203) but, rather, it is acquired as a result of a collaborative process.

Further, as a Muslim, I understand life as a continuous struggle; and, similarly, that education—learning and teaching—is Jehad (or struggle). I willingly chose to undertake further study in this Jehad to increase my knowledge. Islam teaches me to seek knowledge, to think critically, to observe and to explore the world in order to make my journey more meaningful.

Finally, I also chose to leave my teaching responsibilities and to study abroad because I believe that in Pakistan, we are following an externally devised professional development agenda. I feel that this externally devised agenda, established by European and Western authorities (World Bank, IMF, etc.), are inappropriate for Pakistani teachers and their students. As mentioned earlier, I believe that instead of teaching English courses with only British literature—Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and others—native Pakistani writers, writing in English, and writers from other parts of the world, have ideas of importance to the lives of the students I teach.

Laureen Fredman and Dana.L. Fox (1996) argue for an integrated Language Arts curriculum which "brings history and politics into the foreground" (p. 13), opening up ideas to discussion and debate. In reforming literacy education in this way, Graff (1992) believes "we will contribute much more to the development of a democratic society" (p. 38).

I understand literacy as so much more than learning how to read and write. Literacy is also about developing critical and moral understandings. Being literate is

about being aware of the differences between what is false and what is true, what is fair and what is unfair, what is democratic and what is dictatorial, and what is a right and what is a responsibility as a social being. Literacy learning involves learning how to contribute meaningfully to one's family, local community, or larger societal context.

Such a view of literacy also applies to professional teachers, who, I believe, must be given the opportunity to read and write their own inquiry agendas. For me, to learn as a professional is to enter into dialogue and debate with myself and with others and to think collaboratively about what I am doing and who I would like to become.

As a teacher in Pakistan, I was blessed with the support of parents and the larger society as well as the respect and trust of students. In our schools we face different problems from those of Canadian teachers. For example, it is possible in Pakistan to have one hundred or more students in one class with one teacher and no teacher assistants. Poverty is a major problem. There may simply be no classroom, no blackboard and no books available to either the teachers or the students. While students are hard working, there may be few learning resources and little or no opportunity to benefit from the teacher's individual attention, feedback, and encouragement.

Although the education system in Canada differs greatly from that of my home country, Pakistan, I believe there is sufficient common ground in the experiences of teachers (i.e. government curriculum documents, standards exams, brief inservice sessions, etc.) upon which to base my research.

Chapter Two: Reviewing the
Professional Development Literature

Defining Professional Development

I will begin this chapter by elaborating on the definition of "professional development" stated in Chapter One. The *Merriam Webster* dictionary (1986) defines a "professional" as an individual engaged in a learned profession or an occupation requiring a high level of learning and proficiency. The term "development" refers to the process of attempting to achieve or attain intellectual growth through a deliberate program of study. Based on these two definitions, I understand professional development in teacher education to be a continuing process of learning and professional inquiry, leading to an improvement in the quality and proficiency of a teacher's work. A teacher involved in professional development is someone who is routinely involved in intentional professional studies with the intent of developing better ways of supporting and extending students' learning. Professional development would seem to me to be essential; especially, if teachers are to keep abreast of advances and demands in today's rapidly changing educational context.

Before examining the value of professional development, I think it is important to first examine the idea of teaching as a "profession". Historically, teaching has been viewed as an occupation in which teachers were considered transmitters of information that had been generated by others (textbook publishers, provincial/state departments of Education, etc.). In the last half of this century, however, the status and role of the

teacher began to shift. More recently, in many countries, "normal schools" (colleges designed to "train" elementary teachers in practical teaching methods) have given way to university faculties or schools of Education (whose purpose has been to bring together the study of educational theory, research, and practice). In the last few years some faculties of Education have begun to establish an undergraduate degree as a basic entrance requirement. Collectively, these, and other related changes, represent an interest in strengthening the academic background of teachers. The assumption is that with a stronger intellectual grounding, teachers are positioned less as technicians—passing on others' information, and more as professionals—individuals having specialised knowledge of subject disciplines, educational theory, learners, and curriculum and instruction methodologies.

In the research literature, there has been much discussion of teaching as a "profession". Marshall (1980) argues that teaching is very much a profession, given his definition of professions as: prestigious occupations... [that] carry out an essential social service, are founded on systematic knowledge, require lengthy academic and practical training, and generate inservice growth" (p. 12). Labaree (1992) points to the formal knowledge and workplace autonomy exercised by teachers as evidence of two essential elements of professional status. Lainer and Little (1986) agree with Doyle (1986) and Goodlad (1990) that teaching qualifies as a profession by virtue of its identified knowledge base, its emphasis on developing technical skills in teachers, and its commitment to altruism (p. 24). Merton (1982) makes a similar argument. He identifies three human values that he believes are central to a profession: knowing, doing, and helping. Merton explains that knowing involves the personal construction of a systematic

body of theoretically and empirically derived knowledge, which is not easily obtained by the average individual. He suggests that doing refers to the use of this specialised knowledge to solve real problems experienced by people. The third value, helping (or, more specifically, caring), Merton claims, is what compels professionals to place the needs of others above their own.

Consistently, in the research literature, the argument is repeatedly made that theoretical and research knowledge must be integrated with practice. Researchers such a Darling-Hammond, 1993; Kramer, 1991; Lainer and Little, 1986; and Sikula, 1990 all point to the need for ongoing professional development (including professional development inservice days, professional reading, university course work, professional conference participation, etc.) as a means of bringing knowledge and practice together.

Conditions for Effective Professional Development

From my reading of the research literature, I have been able to identify the following six conditions as necessary for effective professional development: (1) teachers' appreciation of the importance of professional development; (2) teachers involvement in determining their own professional development needs and opportunities; (3) active, critical inquiry as a central component of the professional development experience; (4) the sharing of multiple perspectives through professional development experiences; (5) ongoing reflection as a major component of professional development; (6) and a democratic context for professional development. In the case of teachers of

early literacy, I would add a seventh condition: that, teachers also require a comprehensive knowledge base in reading.

Teachers' Appreciation of the Importance of Professional Development

Effective teaching does not just happen. It takes practice and preparation and it involves teachers in a constant exploration of new ideas and innovative techniques. Without adequate content and pedagogical knowledge, it would be impossible for teachers to deal with continual and changing student needs and the constant flow of new curricula. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) maintain that it is important for teachers to posses both a deep understanding of academic disciplines and specific, pedagogical knowledge related to this disciplinary knowledge. Sparks and Hirsh explain that what is critical to professional development is the *teacher's desire* to develop disciplinary expertise and to enhance his or her pedagogical skill.

Rebore (1994), suggests that like other professionals, teachers generally appreciate the need to be open to the advances being made in content knowledge and teaching methods. He suggests, however, that the extremely hectic schedules of most teachers make ongoing, individually directed professional development a challenge. Seldom, Rebore writes, is the teacher's need for in-depth study satisfied through short-term inservice sessions.

In connection with this idea, Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) point out that the teacher's interest in professional development is not limited to his or her acquiring external knowledge but also "self-understanding". Not only are teachers interested in

their professional and intellectual development, but they are also interested in gaining greater insight into their own learning as learners and people. Teachers' interest in professional development is complex. Continually re-experiencing what it means to be learners themselves has the potential to open teachers to problems faced by learners in their classrooms on a daily basis (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992).

Teachers' Involvement in Their Own Professional Development

As I have stated, the research literature offers ample evidence that a teacher's willing involvement in teaching, learning, and inquiry is essential for effective professional development. According to Bowers (1974), teachers are responsible for defining rather then being passive consumers of ready made explanations of *what*, *why* and *how* to teach. After all, as Linda Crafton (1997) notes: "only 5% of traditional professional development ever results in classroom implementation" (p. 4).

Ken Goodman (1986), explains that when professional teachers see themselves as learners, they willingly involve themselves in their own ongoing professional renewal and accept responsibility for "staying informed, developing a sound base knowledge for classroom planning, practice and decision-making" (p. 67). Joan Irvine (1993), a former professor of Education at the University of Manitoba, writes that when teachers' knowledge is valued and they feel supported in their efforts to explore their knowledge, the likelihood increases that they will take responsibility for self- and collaboratively initiated professional studies. When such valuing is in place, she suggests:

> ...teachers can become life-long learners who are self directing both in terms of their practice and their own self-renewal. They see themselves as decision-makers

and problem solvers. At the same time, they value being a member of a professional group, which inquires into the same kind of problems. (p. 15)

Unfortunately, seldom is such valuing in place. Much more often, professional development days are designed exclusively by school and school division authorities (sometimes including chairs of professional development committees, who may lack intimate knowledge of teachers' learning agendas).

Neilson (1991) criticises the perpetuation of this situation, noting that "professional development is still largely considered to be a packaging enterprise, more like a commodity than a way of being, a process of acquiring rather than inquiring" (p. 241). Neilson suggests, instead, that in the educational community, we need a place where teachers' stories can be heard, valued, and shared by other community members: "To do this with others demands that there be a place for teachers to share their stories, which has not been available in the current education system" (p. 240). He argues that telling such stories enables teachers to consciously rethink and review their roles as teachers. Neilson advocates that teachers play an active role in their own professional development by constantly evaluating their teaching practices, by asking who they are, as well as, what they are doing, on a daily basis, alone and together with students and with colleagues and friends

Linda Darling-Hammond (1997), a professor in Education Foundations at Teachers College, Columbia University, and co-director of the National Centre of Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching, observes that the U.S. education system fails to focus on teaching quality and teachers involvement in their professional growth. Her analysis is that

> for most of this century, it was thought that learning could be improved by ever more precise specification of teaching procedures: a more tightly prescribed

curriculum, more teacher proof texts, and more extensive testing and more carefully constrained decision-making. (p. 20)

Darling-Hammond claims that tightly prescribing teaching methods serve to shut down teachers' inquiries into their own professional development. In "Reframing the School Agenda," Darling-Hammond (1993) describes quite a different mission for professional development, she suggests that professional development should not merely be about the delivery of instruction, but rather that it should support teachers in helping students to learn at the highest possible levels. It is no longer enough to cover curriculum, teaching must also enable remarkably diverse learners to "construct their own knowledge and develop their talents in effective and powerful ways" (Darling-Hammond, 1993, p. 75). Joan Irvine supports this idea, suggesting that professional "teachers need to take responsibility for collecting and sharing a different kind of evidence of learning in their classrooms"(p. 11). She argues that teachers' professional development must be viewed as research *with* teachers, rather than handing university research to them to be implemented. Jaggar (1989) agrees:

> Neither teachers nor those they teach change simply by giving them information [recipes], by being told about theory and research or new approaches. Unfortunately, we often equate knowledge with information ...instruction won't improve in our schools if we hold onto the idea that all teachers need is more information and everything will get better. Information is necessary, but it is not a sufficient condition for change. (p. 146)

If teachers willingly participate directly in their own professional learning process, believing that they will benefit from their efforts, chances are that they will assume responsibility for their continued learning. If teachers, on the other hand, are excluded from self and/or peer-initiated inquiry by being rendered passive recipients of pre-packaged solutions, there is far less likelihood that they will implement what they

have learned. Teachers must approach professional development with enthusiasm seeing

it as a means of inspiring their teaching and therefore a way of enhancing their

effectiveness as professional. McNiff (1988) concludes that through their own

involvement in professional learning, teachers learn "to become adventurous and critical

in their thinking, to develop theories and rationalise their practice, and to give reasoned

justification for their public claims to professional knowledge" (p. 234).

Active, Critical Inquiry

Not only is there support in the research literature for the idea that teachers need

to be involved in determining their own professional development needs and

opportunities, but there is also support for the idea that such determinations ought to be

guided by an inquiring stance. Teachers grow as professionals when they ask self-

directed questions and seek solutions to real educational problems that they have posed.

"Teacher inquiry," writes Linda Crafton (1997), "is about teachers generating their own

knowledge about teaching" (p. 4). Kathy Short and Carolyn Burke (1991) agree. They

argue that without inquiry, a sense of purpose and meaning in learning is lost and our

natural inquisitiveness as learners is deadened. Instead of studying topics to gain bits and

pieces of information, we ask our own questions and engage in inquiry. We learn to

search for problems as well as explanations for our problems. We are both problem

posers and problem solvers (p. 55).

Crafton (1997) defines such inquiry, undertaken by teachers, as "teacher

research"— teachers self-critically and "systematically studying their own practice over

time" (p. 5). She writes that the teacher's role as a principal investigator in research is

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not a usual one. Much more typically, she explains, teachers have been expected to

implement the research findings of other (mostly university-based) educators, without

questioning whether or not the findings of this research work for them or for their

students.

Sharing Multiple Perspectives

Sharing what they have learned through their own inquiry/teacher research plays a

central role in teachers' professional growth. Critical to such inquiry is discussion.

Discussion guides interpretations and helps teachers to appreciate perspectives which are

different from their own. Donna Alverman (1991) remarks upon the power of group

discussions to stimulate thinking. She takes a Vygotskian (1962) perspective that

thinking needs to occur first on a social plane before it can be constructed as intrapersonal

knowledge. In social exchanges, Alverman writes, teachers often discover that what they

believe and value may be quite different from what they have assumed or what has been

assumed by their colleagues. Such a discovery is initially discomforting, but ultimately it

leads teachers to broaden both their individual and their collective visions of teaching

(Pinnel, 1994).

Similar to Pinnel (1994), Joyce and Showers (1997) suggest that collaborative

research relationships "break down the isolation and increase the collective strength of

the community of educators who staff the school" (p. 45). Judith Newman (1991) also

emphasises the value of teachers' sharing their inquiries. Newman writes that through

collaborative inquiries teachers feel supported in learning to experiment, to make

mistakes, and to change what they are doing based on the outcomes of their experiments.

They are encouraged to examine and question their own strategies and assumptions as well as the strategies and assumptions of people around them. By working together they are able to discover the various ways in which things...are done. (p. 20)

In *A Paradigm Shift in Staff Development*, Spark and Hirsh (1997) suggest that it is very important to bring all members of the learning community together for collective decision-making and action because professional growth is most effectively generated and sustained through collaborative efforts. Research by Kaser, Kahn and Crawford (1996) highlights the importance of a teacher support system; including, study groups, research dialogue groups, and team teaching. Kaser, Kahn and Crawford agree that teacher researchers benefit from groups of colleagues who meet regularly: to share their ideas, to participate in in-depth and long-term discussions, to offer constructive criticism, and to provide analyses and multiple interpretations of findings. By sharing inquiry experiences, teachers deepen their collective conversations. They draw upon one another's perspectives and, in so doing, they position themselves to take a more critical stance with respect to their own assumptions.

Ongoing Reflection

Teachers need time to reflect on their own situations in relation to what has been collaboratively learned in order to decide how such learning will impact their own practices and future learning. Much attention in the research literature has recently been paid to the role of the "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1982). This concept is not unlike the ideas I have already described in terms of inquiry/teacher research. I have introduced

this new term, however, because I want to highlight the contemplative component of thoughtful, self-critical teaching. My reading has led me to understand that a "reflective practitioner" is someone who not only builds upon his or her tacit knowledge base through active inquiry, but who constantly re-thinks and re-evaluates his or her own values and the impact of his or her practices on others (intentional or otherwise) (see Lieberman, 1994, p. 36). Reflective teachers take time to consider what might work best for them. They personalise what they have learned from their inquiries and integrate this learning into their future teaching decision-making. Reflective practitioners reject the simplistic notion that there are "one-size-fits-all solutions" to educational dilemmas. Self-critical reflection, is of course, difficult and demanding work, but I appreciate that it plays an essential role in preserving the professional autonomy of teachers (Patterson, Snata, Short, and Smith, 1993).

A Democratic Context

A democratic context promotes the truly *professional* development of teachers (Bruce & Showers, 1995). Effective professional development requires an environment in which each voice is heard and valued in decision-making. One loud voice cannot drown out the others. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, professional development programs have often excluded the voices of the teachers themselves. In a democratic context teachers' voices are heard: a safe, non-judgmental environment which values teachers' knowledge allows them to speak honestly to their experience.

Long ago, writing in *Liberalism and Social Action*, John Dewey (1935) explained that the method of democracy is to bring conflicting ideas into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interest than are represented by either of the ideas separately (p. 79). Democracy, means valuing others' perspectives—perspectives which may well be at odds with our own. In *The Double Perspective*, David Bleich (1988) argues that each of us holds perspectives that represent to a large extent the "company we have kept". Depending on this company and our role or particular interest in an issue (for example, whether we are administrators, teachers, parents, students, etc.), contradictory positions may well arise. In a democratic context, however, such differences are valued for their potential to enrich all participants' learning. According to Michael Fullan (1998), we need to value multiple solitudes, multiple points of views, and multiple narratives if we are to genuinely achieve democratic ends.

The function of good democratic inquiry is that it draws new voices into the conversation, and through this process learning communities are established. In "Creative Democracy-The Task Before Us," Fisch (1951) poignantly expresses the idea that the "task of democracy is forever that of the creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and which all contribute." For teachers, a democratic context is a place where everyone has an opportunity to freely speak of his or her experience and to hear others who are doing the same. In a living democracy, teachers participate directly in their own and one another's development as professionals.

A Knowledge Base in Reading

"Literacy is," as Braungner and Lewis explain, "key to success in school and beyond, for effective participation in the workforce, the community, and the body politic. This was true in the past and it will be even more true in the future" (p. 1). While teachers cannot anticipate all of the future literacy needs of their students, if they are even to respond in a relevant manner to the literacy needs of their students in today's increasingly pluralistic and rapidly changing society, they must ground their teaching in the most current knowledge base. The National Council of Teachers of English states this position plainly: "readers learn best when their teachers are knowledgeable about the reading process and the conditions that influence its development" (NCTE, p. 3).

According to Braunger and Lewis (1997):

> Teachers develop their own knowledge about reading through their own formal education, their reading and reflecting on the work of published researchers, and close observation of and reflecting on children reading in their classrooms, their sharing of classroom based insights with each other, and ongoing study of their classrooms in light of new understandings from teachers' and researchers' work. (p. 10)

Professional development in reading education is a complex process. Linda Crafton (1997) argues that "deep" professional learning occurs only when teachers are able to connect their reading and observations of others' work with what they know through their own firsthand inquiry experiences. Braunger and Lewis (1997) agree that as professionals, reading teachers are responsible "for continuously interrogating and revising their practice based on experience and emerging knowledge" (p. 5).

While typically reading has been seen as a language art, the current view is that reading knowledge is essential for teachers working in all curriculum areas. Reading

researchers P. David Pearson and Diane Stephens (1992) take a transdisciplinary view of reading: they expect all teachers—in every subject area—to consider the specific learning demands and needs of readers in their classrooms. The National Council of Teachers of English has compiled a brief synthesis of core understandings of reading that ought to form the knowledge base of all teachers:

- reading is an act of language; it is always about meaning and communication;

- reading is a construction of meaning from text; it is an active, cognitive, social, cultural, and affective process;

- making sense of print involves the use of four language cue systems-- graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic;

- while readers vary in their use of reading strategies and cues, the proficient reading process is the same for all readers;

- environments rich in literacy experience, resources, and models facilitate reading development;

- background knowledge and prior experience shape a reader's comprehension (NCTE, p. 4).

Concluding Comments

My review of the professional development literature--specifically as it relates to primary teachers with responsibilities for reading education--suggests that teachers professional development is enhanced when teachers: appreciate the importance of ongoing personal and professional learning; are involved in determining the directions of such professional development; engage in active, critical inquiry; share and learn from

diverse perspectives; reflect deeply on their learning; participate in a democratic context in which everyone's voice is heard and respected; and, have opportunities to develop understandings of the current research base in reading, through vicarious and firsthand experiences.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

According to Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (1988), narrative inquiry is not only a "phenomenon," it is also a "methodology". As a phenomenon, narrative inquiry is the structured quality of the experience to be studied. The methodology is the storying process engaged in by the narrative researcher. Edward C. Short (1991) writes that "people by nature lead storied lives... while narrative researchers describe such lives, collect stories of them and write narratives of experience" (p. 121). In this study, narrative inquiry, storytelling, is the vehicle I will use to represent my research findings.

Participants

In Chapter One I began with my own teacher story. In this study I share four teachers' stories. I have purposefully selected the four participants according to two criteria. Firstly, each of the participants is or has been a primary teacher, with at least several years teaching experience in their local school systems. Secondly, all four are enrolled in graduate, university studies in literacy education. I chose participants who are graduate students in literacy education because I assumed that their decision to pursue advanced studies demonstrated a deliberate intent to pursue professional development education.

Two of the study participants are international graduate students: one is from Korea, the other is from China. The other two participants are Canadian teachers from Manitoba. I chose the two Canadian, primary teachers because I wished to learn about

the professional development experiences of literacy teachers in a very different educational system from the one I had experienced in my home country of Pakistan. I chose the two Asian, primary teachers because I assumed that there would be similarities between the education systems of these two countries and the education system in my country.

The interviews enabled me to discover if the assumptions I had made about participant selection were correct. Regardless of these assumptions, however, the interviews afforded me the opportunity to learn about the attitudes, beliefs, understandings and professional practices of these four teachers (Creswell, 1994).

The Interviews

I conducted two audiotaped interviews with each of the participants. The interviews were one-on-one sessions. Each of the interviews was approximately one hour in length. All interviews were held in a comfortable location arranged by mutual agreement. In the interviews I drew from the questions I discuss below.

In the first interview, I attempted to create a friendly environment and I encouraged honest communication—because narrative inquiry is a believing game. I began the interview with "grand tour" questions such as: "Tell me about your experiences of teaching and professional development." "Have you had the same kinds of experiences I have had?" "How are your experiences of teaching and professional different from mine?"

The second set of interviews focused specifically on the participants' perceptions of their professional development experiences in reading education. Here, I wanted the participants to draw upon their perceptions of: their students' present and future literacy

needs; current societal demands with respect to literacy; their own learning needs with respect to the knowledge base in reading education; and, the conditions which had enhanced or interfered with collaborative professional inquiries and collegial dialogue. The second interviews also began with an opportunity for participants to reread and respond to the narrative I had created. I also used this second interview to clarify content from the first interview.

During all of the interviews, field notes were taken of body language I had observed, episodes in the interview when questions and requests for clarification arose, etc. Immediately after each interview, I transcribed the audiotapes.

Instruments and Tools

An audiocassette player and field notes were used during the interview process. The audio cassette player recorded oral communications. Body language, personal notes, clarification issues and any interruptions were recorded in my field notes.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Audiotaped interview conversations and field notes were transformed into stories. According to Connelly & Clandinin (cited in Short, 1988), "narrative inquiry in the social sciences is a form of empirical narrative in which empirical data is central to the work" (p. 145). The purpose of transforming this data into narrative form is to benefit from the power of fictional writing. Carol Williams (1995) suggests that "fiction helps us make connections between ourselves and others, between reality and possibility. Those of us who love to read do so with a sense of pleasure and power" (p. 2). Fiction helps us to

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travel quickly through time, and it makes visible the commonalities among different cultures and systems. This is not to say, however, that my research data was imaginative data—data without an empirical basis. Rather, by creating a narrative—in the multiple voices of the storytellers—I hoped to reveal in more depth what had really happened to them and what they really believe. The point of narrative inquiry is to evoke a fuller, more textured, sense of "truth" than would be possible in a single-voiced, expository text told from my perspective, as researcher.

Interview data was interpreted in a qualitative manner: I probed backgrounds and meanings behind beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Creswell, 1994). This approach is consistent with the research literature on narrative inquiry (Creswell, 1994; Frenkel & Wallen, 1999: Clandinin & Connelly, 1988b). Principally, it involves the collection of data in the forms of words—retelling the story, attempting to understand how participants interpret the meaning of their experiences, and critically analysing the issues that this data raises.

In telling the story itself, Morrow (1997) suggests that a "well-structured story has a setting (a beginning, time, place and introduction), theme (the main character's problems or goal), plot episodes (a series of events in which the main character attempts to solve the problem) and an ending" (p. 135). Narrative inquiry involves not only collecting data, but also representing this data in a way that preserves the integrity of the teller's experience and of his or her storying about this experience.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I was not a distanced observer. Rather, I attempted to position myself as a co-learner, trying to grow and gain insight from my study participants'

experiences of teaching and learning and professional development. Long ago, John Dewey (1938) asserted that "[t]he aim of education is growth" through experience (p. 13).

In Chapter One, I shared my own autobiographical narrative. In this narrative I disclosed my teaching and professional development experiences and the beliefs and values underlying my understanding of my own experience. I did this because during the interview sessions, I had shared my own experiences with my study participants. Dewey (1944) wrote that sharing, in such a manner, is a way for us to get outside of our own life stories and to view them as others might. The four study participants and I were involved in a process of telling and listening, noting similarities and differences, retelling, and further reflecting on our stories. The text I have created is as Barnieh (1989) names it a "plurivocal" story. This text offers a place in which five voices meet in conversation with one another. It is my hope that in reading these stories, as a reader, that you will feel compelled to tell your own story, alongside the ones represented here.

From our story sharing interviews, I learned of similarities and differences in teachers' experiences and when these differences were a consequence of a different educational context.

The stories told are insiders' stories—stories of teaching, ongoing learning and professional development, filtered through teachers' own conceptual lenses. No one speaks for the teachers.

Chapter Four: Insiders' Stories

Meet the Cast of Characters

In *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*, Edmund C. Short (1991) wrote that in learning

about teachers and teaching "we need an understanding of people with a narrative of life

experiences" (p. 124): What do primary teachers from different national backgrounds,

have to say, themselves, about their experiences as teachers and what they have

experienced by way of professional development in reading education?

I began this study with my own teacher story in Chapter One. In this fourth

chapter, I present the perceptions, experiences, and stories of four other primary teachers:

Anna and Jay from Canada; Hao-Ying from China; and, Sujung from South Korea.

Canadian Teachers' Perspectives

Anna's Story

Anna has a permanent professional certificate, classification 5 from the

Department of Education and Training in Manitoba, Canada. She has several years of

teaching experience in an elementary school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has a Bachelor

of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Manitoba.

Anna is also presently enrolled as a part-time graduate student at the University of

Manitoba in the Faculty of Education, specializing in literacy education. She is a

graduate student because she believes that involving herself in formal studies, with other

teachers, will enhance her knowledge of literacy teaching as a professional teacher.

Anna also actively participates in local professional development workshops and in services offered by her school division and local professional organizations. She describes herself as being continually involved in her own personal and professional growth. Here is Anna's story:

A professional teacher is someone who is knowledgeable about the area that she works in. A professional is capable of making her own decisions. Being a professional teacher brings a certain autonomy to the work I do. I recognize that the decisions I make as a teacher affect other people.

I don't think that teachers are allowed as much professional independence as I think they once had in Canada. In Manitoba, with the flurry of new curriculum guides being passed down to us from the Department of Education and Training, there is less and less autonomy. There is certainly less and less decision-making to be done by individual teachers about what they teach the children in their classrooms.

The most significant thing I have done as far as my own professional development has been to return to university to work on my Master's degree in literacy education. I didn't go back to university because I wanted a Master's degree. I am already a class 5 teacher which means I have five years of university education. When I complete my Master's degree, I will be a class 6 teacher, and I will receive a slight increment in my pay. But, if I was doing this for the money, I would be far better off [financially speaking] buying an RRSP. The government isn't terribly supportive of teachers going back to university. In fact, they would like to change how teachers in the province are

paid and how they receive increments. Working toward an advanced educational degree won't necessarily count as much in the future as it does now.

In Manitoba, teachers are given 10 professional development days per year. This means that for 10 school days each year I am not responsible for teaching. For four or five of these 10 days, however, I am required to meet with parents for parent-teacher interviews. Only a few of the 10 days are actually available to me for professional development.

By professional development I mean inviting someone--a guest speaker--to the school who we want to hear as a staff or sitting down with colleagues discussing some aspect of our teaching. I don't consider parent-teacher interviews professional development. Although these are very important days, they are not really a part of my professional development. My school division sometimes plans a program for us for a few days-a-year, but I don't know that I have ever learned much from these sessions.

I think professional development needs to be planned more locally, at the school level. We have a new principal at my school this year. He's set-up some committees within the school to look at the "big picture" of where we're headed as a school, so that we can do some more long-range professional development planning. I think there are teachers in my school who need a lot of support with understanding literacy learning and teaching. Even common place ideas, such as conducting reading and writing workshops (that have been discussed in professional books and articles for a long time now), haven't found their way into many of the classrooms in my school. I think it would be helpful to us as a school if we could plan professional development days for our school, rather than running off in different directions to workshops being put on at other schools.

Earlier I mentioned that I felt a lot of professionalism has been taken away from teachers by new curriculum directives from the government. In Manitoba, we've moved to "results-based, performance outcomes and standards" so as teachers we are being told specifically what to teach and where children are "supposed to be". There are two sides to this issue. Certainly there are teachers who are comforted by being told what they are supposed to do. And, while I appreciate some direction, I think curriculum guides should be exactly that—guides, they shouldn't be the law. What I do as a teacher has to be based on in-depth knowledge of the children I am teaching. The children in the class change every year. I couldn't possibly run the same program year after year. I understand curriculum to be an inquiry process: my job is to help children to appreciate what they already know and help them discover what they want to know next. I need to understand where they are coming from and their questions are important to me.

When curriculum documents are just guides, this gives me the room I need to choose what concepts and processes will build upon where the children are. When curricula are mandated by the government, then I am legally obligated to make sure that every single item identified in print is dealt with in my classroom. This doesn't leave me with much time to deal with children's questions. As far as I'm concerned, children can only construct new understandings from what they already know. I think curriculum documents have to have enough latitude to accommodate the wide range of children's experience and thinking. The new, mandated curriculum documents coming out of the Department of Education and Training are much more specific and much more restrictive than they used to be. I would like to see them far more open-ended about where children might end up.

The brand new English Language Arts curriculum emphasizes targeting specific outcomes and assessing children in terms of external standards. This document puts me at odds with what I know about children's literacy learning and development. I know from my own experience and from my professional reading that children vary in their development as readers, depending to a large extent on the reading experiences they have had at home. It doesn't make sense to me that experts outside of my classroom could set an expectation of where the children *should* be at the end of Grade 1. These outcomes and standards aren't realistic for some students and they would be simple for others.

I am very fortunate. I have had very supportive school administrators who have respected my decision-making as a teacher. I have been in the same school since I began teaching. In the seven years that I've been teaching, I've had four different school administrators. Generally, I think most administrators in my school division would support a teacher's decisions if she could back up why she was doing what she was doing. In my school I feel that I have freedom to make the decisions I think are best for the children in my class. I am sure there are some schools where there is less freedom for teachers to make these decisions. I don't think you can mandate teaching methods. Teachers are individuals. Teachers are interacting with all these different children, how can you say your going to teach exactly the same for every child?

Public understanding of literacy learning doesn't always take this diversity into account. I think most parents expect that in Grade 1 a child will learn to read. They don't have the understanding that children read to learn: in my class the children don't just learn how to read, what we read has to have meaning for them in terms of what we are trying to do and what we are trying to learn about. Reading isn't just a skill. Reading has to be

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purposeful for the children. I think parents and even teachers in my school expect that in Grade 1 children will learn to look at the words on the page and decode them. I expect more than this. Children come to school with lots of experience with print. I try to build on this experience.

This can all be so confusing for parents. A lot of the parents of the children I teach, for example, initially don't believe that when a child reads a book from memory that this has to do with real reading. And yet, these familiar books are so important to children's reading development. This is how many of them take that next step into reading independently. The parents of the children coming into my Grade 1 classrooms have mostly thought that a child is reading if you can give that child a book he or she has never seen before and he or she is able to correctly say all of the words written on the page. Seldom would parents' definition of reading include that the child has understood everything he or she has read. Just being able to say the words aloud is usually considered evidence of being able to read. I do a lot throughout the year to change the parents' thinking about what reading is.

What makes this even more difficult for parents is that there are so many mixed messages. Parents are constantly being bombarded with what I think is misinformation from people who are just out to "make a buck". I get upset when I hear an advertisement on the radio or the television for some new phonics game. The latest one I've heard begins with talk about children who are not very good readers and who are not doing well in school. The sales pitch is that if parents would only buy this phonics games, which is such a fun way to learn to read, they are guaranteed to raise their child's reading

performance by at least a grade level in the next term. If this game is so effective, why aren't we using it in schools?

Not too long ago there was a letter in the newspaper, written by somebody who went on about how teachers haven't been teaching children to read anymore because the they have turned away from the idea of phonics (learning the relationships between letters and sounds). Certainly there is a need for children to learn phonics, but it is only one aspect of what children need to know to become readers. Letters like this one make learning to read sound as if it is a simple, step-by-step process. The implication is that as a teacher all you would have to do is follow a guidebook to help you take children through a set of graded phonics readers and that if you did this all of the children would be reading in no time, without any problems. Based on my own experience and what I have learned from reading the research, I know this just isn't reality.

There are no easy solutions to helping parents to deal with these conflicting ideas. Last year I had a parent volunteer regularly in my classroom, we had lots and lots of talks about reading. At the beginning, he was pretty mystified by what I was doing; it was so different from what he had experienced himself in school. But over time he began to understand a lot more because he could see for himself how the children were learning. If he hadn't been in the room I don't think he would have understood nearly as well what I was doing and why.

It is not just the media and the parents' own schooling experiences that make it difficult to understand what is happening by way of reading instruction today. In the profession itself we are headed down paths that seem to going in opposite directions. In education, we seem to jump from one bandwagon to another, without fully exploring the

underlying principles of what is being advocated. Right now what is in vogue is a "balanced approach" to reading instruction. What this means is that teachers are to teach the skills of reading (decoding, recognition of high frequency vocabulary, etc.) on the one hand, while at other times involving the children in authentic reading and writing experiences on the other. I've just read a book called *Guided Reading* that purports to take a balanced reading stance. While some of the reading instructional strategies seem okay to me, the book also has bibliographical lists of graded—or "levelled"—books for children at a myriad of reading levels. Some of these books are not real stories; instead, they've just been written to teach reading. The language choices in these books are made with a certain level of reader in mind. I don't think either language or reading work in this way. There is no such thing as a list of words that goes from easier to more difficult words. As well, the meaning of a word is determined by more than the word itself: a reader reads language, not just words. Children know words they have met in other life and reading experiences. Children learn what catches their interest. Some of these understandings don't seem to be considerations of a "balanced reading" perspective. Again, my own experience and my reading of the professional literature, make me sceptical about leaping onto new bandwagons.

I have really worked at developing a sound philosophy of what I think happens when children read. I believe that what is most important is that the children see themselves as readers. I think young children need to be immersed in the wholeness of language before we—as parents and teachers—start directing their attention to the abstractness of sentences and words and individual letter sounds. Whole language philosophy says that language learning has to involve the whole of language; if children

are just presented with bits and pieces of language, these bits and pieces may well not make much sense to them. I am also aware of the fact that children are forever making natural connections between oral and written language and drawing. Learning in one of these "languages" informs children's learning in the others. I am interested in learning more about the relationships among these various "languages" in children's literacy development.

I also want to learn a lot more about how to make reading processes more visible to the children. In my classroom right now I talk with the children about the reading strategies the children are using or could be using. As a class, we've brainstormed a list of these strategies and I've posted them on chart paper on one of my classroom walls. We add to this list all of the time, as we notice ourselves using new strategies. If it's a strategy the children say they use, I write it down. Later on I invite the children to reflect on and discuss the effectiveness of some of the strategies we've recorded.

I enjoy being involved in ongoing research in my own classroom. This is one way that I keep learning. I know that I could also be learning more from other teachers who are interested in some of the same questions I have. It would be wonderful if a group of teachers would videotape really good examples of children reading in different situations and we watched them and talked with each other about what was happening.

It's because of the possibilities of these kinds of conversations, that I've been thinking that some day I might like to become a resource teacher. If I ever did this, it would be such fun to be invited into classrooms to help teachers set up writing workshops and reading circles and things like that. I would love to have the resource teacher in my school come into my classroom and support me. Even now we don't work together in the

usual ways. I often have her read with the children who are really doing well in reading, and this gives me a chance to read with some of the others. This only makes sense since I know them the best.

To help us grow professionally as teachers I think we need to see more real examples of how we might work with a child. This could be on videotape or in real life with another teacher or by reflecting on your own reading and writing. It's not all practice though, I think teachers need to ask themselves philosophical questions about what reading is for and why they're doing what they're doing. For me, teaching is about helping children to feel better about who they are, how they relate to others, and what they can do.

Jay's Story

Jay is a Canadian teacher with 7 years experience in a Manitoba elementary school. Jay has a Bachelor of Education degree and a Post Baccalaureate Certificate in.Education from the University of Manitoba. He is currently a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, specializing in the role that field experience teachers play in supporting the development of pre-service teachers' understandings of literacy education. Accordingly, Jay is trying to keep up with current research and practice in literacy education. He has done this mostly through taking courses at the local university and by participating in local professional development in-services and workshops. His story follows.

For me, the term "professional" teacher means being a lifelong learner. Once one becomes a teacher, one's learning never stops. I believe that teachers need to be continually questioning what they are doing in the classroom and why they are doing it. They need to constantly be struggling to make their theory congruent with their practice. As I have gained more experience as a teacher, my theories have changed as well.

In terms of professional growth, a teacher has to define what he or she wants to explore. This agenda can't be left up to the school administrator or to the school division to decide. In Manitoba, often professional development workshops are not planned in response to teachers' perceptions of their own professional needs. When it comes to professional development, teachers' voices are often silenced. The workshops that are planned seem to be focused on administration's concerns, rather than teachers' questions.

"Voice" is an issue that is important to me. As a teacher, I don't think my job is to just fit into a fixed system. Not only do individual teachers need to be questioning their own classroom practices, but, collectively, as a school staff, we also need to be thinking about what is going on at the whole school level. The whole school community needs to be talking about what we value. And, I don't just mean that we need to speak up. I also mean that we need to put our beliefs into action.

One of the most important values for me is the establishment of caring relationships. Whether I am working with the children in my classroom, their parents, people in the local community, my colleagues, my administrators, or members of school division committees, I am seeking collaborative relationships. For me, a collaborative relationship begins with mutual respect and a desire for authentic dialogue. Even when there are disagreements there can never be a loss of respect. There are always some

shared values within the differences. As a teacher, I welcome diversity rather than shunning it.

As the government has moved to more standardized curricula, valuing diversity has become more difficult. There is definite pressure from administrators to address the intended curriculum outcomes. Learning which falls outside of these intended outcomes is seen as unimportant. I have problems with this because I think children learn holistically. The life experiences the children bring with them, the children's own interests, the new learning that happens because of the unique collaborative relationships developed in the classroom, I see all of this impacting what is learned. Current curricula seem also to be restricted to intellectual learning; emotional, spiritual, aesthetic, and social learning seem not to be nearly as important.

One of my primary goals as a teacher is to come to know the child as a "whole" person. I see this happening by way of an ongoing dialogue that enables the children to bring their beyond school interests and experiences into the classroom with them. As we come to know one another, we become a community. A strong sense of community in the classroom is very important to me: I try to make sure that nothing happens in the classroom without the consent of the group. I really try to put into practice the ideal that an effective community is dependent on all of its members playing an active role. This sense of community shows itself every Friday in weekly class meetings, and in the ways that the classroom is set up physically to meet the needs and wants of the students. At the beginning of each year, there is nothing in the room except ten to twelve wrapped up boxes at the centre. The students unwrap them and from there they decide how they're going to set up the classroom. All supplies are communal. There are no desks or tables.

Every student has a plant that they bring into the classroom. Every student has their own personal shelf. As the year progresses, I think that the children come to believe that each of us can learn from one another. This blurs my role as teacher/learner.

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that an inclusive vision of learning needs to extend beyond the walls of the classroom. As a classroom community, we are always looking for ways that we can collaborate with other classrooms and with parents. One of the ways we connect with the larger community is by inviting in guest readers: students from other classrooms, moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, and babysitters. This year as a way of locating ourselves in the community at large, we developed a year-long relationship with a bakery--a neighbourhood family business, across the street from the school.

I would imagine that most people reading what I have just described would say that this kind of curriculum sounds as if it makes good sense. But, in the current educational climate, I am looked upon as a kind of radical. I don't think people outside of the classroom appreciate just how much pressure there is on teachers to conform to the specific outcomes in the curriculum documents. Certainly I can connect what I've described with the curriculum documents, although this requires some creative integration. I'm afraid that even this creative integration would raise a few eyebrows in my school division. I don't think there is an expectation that teachers will be curriculum-makers. I am not sure that my professional voice is welcome in curriculum decision-making.

I want to be sure that my stance is clear. I am not opposed to the province setting out general curriculum expectations. I just don't want these expectations to exclusively drive the educational agenda that I feel I should be creating *with* the children in our classroom. I see us as a community being involved in uncovering the curriculum together, rather than my just covering the outcomes that have been dictated to me from someone outside of the classroom.

This puts me at some risk in my school division. At the moment, my school division is very much just a mouthpiece for government policies. The leadership in the division doesn't seem to want to take a stand of its own: there's just a knee-jerk reaction. The government dictates something and my division follows, without stopping to reflect on whether this is a direction in which we think we *should* be headed. I don't think my school division has a vision or an overall plan. I keep asking "what is the big picture?"

I think parents are confused too. I really believe that parents want the schools to address all of the child's needs as a human being, but they are told that serving the child's intellectual needs is all that the school is prepared to deal with. I don't think it is clear to parents what role they are supposed to play in their child's schooling. My sense is that parents aren't sure whether or not their voices will be honored and welcomed in their children's school.

It was my own need to develop my voice that prompted me to return to the university for further studies. What the provincial government was telling me and what my school division was echoing seemed to contradict much of what I believe in as a teacher and learner. I was anxious to have some other voices to think with. Reading and talking with others has led to a lot of thinking about my own professional development.

My professional understandings have come from: observing and reflecting on what the children are doing in our classroom; reflecting on how my practices support or interfere with children's learning; the sustained dialogue I have had with colleagues; and, from reading and responding to articles and texts. Whether it was literacy education I was learning more about, or professional development in any other area, I would see it being necessary for me to be directly involved in collecting and interpreting data from my own classroom, talking about this data with colleagues, and using professional readings to think about this data in new ways or with new language. Meaningful practical understandings come about when I take risks, when I try out new strategies, or when I try to put an abstract idea into practice. I know that I need to risk if I am to learn. That's how professional renewal comes about.

Time is perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to professional development. There never seems to be enough time to experiment. I often feel overburdened and overwhelmed. Lately I have felt even more inundated than ever with new curricula, with children's family issues, with record-keeping, and with expectations from my school administrator.

My own professional development has certainly been enhanced when I have not felt as if I was working alone. Whenever I have had opportunities for professional development in partnership with another teacher or as part of a group it has been so much easier to keep going. This solidarity is really important. When I have come up against obstacles, I've felt as if my colleagues were there to help me find my way around them. The camaraderie can be both supportive and energizing. Right now at our school, we meet every Tuesday for an hour and we bring any articles, books, questions or issues that

we want to explore. Our focus at the moment is on student portfolios. This has become a way for us to build a professional inquiry community. Collegiality can support risk-taking.

On the other hand, risk-tasking can be shut down when professional development endeavours are used by administrators to make evaluative decisions about teachers. For example, I might put together a portfolio as a way of tracking my learning in an area that I hoped to strengthen. This would involve exposing and addressing my self-determined weaknesses as a teacher. This would be quite a different portfolio, though, from one I might put together to showcase my strengths. The first kind of portfolio would undoubtedly be a far more valuable tool for supporting my continuing professional growth as a teacher. I certainly wouldn't want my administrator assessing this kind of portfolio, though, as a means of judging my competence as a teacher.

I have a very clear sense that my administrator would view my professional development as a way of assessing my performance as a teacher. I wonder what this would mean if I were to want to pursue some area of professional growth in an area that he didn't deem valuable or that was in conflict with his values as an administrator. Should my professional learning have to be validated by my administrator? What would this say about what it means to be a professional?

Asian Teachers' Perspectives

Hao-Ying's Story

This is the story of Hao-Ying, an international graduate student from China. Hao-Ying's first degree is from Normal University, China. After receiving his teaching

certificate from Teachers' College, he taught for six years at Yudai Elementary School, in China. Hao-Ying came to the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Education to explore new methods of teaching and learning. His passion for learning and inquiry has taken him half way across the world. Hao-Ying came to Canada with the hope that it would provide him with the opportunity to develop excellence in his use of English in reading, writing, listening, and especially, speaking. Having been hosted by a Canadian family in Manitoba, he has learned about Canadian culture and he has practised his communicative English. This learning adventure has not always been easy. Hao-Ying has faced many cultural and linguistic hardships while studying in Canada. These hardships have been outweighed, however, by his personal and professional growth. Hao-Ying's journey to a foreign country has been part of his inward search for his own professional identity. His story is told below.

Teaching is not easy work. As a teacher, I care about my students' learning and I feel the pressure of wanting to make a difference in their lives. Professionally, it is my responsibility to know the subject matter of what I am teaching as well as the "why" and "how" of my teaching. I think that a professional teacher teaches to learn. As students' needs evolve and change, the teacher needs to respond. This means that there is a need for a teacher to be researching all of the time. Professional learning could go on forever and ever.

As a teacher of language and literacy, I feel that I too need to be involved in regular reading, writing, and researching myself, for my own personal and professional learning. And, while I know that what I believe as a teacher affects my actions in the

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classroom, I also recognize that my actions inform what I believe. Theory and practice need to be examined together, throughout a teacher's career.

Unfortunately, what I have just described is not what happens by way of professional development in China. In China, professional development seminars are organized by school authorities. Seldom are teachers' needs assessed. Never are teachers' voices included in these seminars. Instead, authorities lecture teachers. These authorities do not address the teachers' inquiry questions. Nor, is there any attempt made by these authorities to think about a teacher's needs, problems, concerns or frustrations.

Sadly, professional development is a joke. Professional development in-service sessions and workshops are considered by teachers to be quite useless—a waste of time, money and energies. Few sessions and workshops have any affect whatsoever on what teachers do in their classrooms. If a teacher wants to be promoted or to receive a pay raise, though, he or she had better not miss one of these professional seminars. Usually, teachers meet once-a-week to listen to administrators' instructions about policies or regulations on school affairs from the government. The teacher's job is to follow these directives. Reflection on and any democratic discussion of these directives is not encouraged or valued. Teachers do not participate in sharing their ideas during these meetings, nor do they ask questions about how they might inquire into something back in their classrooms. Generally, there is a lack of democracy, trust and openness in Chinese schools. The question that I would ask is: "how can a teacher improve him or herself, without positive reinforcement and encouragement from school authorities?"

In Chinese schools, the principal and other administrators (a large school would have a principal, a couple of vice-principals, a political instructor, a general secretary of

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the Communist party, and a student advisor) have many rights and much more power than teachers. In fact, a principal can determine a great deal of what a teacher can or cannot do in his or her classroom.

The decision-making of the principal, however, is restricted by a curriculum which has been designed and issued by the central government. Official curricula documents dictate everything that is to be taught. Chinese teachers do not have the right to change any of this content. While teachers do not have the freedom to think about what is worth teaching in their own classrooms, they can decide how they will go about teaching this pre-designed content. After a few years of teaching this same material over and over again, however, no matter how creative the delivery, teaching becomes very mechanical and without much thought. Locally developed curricula would be more relevant and meaningful to students and this would help to make teaching more interesting.

I do not like the top down, transmission system because each individual student has his or her unique character, learning style, diverse learning needs and abilities that need to be addressed. But this is the educational tradition in China.

In addition to tradition, this transmission approach to teaching is also a consequence of large class sizes and pressures teachers feel to cover the curriculum and mark students' assignments. In some densely populated areas, there could be as many as sixty students in one classroom. In these teaching conditions, it is almost impossible to give children any individualized attention. Some students get lost. If their parents are well off they can hire older students as tutors.

As you can tell, I would prefer a learner-centred curriculum for both children and teachers. This does not mean that I would back out and let the students take over. They are limited in their knowledge: they do not always know what they want, where they want to go or how to get there. But, students should have some say in what and how they learn. Teachers need this too in terms of their own personal and professional growth.

Moving toward learner-centred education in China would not be easy. Parents are used to judging good education on the basis of grades on exams. The students are also satisfied with high marks. Passing exams can get you into a higher level of education. There is much competition for higher education.

I believe literacy is more than a score on a test. Literacy is education for life. Reading should fulfill both a student's intellectual and his or her aesthetic needs. Instead, in Chinese schools what children read and write about may be totally removed from their experience. There is also much more emphasis placed on completing written exercises than on reading. If I had any say in what happened in schools, I would love to see young children being encouraged to choose their own story books to read. I would also encourage children to respond to shared reading experiences. Personally, I value children's participation as central to the literacy process. Children understand when they contribute their connections to what they read. Exchanging ideas with others also allows children to grow socially as well as individually. A teacher must be knowledgeable about these ideas if he or she is to make a difference in the child's education.

It is ironic that while the government expects teachers to develop students' reading comprehension abilities so that they can use the knowledge that they have gained, seldom do the exams attempt to measure comprehension or application of ideas. Most

exams are tests of memory. Again, teachers have been left out of this process. Teachers are not happy about this, especially since the parents' evaluation of the teacher is based almost entirely on exam results.

In terms of teacher education, the same kind of exam-driven thinking applies. In universities and teachers' colleges, teachers study student learning and teaching methodologies, but in most cases they take these courses just to get credits and a degree. The most important reason for taking these courses is to pass the test or to get a good mark on a paper, so that you will be qualified to teach.

I don't want to be too bleak about teaching in China. There are several professional development projects in literacy education that I know about. This has involved teachers in visiting other--usually more experienced--teachers' classrooms. Through observation and dialogue these teachers expand their professional skills. I hope there will be more of this kind of professional learning, where teachers learn from one another. It is also becoming possible for teachers to take a leave for a week or two, with pay, to attend classes and to read.

I don't expect that there will be too much change in professional development, however, until teachers are better paid and more highly-respected and valued. Teaching cannot be seen by the society to be just an occupation.

Sujung's Story

Sujung comes from South Korea. She is an international graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Sujung has several years of teaching experience at the Jungang Elementary school in South Korea. She has a degree,

specializing in education from a teacher's college in South Korea.

Sujung came to Canada to learn new philosophies and methods of teaching. Her educational journey is closely related to her own personal and professional development. Initially, when Sujung arrived in Canada she experienced culture shock and confusion because of the differences between the Asian and Western educational systems. It has been a challenge for her to study abroad, in a different culture and system of education. But, she believes that there is no gain without some pain. Here is her story.

For me, being a professional teacher means being a lifelong learner. Teaching is about much more than making a living. I have a passion for teaching and I see myself learning all the time from teaching. In South Korean culture, a professional is a person who is interested in his or her own development and who has a strong commitment to his or her work and community. This is not just an intellectual commitment. It is also a philosophical and ethical commitment. For example, it would please me if teachers all over the world were to collectively reflect on the state of the world's environmental health and on strategies for establishing global, democratic societies.

In South Korea, professional development is largely confined to attending week-long workshops and meetings twice a year, usually held during teachers' summer and winter vacations. These sessions address new information on teaching methods and current expectations of the Ministry of Education. The South Korean government decides what will be covered. Experts deliver lectures to teachers.

Teachers' voices are not heard or included in the planning or in the operation of the workshops themselves. In these professional development sessions, the teachers are

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treated like objects: they are passive participants in top-down sessions that have little to do with their individual classroom situations, practical needs or philosophical concerns. Attendance is compulsory and teachers are paid just for coming. If a teacher is interested in securing a promotion in the future, he or she must attend. My own learning needs, questions, and concerns related to my own classroom situation, always go far beyond what is presented in these sessions. I leave these professional development sessions feeling as if I have to resolve all of the real issues of teaching for myself. This is one of the principal reasons for my wanting to study abroad: I have been searching for others who would be interested in some of the same questions I am asking as a teacher. This is important to me. I came to Canada, without financial support, so that I could learn more about what I need to know to become a better teacher.

The biggest barrier to professional education in South Korea is the top-down decision-making of school authorities and their one-way system of communication. In my opinion, greater collaboration in the educational community is necessary. Every participant in the educational community has the right to have his or her voice heard. As a teacher, I may feel as if I have a better way of teaching something, but I am powerless to act on these ideas. For example, I think that my students could become stronger readers and writers by writing and sharing their own stories, but I cannot let them do this because I feel pressured to teach the exact item in the curriculum that is supposed to be taught at that particular point in the year.

This makes the South Korean educational system difficult for me to work in, because it is based on a hierarchy, dependent on power and authority. I feel marginalised in my own country. Teaching methods are totally teacher-directed. And yet, as a teacher,

all that I get to do is unquestioningly follow the official curriculum. I don't have any freedom to teach in a different way.

One of the main reasons for this top-down approach is that it makes it easier to evaluate students on standardized tests. In other words, teachers in South Korea teach to standardized exams, which are offered twice each year. The South Korean government bureaucracy controls the standard exams and teachers spend a lot of time preparing their students for these exams. Every year I was always amazed at how much time was taken up in getting ready for the exams. This also means that a lot of time is spent in memorization, rather than trying to understand the material. Students can feel overwhelmed as the exams get closer. Personally speaking, I don't believe in such standard exams, I remember, myself, that I forgot everything we had studied as soon as the exam was finished. There was no meaningful learning and there was definitely no relationship between what I was learning and how I live my life. A student can do a good job on the exam and not do well in society as a person.

I have trouble reconciling such an agenda with what I know from my studies of learners and learning. For example, in South Korea, we do not expect students to participate in the classroom setting. In Canada it is the opposite. Canadian students have a responsibility to contribute to the classroom by presenting their own thoughts and opinions. Because of my studies, especially my reading, I have developed a student-oriented, constructivist philosophy of education. I always try to think of the relationship between myself as a teacher and my students as one in which we construct knowledge together. I also consider myself a post-modernist and I am interested in current thinking about critical pedagogy.

Freirean pedagogy could move South Korean teachers toward what education might look like in the future. As an analytical tool, it could help us to examine or question our own oppressions. I would prefer a more democratic approach to education, where students and teachers were seen to be co-learners. In such a situation, the participants would not separate their analyses from their actions. Theoreticians and practitioners would think together. In so doing, they would redefine knowledge, removing it from its current self-serving, elitist base, and democratizing the knowledge production process. This would challenge existing power relationships. University researchers and teacher researchers could develop new ways of relating to one another, and they could validate each other's ways of knowing. I believe it is important to put our theories and our practices up for critique and transformation.

If I were to describe the current knowledge base in reading education I would have to say that reading is for constructing meaning and knowledge. Reading puts learners into community with others. Reading and writing are tools for participating in the society and the culture. In South Korea, in the primary grades, the students are taught mainly basic skills for how to read words and sentences. The focus is on relating the sound system and symbols and on the forms of writing, rather than on meaning. This means that grammar and structure are considered to be more important than meaning and the use of reading materials for learning about the world. This focus does not address the question of "why" we would want to read, nor does it lead to critical and conceptual thinking. I would like to help my students to think much more critically and with much greater understanding when they read and write.

I would prefer to see students reading and writing a variety of texts, sharing their work with peers and with parents. I would also like to see a shift away from an exclusive focus on grammar and language forms to a focus as well on meaning and the functional use of language for contextually-based learning and knowledge production. I would also like to de-emphasize the role of memorization for test writing.

Am I optimistic that such changes or reforms will happen in literacy curriculum in South Korea? I can't say so. It seems to me that it would be almost impossible to make such changes because the curriculum is set by authorities who do not listen to teachers. Such changes would also require a great amount of time, effort, and money. In South Korea, the education budget is very much based on the state of the current economy. When the economy goes down, educational conditions also deteriorate. Teachers, who feel they have no control over this financial situation become discouraged and depressed.

In spite of all of this, when I envision my own professional development, I think about the word "good" professional development. The word "good" means the assignment of value and judgement about how I can really change or at least reflect on my ideas as a teacher. I want to become a good teacher instead of an effective teacher. For me, this means focussing on students' needs and the relationship between teachers and students. I need to think critically about what I have done in the classroom and how I can help my students' learning. My studies have helped me with this.

"Good" professional development would also go beyond my personal reading and reflection. I would be interested in using computer technology to communicate with other teachers (e-mail, discussion groups, sharing pedagogy on the Internet . . .). This

would provide a safe place to share ideas and to examine alternative, teaching choices. Democratic forums could begin with such small steps.

Concluding Remarks

After reading these four international, primary teachers' stories, as a reader you will have learned of their passions, accomplishments, trials, challenges, hopes and dreams for professional development in literacy education. These two Canadian and two Asian (one Chinese and one South Korean) primary teachers have revealed their perceptions of themselves as professionals. They have commented on how much authority and freedom they believe that they have to make teaching decisions. Collectively, they have commented on the tensions and challenges they face in the educational community. All four have shared their hopes and dreams.

In Chapter Two, I highlighted what the research literature had to say about professional development in literacy education. In the next and final chapter, I would like to hold up this literature review to the life stories of these four teachers.

Chapter Five: Bringing the Research Literature and the Teachers' Stories Together

In this final chapter I will review and analyse Anna's (Canada), Jay's (Canada), Hao-Ying's (China) and Sujung's (Korea) stories as portrayed in Chapter Four, in juxtaposition with the research literature on professional development education in early literacy and my own teacher story.

These professional teachers are from different countries and linguistic backgrounds and they have varied teaching experiences, however, each of them is struggling with his or her own professional growth within his or her respective educational system. Beyond the obvious differences in the educational systems of the three countries represented here, all four stories reveal similarities in teacher beliefs, practices, problems, and hopes.

The four participants in this study revealed private thoughts about their places within their educational system, their understandings of teaching and teaching practices, and their professional development experiences. In the course of telling their stories, each of these teachers formed a new vision of himself or herself as a professional teacher and learner.

Like other professionals, these teachers wish to play an active role in their own ongoing learning. Each of them sees himself or herself in transition. They are all looking for inspiration, encouragement, and support or direction from colleagues, professional reading, school authorities, the local and larger societal community. All four struggle with top-down, autocratic and fixed programs of professional development. As well, all four see themselves as involved in a continuing journey of searching for meaningfulness

and insight as teachers. They all wonder how they can be "good" teachers who effectively

support and facilitate their students' literacy educations. They also accept that

professional development means challenging their assumptions about teaching, learning,

and inquiry in order to keep abreast of students' diverse needs in a changing educational

system.

In their desire to be active agents in their own professional education, these four

teachers agree with the professional development research writings of Basica (1996),

Hargreaves (1994), and Little (1993) who argue that educational policies "increasingly

require teachers to expand their professional responsibilities beyond the traditional realm

of classroom practice – to develop curriculum with colleagues rather than leaving such

development to curriculum 'experts', to participate in school programs and policies rather

than leaving them up to administrators, and to continue to update their technical skills,

their understanding of their students, and their subject expertise" (Little, p. 1). Fullan

(1982) also argues that educational change has to be understood and accepted by all those

who are involved–teachers, administrators, educators, government, parents, and students.

Fullan points out that changing understandings and acceptance of changes in teaching

take time and requires considerable encouragement (p. 12). Iano (1986) concurs with

Fullan and suggests that effective professional development is a complex business that

cannot be addressed in a random, short-term fashion.

With the benefit of the four teachers' "insider" stories, I would like to now return

to the seven conditions of effective professional development that guided my synthesis of

the research literature in Chapter Two. The conditions I identified were: teachers'

appreciation of the importance of professional development; teachers involvement in

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determining their own professional development needs and opportunities; active, critical

inquiry as a central component of the professional development experience; the sharing of

multiple perspectives through professional development experiences; ongoing reflection

as a major component of professional development; a democratic context for professional

development; and, the requirement that teachers have a solid knowledge base in reading.

Teachers' Appreciation of the Importance of Professional Development

My research has led me to define a professional teacher in literacy education as

someone who is involved in and who is always seeking to learn more about the best

possible literacy teaching practices, in order to meet the changing needs of his or her

students. He or she is engaged in his or her own firsthand literacy learning. He or she

also participates in self-directed and self-critical inquiries in an effort to become a more

knowledgeable and effective teacher. And, finally, he or she is someone who

collaborates with his or her colleagues in producing and sharing literacy teaching

knowledge. A final report (1987) to the Manitoba Teachers' Society, "Professional

Development: Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Manitoba," offers a

valuable perspective on the professional growth of teachers. This document describes

professional development as:

> formal and informal activities intended to foster the growth of educators—persons
> whose growth enriches their teaching and their relationship with students, as
> professionals whose increasing competence enables them to carry out their roles
> more effectively, and as staff members whose collegial relationships have an
> effect on the motivation and skills of others and who will be able to implement
> curricular and other changes. (p. 1)

For Anna, a professional teacher is "someone who is knowledgeable about the area that she works in." According to Jay: "the term professional teacher means being a learner. Once one becomes a teacher, one's learning never stops." Hao-Ying explains that a professional teacher is someone who "teaches to learn," and someone who responds to the changing and evolving needs of students. A teacher, in Hao-Ying's mind, is someone who is "researching all of the time" and who is learning "forever and ever." Sujung agrees with her colleagues that the term professional teacher means being "a lifelong learner," but she extends this definition beyond the intellectual commitment to the philosophical and ethical commitments of professional teaching. These ideas are summarized in Barth's (1997) statement: "When teachers stop growing [learning], so do their students" (p. 50).

I note similarities among the four teachers' appreciations of the importance of professional development. All four participants highlighted the value of professional development and claimed that the reason they continue their educational journey is not for personal material gain but to enhance their knowledge for their own sake, for the sake of their students and for the sake of the profession. These four teachers believe that professional education is a lifelong learning process, and that, accordingly, to become the best teacher possible, one must continuously upgrade his or her own knowledge-base in literacy education.

It was a personal and financial hardship for Sujung to come to another country to enhance her professional development, but she did so in an effort to "learn more about what [she] needed to know to become a better teacher" and in altruistic search "for others who would be interested in some of the same questions [she] was asking as a teacher."

Hao-Ying, a Chinese teacher, stressed the value of professional development and he

pointed out that like his students, he recognized that he too needed "to be involved in

regular reading, writing, and researching [himself], for [his] own personal and

professional learning." As a teacher, myself, I agree with Hao-Ying and I believe that

teaching and learning are ongoing processes based in part on our own firsthand

experiences.

What I have learned from the four teachers' stories is that our teaching must be

firmly rooted in our values and beliefs. Because Jay believes teachers are learners, he

appreciates that professional development is essential. As a learner, Jay wanted "other

voices to think with." He wanted to increase his knowledge through others' perspectives

and experiences and this drew him back to the university. Anna, too, acknowledges the

importance of serious, sustained professional development: "the most significant thing I

have done as far as my own professional development has been to return to university to

work on my Master's degree in literacy education."

Teachers' Involvement in Determining Their Own Professional Development Needs and Opportunities

There could be no doubt that the four teachers who participated in this study

believe in the need for teachers to determine their own professional development needs

and opportunities. Anna was very clear about her feeling that professional development

needed "to be planned more locally, at the school level." In her discussion of her new

understandings of children's connections between oral and written language and drawing,

she identified focussed learning goals that she had set for herself: "I am interested in

learning more about the relationships among these various 'languages' in children's literacy development." Following these comments, she added: "I also want to learn a lot more about how to make reading processes more visible to the children." Not unlike Anna, Jay expressed frustration with professional development that is "left up to the school administration or to the school division to decide." He was deeply concerned that in planning professional development, "teachers' voices are often silenced" and their questions are ignored. And, while Hao-Ying's professional development experiences occurred on the other side of the world, he said much the same as Jay had said: teachers' needs are not assessed, their voices are not included, and inquiry questions are not addressed. He argued that just as his students needed to have some say in what and how they learn, that "teachers need this too in terms of their own personal and professional growth." Sujung echoes these sentiments. She described how "teachers' voices are not heard or included in the planning or in the operation of the [professional development] workshops themselves." This left her with the feeling that her "learning needs, questions, and concerns related to [her] own classroom situation" had not been resolved.

Researchers such as McCormick and James (1998) agree with the teachers in my study. They argue that effective professional development depends upon the involvement of the participants in the process: "commitment can only be achieved if those involved feel they have control of the process . . . whereas, they will resist change that is forced upon them" (p. 11). Similarly, Wideen (1986) argues that the old model of doing professional development to teachers is no longer acceptable: "In the past, teachers were objects to be 'in-serviced'; they were seen as individuals without a context" (p. 124).

The teachers' collective plea to be treated as professionals willingly to take responsibility for their continuing learning cannot go unheaded. These teachers are demanding that they be viewed as "active agents" in their continuing learning. They seek to be respected as learners with varied interests, backgrounds, points of view, goals, concerns, needs and aspirations. They are not satisfied with cookbook recipes from experts who cannot imagine their own and their students' needs, concerns and dilemmas.

Active, Critical Inquiry as a Central Component of the Professional Development Experience

Over the last decade, a number of researchers have stressed the centrality of teachers' own inquiries/"teacher research" to their professional development. This is in contrast to the usual expectation of teachers being primarily passive consumers of university researchers' expertise. I believe that a teacher's own inquiry can provide him or her with insight into the relationship between his or her theoretical and values assumptions and his or her practices. As teachers inquire, in the context of their own classrooms, they have the potential to learn more about their students' needs and how they can modify their teaching to best support the particular learners gathered around them.

Linda Crafton (1997) explains that "teacher inquiry is about teachers generating their own knowledge about teaching" (p. 5). On the basis of their research, Barnet and Young (1998), along with Irvine (1993), claim that inquiry/teacher research and ongoing problem-posing and problem-solving do more to help teachers analyse their current practices and reshape them, than perhaps any other single form of professional

development. Teacher-driven inquiry models—as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) recognizes—honour the complexity of the knowledge base of teaching, invite teachers' authentic questions, and enable teachers to pursue their questions in a systematic and self-critical fashion (1998; p. 6).

Through active inquiry, teachers develop their voices as reflective learners and researchers. Jay tells us that his professional understandings have come from his reading and talking with others, but also from "observing and reflecting on what the children are doing in our classroom" and by "reflecting on how my practices support or interfere with children's learning." Anna agrees: "I enjoy being involved in ongoing research in my own classroom. This is one way that I keep learning." Hao-Ying connects the practice of observation and reflection to his involvement in theory-construction: "while I know that what I believe as a teacher affects my actions in the classroom, I also recognize that my actions inform what I believe." Sujung takes Hao-Ying's statement a step further. She locates the usual separation of teaching theory and practice in the traditional hegemonic relationship of theoreticians to practitioners. Sujung argues that researching one's own practice enables a teacher to participate in the knowledge production process. Doing this, she points out, could potentially challenge "existing power relationships" and situate university researchers and teacher researchers in a new relationship where one another's "ways of knowing" were both validated.

Active, inquiry is about coming to understand the classroom learning environment in more depth and more detail. But it is also more than this. Inquiry/teacher research is as Sujung and Jay suggest, a way of "entering the conversation about education"—a conversation that has often in the past excluded teachers' voices.

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The Sharing of Multiple Perspectives Through Professional Development Experience

In his writings on school improvement, Roland Barth (1997) expresses his

commitment to sharing perspectives through collaboration in professional development:

"I expect all of us to work together, help one another, and make our knowledge available"

(p. 33). In his long years of research in professional development, Barth identifies and

attributes special significance to the collegial relationships between teachers and

administrators:

> I think that the problem of how to change things from "I" to "we,"of how to
> bring a good measure of collegiality and relatedness to adults who work in
> schools, is one that belongs to the national agenda of school improvement--
> at the top. It belongs to the top because the relationships among adults in a
> school are the basis, the precondition, the *sine qua non* that allows and energizes
> and sustains all other attempts. Unless adults [teachers, administrators] talk with
> one another, and help one another, very little will change. (p. 32)

For Barth (1997), and for other researchers such as Newman (1997) and Stoll (1991),

collegiality and congeniality are absolutely key to successful professional renewal. Stoll

(1991) writes:

> Students benefit academically when their teachers share ideas, cooperate in
> activities and assist one another's intellectual growth. In the more effective
> schools, the emphasis is on teachers as learners, as well as students as learners.
> Staff exhibit cohesiveness, identify problems and take action, and have a shared
> approach to planning. (p. 77)

Stoll (1991) sums up this position with the comment that "effective schools are

characterised by a culture of collaboration in which all of the partners within the school . .

. share a commitment to work together to develop the schools' learning environment" (p.

76).

Hao-Ying's hopes for professional development in China are pinned on their being more opportunities in the future for teachers to "learn from one another." Sujung too, is hungry for social learning. She sees technology as perhaps creating a "safe place to share ideas and to examine alternative, teaching choices." Jay describes himself as "seeking collaborative relationships." He is not looking just for someone to confirm his beliefs, but rather, he is interested in "authentic dialogue". He welcomes "diversity rather than shunning it." Jay appreciates that the differences help us to reexamine what we believe in a new light. For Jay, it is the "sustained dialogue" with colleagues over time that will provide him with opportunities for professional renewal. He told me: "Whenever I have had opportunities for professional development in partnership with another teacher or as part of a group it has been so much easier to keep going. This solidarity is really important." Jay saw this sustained collegial relationship as "supporting his risk-taking." Anna was also so attracted to the potential of learning with and from her colleagues that she thought she might pursue a position as a resource teacher some day, so that she could have such conversations.

All of the participants in this study felt isolated. There was little time for these teachers to share their questions, findings, or concerns. All four of the teachers were desperate for a supportive space in which their ideas could be heard, respected and valued. In the increasingly pluralistic, global community in which we live, there was a recognition among the teachers that sharing perspectives would, in turn, enhance their abilities to accommodate the diversity of student needs within their classrooms.

Ongoing Reflection as a Major Component of Professional Development

From the teachers' perspective, I have already addressed the idea of ongoing reflection within my discussion of teacher inquiry. I do not believe that there can be effective "action" research without accompanying critical reflection. After interviewing the four teachers, I now better understand the notion of "praxis"—theoretical practice/practical theorizing. Theory and practice may be different acts, but each reciprocally informs the other. In this section, I will confine my remarks to the research literature.

Schön (1987) contends that "being reflective is a critical feature of being a professional" (p. 161). The research literature is absolutely filled with voices (Newman (1987); Goswami and Stillman (1987); Lester and Miller (1987); Schindele, (1985); Iano (1986); Skrtic, (1986); Schön, (1987); Barton, (1988); Heshusius, (1989); and Ainscow (1991), among many others) advocating that teachers assume the role, and see themselves as, "reflective practitioners". Patterson and Shannon (1993) describe such a role as involving teachers in:

> moments of reflection and inquiry in order to take action that will help their students learn better. In a sense, then, all good teachers participate in teacher research because they reflect about students' learning (and their own), inquire through multiple data sources (observations, analysis of artifacts, conferences, and the like), and then act on their new conclusions. (p. 8)

Of course, teachers need time if they are to do this. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) support this contention. They write that it is critical that times be specifically set aside for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners. And yet, from all that we

heard the teachers say, it seems as if their reflective voices were not welcome at all or were less welcome than they once were (in the case of the two Canadian teachers). The research literature values and advocates what seems to be not valued in practice. This remains an unresolved contradiction.

A Democratic Context for Professional Development

It is important to note that even though the participants in this research study come from two very different regions of the world–Asia and North America–with vastly different political systems and different cultural and academic traditions, all four of the participants raised similar concerns about the need for a democratic context in which to grow professionally. They seemed almost to speak with a single voice: "our voices are often silenced"; "I have a right to have my voice heard"; "I don't think you can mandate teaching methods"; "curriculum documents are more restrictive than they used to be"; "authorities lecture teachers"; "teachers' inquiry questions are not addressed"; "teachers are treated as objects"; "I feel marginalised". . . .

All of the participants in this study felt as if they were not valued, contributing partners in the education decision-making process. Anna observes: "In Manitoba, we've moved to 'results-based, performance outcomes and standards' so as teachers we are being told specifically what to teach and where children are 'supposed to be'." Anna believes that changes in the current provincial curriculum have seriously eroded her professional decision-making powers: "I am legally obligated to make sure that every single item identified in print is dealt with in my classroom. This doesn't leave me with

much time to deal with children's questions." Anna's comments reflect Mel Ainscow's (1991) concern that ". . . individual teachers must have sufficient autonomy to make flexible decisions that take account of the individual needs of their pupils and their uniqueness" (p. 10).

Jay, the other Canadian teacher, echoes Anna's sentiments: "As the government has moved to more standardized curricula, valuing diversity has become more difficult." "Learning that falls outside of these intended outcomes is seen as unimportant." Like Anna, Jay feels as if there is much less room than there once was for the contribution of his professional judgements and knowledge. He feels alone: "my school division is very much just a mouth piece for government policies." "The government dictates something and my division follows, without stopping to reflect on whether this is a direction in which we think we should be headed." Jay wants to know where his school division is headed--"what is the 'vision,' 'overall plan' or 'big picture'?" he asks, and where does he fit in? Heron (1981), writing about the importance of a democratic context, lends support to Jay's worries: "persons, as autonomous beings, have a moral right to participate in decisions that claim to generate knowledge about them." "Such a right . . . protects them . . . from being managed and manipulated" (p. 13).

Sujung, coming from quite a different political and educational context has the same worry as Jay and Anna about the lack of democracy in decision-making within her educational community. She describes herself as "powerless" to act on her own professional judgements, because of the specific dictates of curricula: "all that I get to do is unquestioningly follow the official curriculum. I don't have any freedom to teach in a different way."

Hao-Ying, told me again and again how his job was to follow directives, not to question them: "Reflection on and any democratic discussion of these directives is not encouraged or valued . . . ." "Generally, there is a lack of democracy, trust and openness in Chinese schools."

Several of the four participants in this study also referred to the imbalance of power between themselves and their school principals. With the exception of Anna, whose principals seemed benignly supportive of whatever she did, the participants in this study did not see their principals as facilitating their growth. Barth's (1997) research speaks to the frequency of this situation. He writes that the reason for "rising numbers of teacher dropout and burnout is that the school principals, sometimes unwittingly, find themselves to be inhibitors, not facilitators, of the teachers growth" (p. 51). Not unlike Sujung, Barth believes that small steps can be taken to create a more democratic culture in schooling. He suggests that professional growth begins with a democratic relationship between teacher and principal and between teacher and teacher. If 'mutual respect', 'authentic dialogue', and 'collaborative relationships' were to be supported among professional colleagues, as Jay suggests, this might invite greater democratic discussion among all the participants in the larger educational community.

A Solid Knowledge Base in Reading

In conversation with the four teachers, I repeatedly heard each of them express his or her desires to become more knowledgeable about what and how he or she was teaching. Jay explained how he would draw upon current professional literature in

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literacy learning to think about his own classroom research data in "new ways" or with "new language". Anna views the professional literature as a tool for helping her to resist the pressure to "leap onto the newest literacy bandwagon." Hao-Ying would like to implement some of the literacy practices in other educational systems that he has been reading about in the professional literature. He is also hopeful about the literacy education projects in his own country that pair teachers together so that they can learn from one another. While Sujung did not expect that literacy curriculum reforms would be taking place soon in her country of South Korea, she, like Hao-Ying, had definite ideas about the kinds of changes she would like to see in literacy teaching. Also, like Hao-Ying, these changes were based on her study of literacy teaching and learning practices in other education systems. These four teachers already recognize what Linda Crafton (1997) points out in the research literature: "[t]he increased complexity of our knowledge base is a strong argument for a professional development model that results in continuous, 'deep' learning guided by the learner's (teacher's) need and outside support" (p. 6).

In both my conversations with the teachers and my reading of the professional literature regarding the current knowledge base in reading, there was unanimity that reading meant making sense of text. In "Learning to Read: The Never Ending Debate," Frank Smith (1995), returns to the same argument he has been making for over 20 years, that teachers must be sure that the text is meaningful to children and that it relates in some way to their life experiences. According to Smith (1995); Wells (1986); and Peterson & Eeds (1990), children are "born makers of meaning" (Peterson & Eeds, 1990; p. 6).

I also believe that like knowledge construction, reading is a social process, wherein, readers freely contribute their ideas to create mutual understandings. If we talk with others about what we have read, we can revisit the text with perspectives we would not have had on our own. Sometimes, in discussion about a reading, we make connections we had not previously put together. Or, at other times, others confirm what we thought or felt about a reading. In this way, teacher and students become co-learners in the reading process. As readers, we can think together as collaborators (Woodward & Serebrin, 1989; p. 394). All of the participants in this study, saw a role for teachers and children to read texts together as co-learners.

Often researchers address theoretical issues and assume that it is an easy step to apply theory in practice. Schwab (1969) writes: "Curricularists in particular and educationists in general have become so infatuated with theory and with intellectual respectability that they fail to recognize that the practice of education was not a theoretical undertaking but a practical one" (p. 52). The participants supported this contention. All four teachers mentioned that throughout their careers they would be engaged in an ongoing professional struggle to fit theory to practice. And, as I have already pointed out, several of the participants described how theory too was informed by practice.

The lack of fit between what the teachers understood about the reading process and what curriculum documents or standards and standardized tests required them to do, created enormous professional tensions. Teachers, as literate persons, ought to be involved in discussion and debate of curriculum texts, as the same way that they would respond to any other text. Curriculum documents ought to reflect the best of what we

know in both theory and practice. They ought to support teachers in their work, rather than restricting their professional roles.

Through their conversations with me, the four teachers in this study heard and read their own "whole" stories for the first time. Each of them told me that this in itself was an empowering experience. Through this process they came to better appreciate their knowledge, their struggles, their plans, and their hopes. In reading each other's stories, we each heard similarities to our own story. We recognized that geography, traditions, and politics alter the context of a teacher's story, but much of this story is universal. Teaching is about establishing and nurturing learning relationships. When teachers are learners, their learning needs to be supported and nurtured too.

Further Study

This study was not conducted with the intent of presenting final answers, solutions or recipes for change. Rather, as a teacher and researcher, it has led me to new questions, which I offer to other professional teachers/researchers. At the end of this study, I am left with the following lingering questions: why it is that we know so much about what constitutes worthwhile professional development and yet we do not use this knowledge in practice? ; how do we reconcile teachers' experiential and theoretical knowledge with highly specific, lock-step, state mandated curricula? ; what happens to teachers (like the ones in this study), whose consciousness has been raised and whose knowledge base has been strengthened through self-directed professional development,

when the contexts in which they teach are neither supportive of their professional efforts nor encouraging of change? ; as resources are reduced in public education, what new and creative ways can school divisions and responsible levels of government find to support sustained teacher reflection and inquiry—both for individual teachers and for collegial teacher communities? ; how can educators more effectively participate in conversations about literacy learning and teaching with the larger educational community?

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Appendices

Appendix A
Letter of Invitation and Consent

Khalida Tanvir Syed
114-99 Dalhousie Dr.
Winnipeg, MB
R3T 3M2
(204) 275-3429
March 5, 1999

Dear Fellow Graduate Student/Teacher;

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba. Presently I am conducting research for my thesis, as part of the requirements for the M.Ed. degree. The title of my research study is *Teachers' Stories: Insiders' Perspectives on Their Own Professional Development in Literacy Education*.

Through this research, I wish to learn more about the problems and promise of professional development in Reading education, as you have experienced and thought about professional development in this area of study as an elementary teacher yourself. Because I am interested in thinking openly, critically, and deeply about professional development potentials in my home country of Pakistan, I am interested in how your experiences and understandings of professional development in Reading education in your country can enrich my learning. I am also curious about the relationship between your experiences and the ideas discussed in the professional development literature in Reading education.

I plan to interview you for no more than 5 hours in total. This five hours will be divided into two, 2-hour interviews and a final 1-hour interview. In the first interview, I will ask questions similar to the sample question provided in Appendix B. I will audio tape this interview and make field notes of my observations during the interview. The purpose of the questions that I ask will be to elicit your experiential stories and thinking about professional development in Reading education as a professional, elementary teacher. In the second, follow-up, audio-taped interview, we will 'go over' the transcript of the first interview and I will share my field note interpretations with you. At this time, I will invite you to clarify and elaborate upon this first interview. In the third interview, I will once more share my interpretations of the first two interviews with you, in an effort to 'verify' my interpretations.

Please be assured that all information provided to me will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not be recorded. Once my research study is over I will erase the audio tapes of our interview.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If, during the interview, or at any other time over the course of the study, you wish to withdraw from the study, you are free to do so without penalty. Should this become the case, all interview information which you have provided will be deleted from the study.

The research findings of this study should be completed in the month of June, 1999. Upon completion, I will arrange to share a summary of the findings with you. If you are unable to meet with me in person I will mail this summary to you.

Additional information about my study can be obtained from me at the address listed above, or from my thesis advisor at the University of Manitoba, Dr. Wayne Serebrin, 474-9024.

If you are willing to participate in my research study, please sign the accompanying consent form and return it to me in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelop. If you agree to participate, I will arrange a first interview at a time and location convenient for you.

Sincerely,

Khalida Tanvir Syed

Consent to Participate

I, _____, am willing to participate in the research study described in the accompanying consent letter. I understand that I can withdraw at any time with no penalty. The information I provide in the interviews may be reported anonymously in the thesis identified by Khalida Tanvir Syed as "Teachers' Stories: : Insiders' Perspectives on Professional Development in Literacy Education.

_____

Name

_____   _____

Signature of Consent   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix B
Sample Interview Questions

What does the term "professional" teacher mean to you?

As an elementary teacher, what are (or were) your perceptions of your society's literacy expectations of the children you teach (or taught)? [further prompts would include: the children's expectations; the parents' expectations; your expectations; the expectations of your school and school division; government expectations, as expressed through curriculum and other documents and policies; and, expectations of other stakeholders, expressed through media and through other sources].

How would you describe the current knowledge base in Reading education? What are some of the most significant understandings educators have of Reading today?

What are (were) your perceptions of your own learning needs with respect to society's expectations of the children you teach (taught) (including your perceptions of the children's present and future needs as readers)? What are (were) your perceptions of your own learning needs with respect to the current knowledge base in Reading?

In your own local context, as a teacher, in what different ways have you participated in "continued learning/inquiry" about Reading as a professional educator?

What or who was supportive of such professional development endeavors? What interfered with your professional learning about Reading education?

How would you envision effective professional development in Reading education?

Appendix C
Letter to accompany Transcript and Data Analysis

Khalida Tanvir Syed
114-99 Dalhousie Dr
Winnipeg, MB
R3T 3M2
(204) 275-3429
April 10, 1999

Dear Teachers:

I am writing to thank you for your recent participation in the research study related to my thesis entitled: *Teachers' Stories: Insiders' Perspectives on Their Own Professional Development in Literacy Education.* Your participation will not only help in the successful completion of my Master's Degree in Education at the University of Manitoba, but it will also contribute to the body of professional literature related to teacher training and professional development.

I have now completed all interviews and have transcribed the data from each. Enclosed is the transcript and narrative report or data analysis from your interview.

Please review this data and contact me at (204) 275-3429 to arrange a time for a follow-up interview to gain further insight into your perspective on staff development: edit or revise as you feel is necessary. This follow-up interview session will be arranged at your convenience.

I really appreciate your most valuable contribution of sharing your educational beliefs, time, and experiences. Upon completion of my study, I shall be happy to share the findings of my research with you.

Thank you for your involvement in this study.

Yours truly,

Khalida Tanvir Syed